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This issue of the Bulletin begins with the German Historical Institute’s 28th Annual Lecture, delivered last fall by Andreas Wirsching (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich), who examined the role of European conceptions of “knowledge” in the transformation of European society since the 1970s. Wirsching’s incisive article examines the origins of the notion of a “knowledge society,” its political uses in the context of neoliberal responses to globalization within the European Union, and its problematic implications, ranging from technocratic rule to social polarization. In his commentary, Jeffrey Anderson (Georgetown University) notes that the explosion of knowledge, including the rise of the internet as a means of disseminating knowledge, has, in fact, led to growing disparities of wealth, both within nations and internationally.

Our next feature article presents an expanded version of the lecture delivered at the GHI’s German Unification Symposium last October 3 by Richard Schröder, who was elected to the East German parliament in March 1990 and chairs the Advisory Board of the Germany’s Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former GDR. In his wide-ranging lecture, Schröder reflects on the role that the memory of dictatorship should play in a democracy. Rejecting the general argument that a better understanding of dictatorship teaches useful historical lessons, Schröder provides a number of specific reasons why remembering and studying the East German dictatorship is important. These include not only the need to compensate and remember the victims of the regime, but the need to provide a kind of substitute for the “public sphere” that was lacking in the GDR and to correct the official history propagated by the SED.

As regular readers know, each spring issue of the Bulletin allows us to present the research of the winners of the Fritz Stern Dissertation Prize, awarded every fall by the Friends of the German Historical Institute for the two best dissertations in German history completed at North American universities in the preceding year. This year we are delighted to present articles by the latest Stern Prize honorees, Chase Richards (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania) and Ned Richardson-Little (Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). Chase Richards provides an overview of his dissertation
project on the German popular press after 1848, which focuses on the so-called Familienblätter, or “family papers,” a genre of illustrated general-interest magazine produced for domestic consumption. While these were commercial ventures, Richards argues that their publishers and editors saw these papers as vehicles for disseminating liberal ideas and values at a time when liberalism faced severe political obstacles. Ned Richardson-Little presents his dissertation research on human rights, ideology, and legitimacy in East Germany. Complicating received narratives in which the SED regime figures simply as a violator of human rights, Richardson-Little recovers the history of the GDR’s attempts to propose an alternative socialist conception of human rights as necessary background for fully understanding the struggle over the meaning of human rights that took place between the regime and East German dissidents in the 1980s.

This issue’s final feature article presents the research of Reinhild Kreis, who was GHI Fellow in the History of Consumption in 2013/14. Kreis presents her research on the history of the do-it-yourself movement, which reveals the different meanings attributed to “making things oneself” rather than consuming ready-made products. Focusing on the interplay of the do-it-yourself movement with the rise of consumer society, Kreis’s project provides new insights into changing social norms and values, including different interpretations of what counts as valuable “knowledge” in a society, thus bringing us full circle with the themes of Andreas Wirsching’s article.

As usual, the remainder of this Bulletin presents a series of reports on recent GHI conferences and workshops. Amid a variety of topics, two foci are discernable. The history of white-collar crime was examined by a major conference at the GHI and a smaller workshop in Germany. The state of current research on National Socialism and the Holocaust was the subject of an international workshop co-organized by the GHI and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, while a conference co-sponsored by the GHI and Boston University examined Nazi Germany’s dispossession of German Jews. In addition to reading the reports on other conferences and seminars, we urge you to read our “news” section, which, among other things, reports on our new staff publications and gives you an overview of upcoming events, at which we hope to see some of our readers.

Hartmut Berghoff (Director) and Richard F. Wetzel (Editor)
Features
I.

