

MEMORIAL

Douglas A. Unfug (1929–2017)

DOUGLAS A. Unfug, emeritus professor of history at Emory University and founding editor of *Central European History* (*CEH*), passed away on October 14, 2017, at the age of eighty-eight. His editorship spanned more than two decades and helped establish the journal as the leading North American venue for scholarship in the field. He taught at Emory from 1957 until his retirement in 1997.

Douglas Unfug was born on June 6, 1929, in Pueblo, Colorado. He earned his undergraduate degree at Yale University in 1951, where he also received his PhD in 1960. His doctoral advisor at Yale was Hajo Holborn, the doyen of postwar historians of Germany in the United States. Unfug was one of the more than fifty PhD's trained by Holborn, a cohort that included future leaders in the discipline like Theodore S. Hamerow, Leonard Krieger, Arno J. Mayer, and Otto Pflanze. While completing a dissertation on German policy in the Baltic states in 1918–1919, Unfug held a Ford Foundation teaching internship at Williams College from 1956 to 1957, and an instructorship at Emory from 1957 to 1962. With Holborn's endorsement, he then joined Emory's history department at the rank of assistant professor. Promotion to associate professor followed in 1970, a rank he held until his retirement.

Despite Holborn's encouragement, Unfug never published his dissertation. He would instead make his professional mark as a journal editor, beginning with his appointment in 1968 as inaugural editor of *Central European History*. The founding of *CEH* was the fruit of efforts by members of the Conference Group of Central European History (the forerunner of what is today the Central European History Society) to found an American journal devoted to the history of German-speaking Central Europe. Here Unfug was one of several scholars, led by Theodore S. Hamerow, who lobbied actively within the Conference Group to achieve this goal. The enterprise became especially urgent after 1964, when *The Journal of Central European Affairs* ceased publication. Although the founding of the *Austrian History Yearbook* (*AHY*) in 1965 partially filled the resulting vacuum, the *AHY* followed its predecessor in focusing largely on the Habsburg monarchy and its successor states. The decision to launch *Central European History*, ratified at the Conference Group's annual meeting in December 1966, set in motion the creation of a journal focusing on the history of German-speaking Central Europe as a whole.¹

As editor of the fledgling journal, Unfug was able to draw on the talent of a distinguished founding board of editors that included Holborn and Hamerow, as well as Gordon A. Craig, Carl J. Friedrich, Oron J. Hale, Robert A. Kann, Enno E. Kraehe, and Hans Rosenberg. Yet, the success of *CEH* in its early years also owed much to the high standards of professionalism that Unfug brought to the journal, a feat all the more impressive given that *CEH* was a

¹For background, see "From the Editors" [Douglas A. Unfug], *Central European History* (*CEH*) 1, no. 1 (1968): 3. That letter, as well as Unfug's final letter as editor, are reprinted as an appendix to this memorial.

shoestring operation during much of his editorship. His first wife, Glee Unfug, eventually joined on as a skilled copy editor; and two of his former graduate students, Theodore V. Brodek and David Hendon, assisted in various editorial capacities. Unfug sometimes had to struggle to retain the financial support of his home institution. That was especially the case in the journal's first decade. Emory was not yet the well-financed research institution it would become in 1979, when it was the beneficiary of what then was the largest single gift (\$105 million) to any institution of higher education in American history. During a period when Emory still saw itself primarily as an undergraduate institution, Unfug had to work hard at times to convince administrators that supporting a scholarly journal was a worthwhile investment of the university's resources.

Unfug remained committed, above all, throughout his editorship to making *CEH* open to new directions in the discipline. To be sure, political history—in line with scholarship in the Central European field as a whole—persisted as the dominant focus of the journal during its first decade. But, by the 1980s, articles in the areas of social, economic, and women's history had come to make up a substantial portion of *CEH*'s contents. That the 1980s would end with a special issue edited by Michael Geyer and Konrad H. Jarausch under the title “German Histories: Challenges in Theory, Practice, Technique,” is emblematic of the journal's evolution during the final decade of Unfug's editorship.²

