

# PREFACE

---

"What exactly does the German Historical Institute do?" All of us at the GHI have been confronted with this question at some point, and none of us can give a quick or simple response that does the Institute justice. The outlines of a proper answer can be found, however, in the Table of Contents of this issue of the *Bulletin*. The Features reflect the different types of public events the GHI organizes over the course of the year. Maestro Kurt Masur was the most recent in a series of distinguished *Zeitzeugen*—participants in pivotal events of the recent past—the GHI has brought to Washington as part of its public outreach program. Masur enchanted a capacity audience with his reflections upon his art and his role in East Germany's peaceful revolution of 1989. Ralf Dahrendorf qualifies as both *Zeitzeuge* and commentator. Whether as scholar, politician, or educator, Dahrendorf has been an eloquent participant in public debate for over forty years. "Enlightenment Applied, Enlightenment Betrayed: A Story of Liberty under Pressure," his contribution to this issue of the *Bulletin*, was delivered at a program jointly sponsored by Columbia University and the GHI in honor of renowned historian Fritz Stern, who, much like Dahrendorf, has long acted on his belief that scholars can and should speak out on issues of contemporary concern. The lecture by Gerhard A. Ritter and the comment by James J. Sheehan published in this issue of the *Bulletin* were presented at what could be described as a "classic" GHI event: a dialogue between two leading historians of Germany, one German, one American, on a critical point of intersection between their countries' historical professions. That the GHI seeks to promote scholarly dialogue across not only national but also disciplinary boundaries is evidenced by Anne Whiston Spirn's essay "Urban Nature and Human Design." Spirn, a pioneering landscape architect, was the keynote speaker at the conference "The Place of Nature in the City in Twentieth-Century Europe and North America." A report on that conference, which brought together scholars from nearly a dozen fields and a dozen countries, appeared in the Spring 2006 issue of the *Bulletin*.

The four projects described in the GHI Research section typify the different forms of historical scholarship the institute supports. GHI Research Fellow Bernd Schaefer is presently conducting interviews for an oral history of postwar German-American relations. Research Fellow Christoph Strupp, in a collaborative project with the Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg, is preparing an edition of American consular reports from Germany dating from the time of Hitler's ascent to power to

Germany's declaration of war on the United States nine years later. Frank Uekötter, the recipient of the GHI's 2005 Breuninger Fellowship, is writing a monograph on the environmental history of agriculture. With the financial assistance of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, GHI Research Fellow Simone Lässig and Cornelia Wilhelm of Rutgers University are compiling a guide to source materials on the history of German Jews in the United States. Oral history, source edition, monograph, reference work: research takes many forms at the GHI.

What exactly does the GHI do? "Organize conferences" is the answer that the 500 or so scholars who participate each year in GHI-sponsored seminars and symposia, workshops, and conferences might give. In recent years, an ever-larger portion of the GHI's conferences have looked beyond North America and Europe. Some of our conferences, such as "Removing Peoples: Forced Migration in the Modern World" and "Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and the Environment," set out to compare a broad range of case histories drawn from across the world. Others, notably "German *Ostpolitik*, 1969–1974: The European and Global Response," attempt to bring a global perspective to topics and issues traditionally set in more circumscribed analytical frameworks. The GHI's encouragement of work in comparative and world history does not come at the expense of its traditional core areas of concentration. Conferences such as "Crossovers: African Americans and Germany" and "Max Liebermann and the Course of German History" testify to the GHI's ongoing commitment to the fields of American and German history.

Many of the conferences and other events described in this issue of the *Bulletin* were organized by the GHI in cooperation with other institutions. An important though seemingly invisible partner in a large share of the GHI's collaborative ventures is the Friends of the German Historical Institute. The Friends provide crucial financial support for programs such as the one in honor of Fritz Stern mentioned above. Likewise, it was only thanks to assistance from the Friends that the GHI was able to host the fascinating theatrical experiment "The Lights are Going Out All Over Europe"; and the Friends also play an important role in the documentation project on the German anti-Nazi resistance that has been made possible by Judith and Horst von Oppenfeld. On behalf of the entire staff of the GHI, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Friends of the GHI for their engagement on the Institute's behalf.

*Christof Mauch*