Editor’s Introduction

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This issue of Enterprise & Society leads off with two articles on the dynamics of business in National Socialist Germany, a subject that has been receiving growing attention. Earlier notions that the Nazi regime was an instrument of big business interests have been widely rejected, but alternative characterizations remain controversial. Was business simply powerless to resist the force of the Nazi state? Or did it retain autonomy to pursue at least some of its own interests? The two articles published here come at the subject from very different perspectives. Michael Schneider shows that even a medium-sized firm might find room to maneuver and, for a considerable time, pursue its own corporate goals and strategic priorities within the framework of dictatorship. Christopher Kobrak, on the other hand, shows how structures of corporate governance in larger firms were remolded by the fascist state and its political initiatives, which thus harnessed corporate energies to its own definition of national goals. These papers are particularly timely because the debate over the behavior of business under the Nazi dictatorship is also reflected in the subject matter of the two books that were jointly awarded the Hagley Book Prize at the recent Business History Conference: Gerald Feldman’s Allianz and the German Insurance Business, 1933–45 (New York, 2001) and Jonathan Wiesen’s West German Industry and the Challenge of the Nazi Past (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001).

Nancy Gordon takes a look at a relatively under-studied area, time period, and industry, the timber industry on the Maine frontier in the early nineteenth century. She tells a story of how a changing culture eventually led roguish logging interests to understand the need to pay for the privilege of cutting timber on public lands. She argues that this laid the groundwork for the wood-products industry as the timber culture moved farther west. David Koistinen, on the other hand, considers an industry and a transition that has been the subject of a massive amount of research in a number of fields, the movement of the textile industry from New England to the South. His work emphasizes the point that, while New England firms did set up mills in the South, it was much more common that the Southern firms were established locally. Thus, the business migration that occurred came about primarily because of the existence of new competition.

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