

## Introduction

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SARA BEAM and MEGAN ARMSTRONG

This forum is the outgrowth of a series of sessions held in honor of Barbara B. Diefendorf at the 2014 Sixteenth Century Studies Conference. Over twenty scholars from the United States, Canada, Britain, Ireland, and France came together to consider the profound impact that Barbara has had on the field of early modern European history. Current and former students, colleagues whom Barbara has mentored, peers with whom she studied under Denis Richet in France, and other scholars deeply influenced by her research gathered to celebrate her contributions and her career.

Barbara's rich and varied corpus has reshaped how historians think about the history of civic politics, religious violence, and Catholic piety in early modern France. While profoundly influenced by the cultural turn, Barbara always remained firmly rooted in the archives. She is always willing to be surprised by what she finds there and grounds her analyses in the actions of specific individuals and local political institutions. Her research has brought unlikely "heroes" to the fore. She showed us how the actions of a handful of militia officers propelled Parisians into the violence of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572 and introduced us to *dévot*e Barbe Acarie, one laywoman among many whose spiritual and material investment in religious renewal at the turn of the seventeenth century sparked a distinctly feminine Counter-Reformation in Paris.

It is Barbara's work on community and religious identity in particular that has inspired the following forum. Her many articles and seminal books have shown how urban communities, faced with state centralization and religious rupture, constantly redefined civic service, communal membership, and religious activism during the early modern period. Community and religious identity proved to be one of the more important themes to emerge from the sessions at the Sixteenth Century Society meeting. As a result, the editors of *French Historical Studies* proposed that we publish a forum highlighting some of the new work that Barbara has inspired on this topic.

This issue explores how our understanding of religious community and religious identity during the early modern period has undergone considerable change during the last few decades. The intermittent violence and disruptions of the Wars of Religion, as well as the shifting policies of the seventeenth-century French state, created opportunities for communities to reinvent public worship and redefine communal membership. Thanks to Barbara's nuanced analysis of the ways that Catholic and Huguenot Parisians lived together for decades before 1572 and innovative research by other scholars on religious coexistence throughout Europe, we have moved from a fairly teleological conception of "religious toleration" to a more nuanced understanding of the permeability of the boundaries between people of different confessions in France, in Francophone Europe, and beyond.

The forum opens with an essay by Barbara, who offers a critical evaluation of this historiography and the directions in which it pushes future research. The five essays that follow explore the myriad ways that community was constructed, undermined, and reinvented during the century and a half that followed the breakdown of Western Christianity, a period also marked by the expansion of Catholic missionary activity outside Europe. Each essay explores a distinct aspect of communal identity—neighborly goodwill, prayer, marriage, conversion, and Marian shrines—and analyzes how these categories of experience were reshaped in a post-Reformation world. Although each contribution focuses on communities deeply invested in defining identity in terms of insiders and outsiders, they also show how notions of community could at times be more inclusive. Together they reveal that trust—in political or religious leadership, in local traditions, in collective spiritual practices, in mutual respect—is always at the heart of community.

Beyond this forum, this conversation will be continued in an H-France Salon, which will include an interview with Barbara and interactive evaluations of the forum by experts in the field.

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