

Letter from the Editor

This issue of *Central European History* has two thematic emphases: the Habsburg Monarchy and the Third Reich, with one article on the former and three on the latter. These are complemented by **John Boyer’s worthy memorial to the late Carl Schorske**, best known for his classic study of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, and by **Jeffrey Herf’s review essay about recent scholarship on the relationship between Nazism and Islam**.

The three articles that deal, in whole or large part, with the Third Reich share several thematic commonalities: an interest in German colonialism, race, and racism; national belonging, memory, and identity formation; questions of continuity from Weimar to the early postwar period; and the links between micro- and macro-developments. **“He Who Owns the Trifels, Owns the Reich’: Nazi Medievalism and the Creation of the Volksgemeinschaft in the Palatinate,”** by Fabian Link and Mark W. Hornburg, is an important case study that focuses on efforts by the Nazi regime to craft a so-called people’s community during the 1930s. Relying on sources from almost a dozen public and private archives, the article looks at a job-creation program sponsored by Bavarian Minister-President Ludwig Siebert during the latter part of that decade and, more specifically, at the role that this program played in mobilizing support for the Nazi regime in the Palatinate region of southwestern Germany. By promoting the conservation and preservation of castles and other medieval ruins and monuments that had been central to the formation of cultural memory and identity at the local level since the nineteenth century, the Siebert Program engaged “ordinary Germans” in a variety of pursuits that helped stabilize the regime by appealing to local interests and sensitivities. Looking at the complex interplay between Nazi cultural politics and regional identity, the article touches on a number of important historiographical issues and debates: the nature and sources of regime stability, the administrative structures of the *Führer* state and the effectiveness of regime propaganda, questions of local and national identity, as well as the (distinctive) aesthetics of Nazi culture. At the same time, the article implicitly raises an important methodological issue about the study of autocratic states: how to gauge regime popularity and support at the grass roots.

In a sense, Willeke Sandler’s **“Colonial Education in the Third Reich: The Witzenhausen Colonial School and the Rendsburg Colonial School for Women”** turns the question of support during the Nazi period on its head by looking at the way in which educational institutions endeavored to win backing from the regime itself. What value and place, Sandler asks, did schools whose primary purpose was to educate and train a male and female colonial elite have in a post-Versailles Germany bereft of overseas colonies—especially under the Nazis, who attached low priority to the recovery of Germany’s former holdings. The eyes of its leadership were directed eastward, of course, which meant that the seemingly obsolete colonial schools established in Witzenhausen and Rendsburg had to persuade the fascist regime that the training they could offer had value for the ideological and territorial goals of the Third Reich. In fact, the article argues, the cultural, national, and racial importance of colonial work—especially that taught at the Rendsburg Colonial School for Women—retained relevance and even increased value

under the Nazis in a Germany *sans* colonies. Sandler is able to explain this seeming paradox through effective use of gender as a category of analysis, showing that the school's commitment to "traditional" gender roles, its emphasis on domesticity, as well as its racist teachings about alleged German superiority corresponded to the regime's needs in occupied eastern Europe. At the same time, she moves beyond the scholarly emphasis on colonial lobbies and leadership and, in so doing, makes a significant contribution to recent scholarship on the imperialist "imagination," as well as colonial imaginations "from below."

The issues of gender and race play a major role as well in Julia Roos's "**An Afro-German Microhistory: Gender, Religion, and the Challenges of Diasporic Dwelling**," a transnational microhistory based on extensive postwar correspondence between an Afro-German woman born during the Rhineland occupation of the 1920s and her aristocratic patroness. Focusing on her experiences as a member of the black German diaspora—who was born a "Rhineland bastard" and died a "Negro" in the United States in the early 1960s—and with an eye to the role that religion played in her life, the article sheds light on the complexity of German attitudes toward national belonging and race from the Weimar period to the first decade after the end of World War II. It examines the proactive strategies the woman employed to make Germany her "home," as well as the challenges she faced in that endeavor. At the same time, this epistolary "biography-as-microhistory" relates the peculiarities of the Afro-German diaspora to larger trends—and peculiarities—in the history of German colonialism and racism. In so doing, it sheds light on the ambivalent nature of race and national identity formation in postcolonial Germany.

At first blush, Luminta Gatejel's "**Overcoming the Iron Gates: Austrian Transport and River Regulation on the Lower Danube, 1830s-1840s**" would seem to be a historiographical hybrid of sorts that combines old-fashioned "history of technology" with newfangled environmental history, a growing and increasingly popular new subfield in the study of Central Europe. It is that, but it is also a great deal more. The article looks at nineteenth-century efforts to facilitate steam navigation along the Danube by "taming," i.e., making more navigable, the so-called Iron Gates, a formidable gorge located at the old boundary between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. Making extensive use of contemporary travel writing, Gatejel broaches a number of important themes in this wide-ranging article: human efforts to impose control over nature, the role of the state in economic development, Austrian relations with the Ottoman Empire, and, last but not least, the evolving mentality of "Orientalism." As she suggests, greater mastery of the Iron Gates transformed the cultural and spatial perceptions of travelers and, in so doing, gradually helped surmount the mental separation between "Orient" and "Occident." Just as important, and seen in a larger context, she intimates that the closer economic and cultural links between Vienna and southeastern Europe that came about as a result of these efforts made it increasingly difficult for the Habsburg monarchy to relinquish its ties to the region and "give up its dominant position in the Balkans—a stance that would ultimately fuel the clashes that would spark World War I." All of this harkens back—or forward, in a sense—to the sort of "colonial imaginations" explored in Sandler's accompanying piece on the colonial schools at Witzhausen and Rendsburg the following century.

ANDREW I. PORT
EDITOR