His contributions as editor were best on display in the double issue of June/September 1984, most of which was devoted to the controversy that followed the publication of David Abraham's *Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis* (1981).³ This is not the place to rehearse the charges and countercharges hurled in what Peter Novick called “the best publicized historical controversy of the 1980s.”⁴ What deserves emphasis here is rather the care, tact, and skill with which Unfug handled the thankless task of editing the lengthy and rancorous exchange between Abraham and his foremost critic, Gerald D. Feldman. Those who knew Doug may recall him as a quiet and shy man, sometimes painfully so. But his editorial persona was different, as was evident in the judicious but firm comments with which he closed the Abraham-Feldman exchange. He was justly praised for his editing of the dispute, which allowed fundamental disagreements to be aired while, at the same time, disentangling the confused blend of personal, professional, and scholarly issues that had made the controversy so toxic. In this capacity, he played a key and constructive role in helping the profession weather a fraught and divisive moment in its history. As Jonathan Sperber wrote privately to Unfug shortly after the publication of the exchange:

I would like to express my thanks for the June/September 1984 issue. Editing the exchange between Gerald Feldman and David Abraham must have been an appalling task, but in doing so you have performed a real service to the profession, moving the whole controversy from the sordid half-light of privately circulated manuscripts and questionable long-distance telephone calls, to a brightly lit public forum, where differences can be openly expressed and everyone in the field can make up their minds about the situation.⁵

²*CEH* 22, no. 3/4 (1989). Also see Konrad Jarausch's contribution to this commemorative issue.

³*CEH* 17, no. 2/3 (1984): 159–293.

⁴Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 612.

⁵The letter is quoted by Unfug in an appendix to his annual report to the *CEH* Board, June 28, 1986 (Emory University, Department of History, Unfug file).

Noting in his characteristically unassuming way the appreciative letters he had received, Unfug wrote to the *CEH* board that, “while I welcome the praise for the journal, I would gladly have done without it if I could have done without the year’s work and aggravation.”⁶

By that time, editing *CEH* had taken a toll on Doug in other ways. When I joined Emory’s history faculty in 1987, the journal was running at least two years behind schedule. The lag had partly to do with his perfectionist streak, which had occasioned delays in the past, but other causes exacerbated the delays. These included the failing health of his wife, Glee, who finally succumbed to cancer in 1992, as well as the accumulated exhaustion incurred by Unfug’s long editorship. It was a difficult period for Doug. At his request, and in an effort to reduce the backlog of submissions, I joined *CEH* in 1989 as its associate editor. The results of my efforts were arguably modest: still untenured at the time, I had professional distractions of my own and neither the experience nor editorial bent to do what was needed to bring the journal up to date. Clearly, it was time for the journal to find a new editorial home.

The years following Unfug’s departure as editor brought their share of personal sorrows. Preceding him in death were not only Glee, his wife of forty years, but also his daughter Molly and his grandson Keenan. Those years brought him great joy as well. He remarried in 1996 and is survived by his second wife, Harriet Gilbert Unfug, who had also suffered the loss of a longtime spouse. Harriet brightened his remaining years through her sparkle, wit, vivacity, and, not least, the flock of stepchildren, step-grandchildren, and step-great-grandchildren she gave him in marriage.

Douglas Unfug loved the company of young people, as junior colleagues who knew him will attest. He always had time to chat with them in the hall, and he always found time to read their work-in-progress, generously placing his editorial skills at their disposal. That made him an invaluable resource for his colleagues, just as it did for the journal to which he selflessly devoted so much of his career.

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⁶Annual report to the *CEH* Board of Editors, June 28, 1986; see *ibid.*

Appendix: Douglas A. Unfug's First and Final Letters as Editor of *CEH*

From the Editors (March 1968)*

Central European History appears in response to a widespread demand for an American journal devoted to the history of German-speaking Central Europe. The need for such a periodical has been especially great since S. Harrison Thomson's *Journal of Central European Affairs*, which published studies dealing with this along with other areas, ceased publication in 1964. The Conference Group for Central European History, after two years of study, voted in December 1966 to sponsor a new journal, *Central European History*, to meet this need. Together with such periodicals as the *Austrian History Yearbook* (also published in collaboration with the Conference Group) and the *East European Quarterly*, which have also been founded in recent years to meet similar needs, *Central European History* should help fill a serious gap in the ranks of American scholarly periodicals.

The scope of *Central European History* will be broadly rather than narrowly defined. Comparative studies with a major focus in this area and studies of German influence in or relations with neighboring regions will be welcome. As far as possible, the editors will seek to maintain a balance between works of broad synthesis and of specialized research, among studies of all periods from the Middle Ages to the present, and among studies using traditional approaches to history and those employing recent or experimental methodological approaches.

