

This new journal is a response to fundamental changes in contemporary historical interests during the last decades. The collapse of the communist regimes in 1989/90 has created new interpretative challenges for politics and scholarship, including the need to deal with the legacy of two dictatorships. Fears that the memory of the Nazi past would fade away with the end of the GDR have not turned out to be true; instead, the intellectual debate about the Third Reich has only become more intensive following the fall of the wall. However, attention also ought to be paid to the often neglected, yet more positive history of Germany's efforts at democratization. As a result of the progress of European integration and the process of globalisation, historical research has to start transcending the national paradigm. Simultaneously the shift toward popular culture and the media has changed how we remember the past, since visual representations follow their own market logic. Finally, the Internet has revolutionized communication inside and outside of scholarship. This journal strives to respond to and shape these changes.

"Studies in Contemporary History" is based on a broad understanding of "contemporary history", encompassing three separate, but overlapping time periods. Central problems of the first half of the century will be addressed to the extent that they are relevant for a historically grounded understanding of long-range issues (e.g. war-crimes, migration, and xenophobia). The central focus of the journal will nonetheless be the decades of German, European and global conflicts between 1945 and 1990, because they constitute the most important experiences of persons alive today. Beyond that we would also like to provide a forum for current history, since scholarly reflection on the most recent past does not have to begin with the release of previously closed files. Beset by new wars, international terrorism, the contraction of the welfare state and other threats, people have a great need for orientation, which is also one of the responsibilities of contemporary historical research.

The central task of contemporary historians is to accompany the transformation of current events into perceptions of the past with critical commentary. Historical images do not grow naturally; rather they evolve from social conflicts in which contending groups propagate differing memories in order to attain specific objectives. At the same time the images created by mass media, primarily aiming to reach a large audience, play an increasingly important role in our imagination. In contrast to such commercial actors, the contemporary historian has the chance and the special task to formulate statements about the most recent past that are based on systematic procedures and can be verified intersubjectively. "Contemporary history as scholarly enlightenment" (Christoph Kleßmann) is therefore simultaneously an intellectual method and an ethical postulate. As a critical corrective of individual and collective construc-

tions of memory, contemporary history plays an important role for a democratically constituted civil society. In this sense Hans Rothfels' famous definition of contemporary history of 1953 is still valid today: Contemporary history ought not to "evade any touchy issue, neither international nor national," in order to "leave no room in which legends might grow."

For contemporary history, understood in this way, the electronic media offer attractive new opportunities. Though the use of the Internet has already become accepted in many areas of historical research, conventional means of publication continue to be preferable for a more thorough treatment of issues. Such widespread skepticism can only be overcome if Internet publications continue to be available and quotable in the long term. Moreover, the maintenance of well-established standards should be guaranteed when publishing electronically. If these prerequisites are fulfilled, the medium of the Internet can provide considerable advantages for publishing scholarly articles: It allows the direct integration of a broader range of sources, Internet resources and cross-references to the authors.

While most electronic magazines have hitherto been mere by-products of printed journals, we are proposing something new and different. The online version of "Studies in Contemporary History" will contain pictures, film segments and Internet links that will enhance the way that in which research is presented. The parallel print version has the advantage of being accessible for reference independently of the Internet. Both versions ought to be understood as mutually complementary. A first focus will be the essay section, where solid empirical research will be presented along with theoretical and methodological reflections. While the content of this section will not greatly differ from already existing academic journals, it should provide a broader scope by selecting less conventional topics and presenting the material with more illustrations.

The hybrid style of publication also allows for the inclusion of more current scholarly debates. We would like to print essays that refer to and address contemporary historical issues discussed in the public more quickly than in other academic venues. Interviews with eyewitnesses of past events or leading intellectuals can further reflect on current controversies. The debate section thus does not try to follow feature articles, but rather to place contemporary political and social issues into a historical context. The close link with the internet portal "Zeitgeschichte-online" (<http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de>) and the mailing list "H-Soz-u-Kult" (<http://www.hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de>) will allow the continuation of discussions independent of the rhythm of journal publication.

Precise verification of sources will remain another priority of this journal. However, this fundamental principle of research must also be extended to non-written sources. We would like to encourage the application of the mainly

textually-oriented method of source criticism to a whole range of new materials. This can be achieved, for instance, by ensuring that citations and interpretations of historical photos, films as well as radio and television programs are subjected to the same standards as written documents. For this reason a new section has been added to this journal – the introduction and analysis of key (audio)visual sources.

Finally we will dedicate a considerable amount of space to critical commentary on of the current media treatment of historical problems: We will evaluate new web-sites, CD ROMs, TV films and movies, exhibitions, etc. that are interesting from the perspective of contemporary history. Since “H-Soz-u-Kult” has proven itself an invaluable forum for book reviews, “Studies in Contemporary History” will refrain from reviewing new monographs and rather refer to these discussions in the form of a list of links. However, comprehensive bibliographical essays and “rediscoveries” of important older works are planned as an independent section of this journal.

Considering the large variety of existing forums of publication, it is an enormous risk to establish a new historical journal. Nonetheless, we will dedicate ourselves to making “Studies in Contemporary History” an intellectually attractive medium that offers interesting insights through its special combination of form and content. The new journal will be mostly directed towards the younger generation of researchers, memory culture professionals and specialists in associated disciplines in order to broaden the discourse on contemporary historical issues. This also means that we would like to provide access to authors who do not write in the German language – we therefore encourage the submission of English texts for publication. We welcome criticism as well as suggestions, especially during the initial phase of the project, when we seek to establish a new form of a scholarly journal with the cooperation of a wider range of contemporary historians.

The Editors and the Editorial Staff