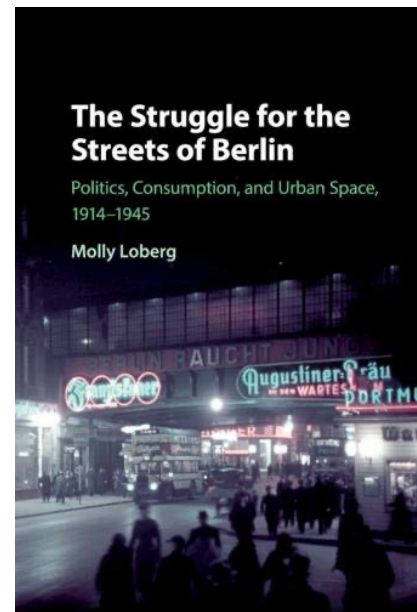


2018 Hans Rosenberg Book Prize Laudatio

Molly Loberg, *The Struggle for the Streets of Berlin: Politics, Consumption, and Urban Space, 1914-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2018)

Decades of scholarship on interwar Berlin have prioritized either cultural-studies approaches or politics. The first set of works has led to enlightening discussions of flânerie, literature, journalism, architecture, theory, consumerism, and gender, but generally remains somewhat distant from the era's political developments, seeking to explain Berlin's unique development of modernity and to highlight continuities with other German-speaking or European places. The second set has focused on the era's implosion and subversion of democracy, often losing sight of the complex, multifaceted Alltagsgeschichte of the city, or treating it as a mere backdrop. Molly Loberg's *Struggle for the Streets of Berlin* is an energetic, savvy, elegantly written leap over that abyss.

But this book is far more than an earnest effort to remedy a historiographical absence. Inspired by urban studies, written with verve and clarity, Loberg's book joins politics to everyday life. Her contention is that urban space became an arena for performing, contesting, and defining perceptions of crisis during the Weimar period. The street was the place where the individual encountered the fullness of collective experience, including social and political conflict, the mass media, and postwar consumerism. The street was one of Berlin's most accessible theaters of modernism and modernization, as automobiles only slowly outnumbered horse-drawn carts during the first half of the 1920s. It was also an arena of internationalization, even including Nazi signs advertising the April 1933 anti-Jewish boycott in both German and English, to take advantage of international attention to events in Berlin.



This book, the author's first monograph, reads like the second or third work of a mature scholar. Loberg's deep dives into Bundesarchiv and Landesarchiv holdings, not to mention her exhaustive reading of various literatures on twentieth-century Berlin, inform her perspective on the streets of Berlin. Loberg skillfully unites inquiries into policing and the law, gender, consumerism, traffic, emotion, crowds, politics, migration, and architecture. In fact, one of the book's many strengths lies in the author's ability to present deep analyses of different perspectives without one dominating the others.

Poster-hangers, street hawkers, shoppers and shop owners, café patrons, political leaders and organizers, urban planners, and Nazi paramilitaries people the pages of this book. But Loberg centers the streets themselves in fascinating ways; they become her main historical actor, as well

as context and object. We learn how Berlin's inhabitants and authorities viewed their streets, both literally and symbolically. Loberg shows well what happens when those multiple perspectives on the streets met in the streets. But she highlights that not all of those streets were the same, thanks to Berlin's enormously diverse streetscapes, not to mention their infrastructural complexity of the city's "cluttered public space."

Among the book's many accomplishments is to encourage subtle, multifaceted readings of Nazism's vexed relationship to Berlin. Loberg notes, for example, that the torchlight parade, now associated with the Nazi Party, was a common Berlin spectacle, employed by sports clubs, church groups, and other political parties. A 1934 reworking of the national traffic code limited signage in the colors used by traffic signs — in particular, combinations of red, black, and white — even as Nazis worried about appropriation of Nazi symbolism by opportunistic shopkeepers and entrepreneurs churning out "patriotic kitsch." Preparations for the 1936 Olympics addressed perceptions of the city as tasteless and ugly, as well as the reality of the city's uneven postwar economic development. Loberg shows how the autonomous social institutions of the street influenced, hindered, and helped the National Socialists' efforts. Although the Nazification of Berlin was overwhelming by the end of 1938, Nazism's final bequest to the city was that of destruction.

Struggle for the Streets of Berlin gains power from comparison to current-day struggles in other streets in cities all over the world, and the relationship of these events to power. Modern cities' very dynamism is also the source of their precarity, Loberg argues; the modern city street offers possibilities for both authoritarianism and anarchy. The city street, in Loberg's trenchantly argued, wide-ranging text, becomes a lived symbol of the relationship between citizens and the state.

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