

PREFACE

The past has figured prominently in political debates of recent years. At the outset of the Iraq War, there was much discussion of the potential lessons that the American experiences in Germany and Japan after 1945 might offer for the remaking of Iraq's political order. More recently, observers on the left and right alike have drawn parallels—very different parallels, to say the least—between America's interventions in Vietnam and Iraq. Another group of frequent allusions to the past in contemporary political discourse is tied to the concept of "empire." Is the United States a new Rome? Should the West reexamine the British Empire and the *pax Britannica* as it searches for responses to the international political challenges of the early twenty-first century? The wide interest in the concept of empire was one of the main reasons the GHI dedicated its Spring 2007 Lecture Series to the topic "Empire in German and American History." In his lecture in this series Charles S. Maier of Harvard University explored the criteria for defining empire and their potential applicability to the United States today. This issue of the *Bulletin* presents his essay "America Among Empires? Imperial Analogues and Imperial Syndrome."

Shortly after Professor Maier offered the GHI's audience a theoretical framework for thinking about America's role on the international stage, former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer presented his reading of the course of European-American relations since the end of the Cold War on the occasion of the Eighth Gerd Bucerius Lecture, jointly organized by the GHI and the Ebelin and Gerd Bucerius ZEIT Foundation. Drawing a contrast to the close transatlantic cooperation that was crucial in ending the Balkan crisis, Fischer gave a frank assessment of the current state of the Western alliance. "Europe is weak and the United States is blind," he declared bluntly. Uncertainty and lack of unity on the part of the Europeans, he went on to explain, and the United States' increasingly unilateralist instincts are hobbling an often effective and still very necessary partnership. The text of Fischer's Bucerius Lecture appears in this issue of the *Bulletin*.

Fischer's analysis rests on a comparison of the differing European and American responses to post-Cold War developments, and in his hands, historical comparison serves as a means to challenge conventional wisdom and ready-made opinions. In similar fashion, Colleen A. Dunlavy and Thomas Welskopp provocatively reexamine the striking differences between the German and American economic systems in their essay "Myths and Peculiarities: Comparing US and German Capitalism" in

this issue of the *Bulletin*. Dunlavy and Welskopp's study was prepared in conjunction with the project "Competing Modernities," jointly organized by the GHI and the Humboldt University, Berlin, with the support of the Robert Bosch Foundation. Each of the fourteen two-person teams of scholars participating in the "Competing Modernities" project is exploring a key facet of twentieth-century life and comparing the German and American experiences of change. More information on "Competing Modernities" is available online at www.ghi-dc.org/competingmodernities.

The driving force behind "Competing Modernities" at the GHI was Christof Mauch, who stepped down as director this past spring. Christof Mauch had come to Washington as the GHI's deputy director in 1998. He took over as acting director the following year and was appointed director in 2001. All who had the pleasure of working with Christof Mauch in his decade at the GHI can attest to his tremendous energy, imagination, and creativity; and also, I should stress, his openness, collegiality, and good nature. All of us at the GHI wish Christof Mauch great happiness and success in his new position as professor of North American history at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich.

On April 1, 2008, Hartmut Berghoff will assume the position of director of the GHI. Professor Berghoff is currently director of the Institute for Economic and Social History at the University of Göttingen. Having served as acting director for six months, I know how demanding the position awaiting Professor Berghoff is. I also know that he will be able to draw upon a tremendous store of goodwill toward the GHI built up over the past twenty years by my predecessors.

My brief tenure in the director's office will be coming to an end as this issue of the *Bulletin* goes to press. I have depended heavily on the experience and knowledge of the entire staff of the GHI: to all of them, I extend my deepest thanks. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Sabine Fix, the GHI's administrative director, and to Anke Ortlepp, our deputy director. Anke and I were hired as GHI research fellows on the same day, and we learned together that we were to be appointed acting director and deputy director. I have relied on her as both friend and colleague throughout my time in Washington, and I wish her all the best as she takes on still greater responsibilities at the GHI.

Gisela Mettele
Acting Director (April–September 2007)