In its first issue, *Central European History* cannot reflect fully the range of its interests. Similarly, this first issue does not yet reflect the journal's approach to keeping its readers abreast of new literature in the field. It will not attempt to publish reviews of all or even most of the flood of new books appearing each year. Instead it will, on the one hand, publish reflective, critical reviews or review articles dealing with works of central importance. On the other hand, it will publish bibliographical articles dealing with limited periods or themes, to serve as guides through the remaining literature.

The editors of *Central European History* will welcome suggestions and comments from its readers, and hope that it will provide a useful forum for scholars interested in this important field of European history.

*This originally appeared in *CEH* 1, no. 1 (1968): 3.

From the Editor:
Notes on *Central European History* (December 1990)†

The end of a long season editing *Central European History* (and the availability of a blank page or two) presents a temptation to write a string of acknowledgements and reflections. I will resist the first temptation, except to say that the historians who have served on its board of editors (and those at Emory University who have shared in editing it) have performed a valuable service in setting and maintaining its standards; that its readers and contributors have been both loyal, and helpful in that job; and that the plans of its new editor, Kenneth Barkin, promise expanded service to the profession. As for reflections, I have only a few (to which a long footnote, listing examples or exceptions, could be added for nearly every sentence).

(1) There are a lot of active historians in this field in North America, and increasingly in other parts of the non-German world—maybe more than there are in Germany and Austria. This is surely a remarkable circumstance, which has continued even as the number of scholars with German backgrounds has declined. These historians have not been peripheral outsiders, but have taken an active, thoughtful, often moderating part in the debates of their colleagues in Germany and Austria.

(2) Their own controversies, while occasionally bitter, have not been easily reducible to questions of method or theory. One reason may be that they have not been notably innovative in methodology or subject; many of the controversies that have affected the profession at large have glanced off of them. They have tended to deal with social history in terms posed by politics, and they have been reluctant to turn social or political conflicts into questions of language.

(3) This relative lack of innovation, it seems to me, comes less from methodological conservatism or resistance to fashion than from the fact that in the end most work in the field continues to circle, regardless of method or ideology, around the central question of what the Third Reich really means. This may have something to do with generations and personal experience, and may be changing with the passage of time; but I doubt it. I think it has more to do with the fact that Nazism is still what Jane Caplan has called the “limit case” for testing difficult historical questions, not just about German history. And in some ways historians outside Germany may be in a better position to focus not on what has gone or can go wrong with Germans, but on what has gone or can go wrong with all of us.

(4) The German events of 1989 and 1990 (and the European ones coming in 1992) will probably direct even more attention to old-fashioned questions centering on politics. But they should also lead to new questions, including what places and peoples our subject really deals with. I have been surprised and sometimes disturbed by the fact that no one has ever questioned the very existence of a journal with this title, defining its focus as the history of “German-speaking Central Europe”; but the definition has at least had the virtue of ignoring state borders. Much of the best work in recent decades (and perhaps especially that of historians outside Germany) has come from looking at “Germany” not as a nation-state but as a collection of regions. But comparative studies even among these regions are, at least for the modern period, less common, and studies crossing state borders even less so. It should be fruitful to pay more attention to these regions (or “Germany” as

†This originally appeared in *CEH* 23, no. 4 (1990): 383–84.

a whole) as parts of larger entities. Some of the most productive work on the Middle Ages and on the early modern period has dealt with border regions, or with larger regions crossing “national” borders, or with institutions, social structures, and historical processes common to “Europe” as a whole. This should be just as true for the modern period. For example: “German” and “Habsburg” Central Europe are in themselves natural, overlapping laboratories for comparative studies of subjects ranging from intellectual history to the 1918 revolutions. Studies of “modernization,” whatever it means, can benefit from considering (say) the Rhineland, Belgium, and northeastern France as comparable regions. A great deal has been done (again, perhaps especially by scholars outside Germany) to make the study of international relations, broadly conceived, into genuinely international history, especially for the 1920s. “Nazism” on the other hand, has for good reasons been studied mainly as a domestic regime, or for its central role in legitimating “racial” and ideological mass murder. But what were its long-term effects (down to the present) on Europe, especially Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union? These examples could be multiplied; but they may be enough to suggest that “Central European” history can play its part in larger European and international histories.

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