Forty years ago, Europe was quite different from what it is today.1 Not only was half the continent in the grip of communism; large parts of southern Europe, including Spain, Portugal, and Greece, were just shaking off the remnants of their authoritarian regimes. The standard of living there was low, and the agrarian sector still dominated the economy. On the other hand, countries like West Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and the Netherlands, as well as large parts of France, Italy, and Scandinavia, were fully fledged industrial societies with around fifty per cent of the workforce employed in the industrial sector. Coal was still a fairly important source of energy, even though the irreversible decline of the mining industry had already become obvious. Oil was cheap and abundant, although the first oil crisis in 1973 temporarily caused a sharp rise in prices and gave a sure indication of the fact that the oil reserves were not infinite.2

The Europe of the 1970s was still separated by many frontiers, and it was not so easy to travel from one country to another. We do not need to speak of the Iron Curtain that continued to cut through the heart of Europe and prohibited the freedom of movement in Eastern Europe. Even within Western Europe border controls were normal and often time-consuming, even though compulsory visas had been abolished by the end of the 1950s. It was still difficult to move from one European country to another in order to settle down, work or study abroad. Applicants had to meet many requirements and qualifications, and bureaucratic proceedings were complex and sometimes insurmountable. Finally, travel was expensive and — as far as air travel is concerned — often a luxury.

Computers did exist in the 1970s but they were huge machines that were operated by specialists in closed laboratories. And computers did not affect everyday life at all. Even secretaries still used rather old-fashioned typewriters when writing their bosses’ letters.

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1 This article is a revised and annotated version of the Annual Lecture I was invited to give at the German Historical Institute in Washington, 13 November 2014.

It would be easy to extend this list of differences between Europe in the 1970s and today. Instead, this paper will focus on the most important underlying change: the change in economic structures and the accompanying changes in the working world. In this respect, the 1980s are a crucial period not only for the western part of Europe but also for its eastern countries and their eroding communist regimes. This is the decade when traditional and familiar forms of the economy and the workplace began to enter their irreversible and partly fatal crisis.

In Great Britain, the miners and printers, who had once been the spearhead of trade union power, fought their last battles against the Thatcher government and against people like Robert Maxwell, the famous British press tsar and ruthless modernizer of the print industry. It was a futile battle. The acceleration of technological change, the economic slump, and growing international competition combined to turn the last big fight of the British trade unions into a huge defeat. By 1989 less than 5,000 miners were going to work in south Wales — where 250,000 pitmen had once earned their living.

In a like manner, the Western European textile industry collapsed. During the 1980s, the last big textile plants were closed down, while at the same time steel workers in Germany and elsewhere fought for the bare survival of their factories. These examples could easily be extended: with great vehemence, international market forces continued their relentless drive and this vehemence could not be changed by any instrument of economic or social policy. Even in West Germany, where industrial corporations were quick to adapt themselves to the new conditions by means of rationalization and innovation, more than two million industrial jobs were lost between 1973 and 1984.

On the other hand, the 1980s also witnessed the emergence of manifold forms of new modernity. Nothing short of a revolution was taking place in computer technology and communications media, such as laser and satellite. Technological innovations paved the way for new productivity in the service sector, beginning with new media and the development of a digital finance industry. This made possible a huge, albeit partial, economic dynamic and created new opportunities for the future. Thus, the 1980s were a period when, “after the boom”, open economic, social, and cultural contradictions clashed.

Several developments, whose origins dated back at least a decade, were converging. The sharp rise in oil prices in 1973 and again in 1979 had left its mark on the world economy. In all Western industrial states, rationalization measures and job cuts in the industrial

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4 Ibid., 475.


6 Ibid., p. 239.

sector were the consequence. “Stagflation” and high unemployment rates constituted a kind of crisis experience that was completely new for the postwar era. Moreover, the highly visible trend towards the internationalization of the world economy was calling into question traditional securities and markets. Western Europe and the United States were facing the challenges coming from Japan and, increasingly, from the so-called “four Asian tigers”, namely Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. At the same time, still in the shadow zone of world history, but with revolutionary consequences in the long term, China, under its great reformer Deng Xiaoping, embarked on the path to modernization. Thus, already in the 1980s, the profile of a new axis of globalization, ranging from North America via Europe to north-east Asia, became visible.

If we look, then, at European history since the 1980s, we observe that the political caesura of 1989 was embedded in a huge, revolutionary, and global technological and economic development. The new information and communication technologies (ICT) changed the world. An irresistible technical acceleration first caught hold of the developed countries of the West and Japan, and then, since the millennium, the whole world. The extent and impact of this development amounted to a kind of “third industrial revolution.” The personal computer dramatically changed working environments as well as everyday life and leisure habits. The World Wide Web, which was introduced in 1995, further accelerated this development. It now became possible to transmit information and data more or less immediately and all over the world. In fact, by the beginning of the twenty-first century it had become technically irrelevant whether an office worker worked in Europe, North America or Asia.

It was in this context that Western European governments and, increasingly, the European Commission began searching for strategies for how to overcome the endemic crisis caused by large structural changes, technical innovation, and intensified international competition. Already during the 1980s, but above all during the 1990s, when multinational corporations began relocating their production to low-wage countries, Western European labor markets as well as working conditions had been coming under increasing pressure. Millions of industrial jobs were lost without full compensation in the service sector. While the welfare state came under fire, Western European societies faced increasing tendencies towards social polarization and exclusion. Since the mid-1980s, Western European governments
developed a strategy to cope with these challenges through market liberalization, including privatization and a liberalization of the labor market, as well as educational reforms. Additionally, there was an increasingly intensive liberalization of international trade and finance, while in Europe itself a single market was formed. Thus, the globalization of the 1980s and 1990s was by no means an uncontrolled process, which engulfed the Western world, as it were, like a natural disaster. On the contrary, states and governments contributed actively to it, because they thought they could best combat the economic crisis and unemployment by means of economic liberalization and market-oriented policies. Through liberalization, deregulation, and privatization, the Western governments enhanced the power of the market and enlarged the international room for maneuver for the great international banks and multinational corporations. The underlying idea was to accelerate the ongoing structural change and to transform industrial societies, which relied heavily on manual labor, into modern service societies.  

In this strategy, knowledge became a transformational resource. On a continent that is chronically short of key raw materials but in possession of an impressive educational tradition, this idea was particularly tempting. Knowledge was to become an important productive force, alongside capital and labor, and might even supersede them as the decisive motor of economic productivity. Thus, the concept of a European “knowledge society” became an integrative, cross-sector strategy for mobilizing European cultural resources, modernizing the European economy, and enhancing Europe’s competitiveness in the world.

Three elements dominated in this discourse. First, there was science. In the last forty years, science has increasingly left the ivory tower and continuously extended its social function. The neologism “scientification” betrays the progress made by science-based knowledge. Science has, indeed, permeated almost all areas of life. This is even true for the private sphere. Consider, for example, the human body as an object of science, the healthcare industry, and the many science-based solutions offered for almost all psychological problems and personal stress factors. Second, science has promoted technology. There are several “new technologies” that have gained momentum since the 1980s. The most important are, of course, the information and communication technologies or ICTs, which have contributed to the far-reaching changes that we have experienced during the last

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8 For the larger context, see Andreas Wirsching, Der Preis der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in unserer Zeit (Munich, 2012), 226-266.
thirty years. In this respect, the “knowledge society” is the legitimate successor to what was called the “information society” in the 1980s, that is, a society that is economically increasingly dependent on information technology and culturally ever more influenced by those technologies. Indeed, technology and above all ICTs have transformed the everyday lives of Europeans in a way that may truly be called the Third Industrial Revolution.

This is why, third, the concept of the knowledge society has required the transformation of education. In the face of the modern, knowledge-based economy’s ever increasing needs, education has had to be developed in two ways: governments and public actors have had to improve education systems, and individuals have also had to rise to the challenge by working to enhance their knowledge and their ability to act successfully in the labor market.

In the following pages, I will discuss the assumption that this European concept of “knowledge” has not only been very influential at a political level but has also strongly contributed to the transformation of European societies since the 1980s. First, I will concentrate on the intellectual origins of this knowledge concept (II); second, on the efforts to implement it politically (III); and, third, I will consider some of its problems and highly ambivalent consequences (IV).

II.

The idea of knowledge as a transformational resource is a very interesting example of a transatlantic discourse to which European and North American actors contributed simultaneously. Most key advocates of the concept were European-born, but they found a larger audience in the U.S., and they were more successful there than in Europe. In the end, however, Europeans took up the concept as a program for modernization. At the same time, and in the context of neo-liberalism and the growing power of consulting firms, this program could easily — but inadequately — be described as a kind of economic “Americanization.”

Already in the 1950s, some observers had predicted the transition from industrial to postindustrial (or service) societies. Starting with Jean Fourastié’s (overly) optimistic forecast, these studies agreed on the expectation of higher productivity, higher levels of education, the humanization of work, and a flourishing culture. As early as 1959 Peter F. Drucker, the Austrian-born leading theorist of management,
predicted the rise of a new class of “knowledge workers.”\footnote{Peter F. Drucker, \textit{Landmarks of Tomorrow} (New York, 1959).}
In the following decades, Drucker described the concept more precisely. His ideal type of the knowledge worker was, in fact, the historical successor of the white collar worker. Drucker’s knowledge worker had at his or her disposal an advanced education as well as great spatial and professional flexibility; he or she could swiftly change jobs and employers and was able to repeatedly acquire highly specialized knowledge. Therefore, the knowledge worker could act in complete autonomy on the labor market and choose among many different career options. In the end, power in the workplace would shift from bosses to knowledge workers. As Drucker himself formulated in \textit{1999}: “More and more people in the workforce — and most knowledge workers — will have to manage themselves. They will have to place themselves where they can make the greatest contribution; they will have to learn to develop themselves. They will have to learn to stay young and mentally alive during a fifty-year working life. They will have to learn how and when to change what they do, how they do it and when they do it.”\footnote{Peter F. Drucker, \textit{Management Challenges for the 21st Century} (New York, 2007), 13.}

This analysis was immensely influential. By the time of his death in 2005, Drucker had published thirty-nine books, which have been translated into more than thirty languages. Most receptive to his concepts was, of course, the consulting sector. Drucker himself entered into a long and successful consulting career and worked with major corporations like General Electric, Coca Cola, and many others. For the mission statement of consulting firms like McKinsey, Boston Consulting, and many others, Drucker’s credo of self-management, individual creativity, lifelong learning and flexibility on the job market has become a sort of modernization mantra since the late 1980s.

Ironically, the concept converged nicely with some late Marxist positions. While Drucker primarily addressed the economic world, the American social scientist Daniel Bell adopted a similar analysis. Bell’s immensely influential book on the “coming of the post-industrial society” was published in 1973. Here, the future postindustrial society is driven by knowledge and science-based innovations. Accordingly, the new society would doubtless be a “knowledge society.” Knowledge would be the decisive innovation factor, fundamentally transforming the nature of work and production. Bell did not conceal his assumption that this new society would probably require significant adjustments by workers as well as create new pressures to conform. But this prospect could also be seen in an optimistic way: in an increasingly
computer-based knowledge society, a new labor force would be able to meet these requirements by means of more intensive vocational training and higher levels of education. 12

In his social forecasting, Bell predicted greater prosperity within a technologically advanced economy. Thus, he led the way in transforming Marxist humanistic ideals into an optimistic (or even utopian) analysis of the future postindustrial society. Others, like the Polish Marxist Adam Schaff or the Austrian-French philosopher André Gorz, followed this path as well. Future society, based on self-sustained growth, prosperity, and leisure, would offer everyone unprecedented possibilities for personal development. It was in this sense that Adam Schaff wrote in 1985 on behalf of the Club of Rome: “The universal man is universally educated; that is why he is able to change his profession and to change his position in the social division of labor. So far, this kind of man has only been utopian. But today this man is beginning to become a reality. To some extent, he is becoming a necessity. Continuous education and ever more efficient information technologies will realize this ideal.” 13

An underlying assumption here was the idea of social mobility or even social egalitarianism. Peter Drucker’s model of the knowledge worker suggested continuous upward social movement driven by knowledge. “In the knowledge society,” he wrote in 1994, “for the first time in history, the possibility of leadership will be open to all.” 14 Others, like Manuel Castells — a Spanish-born social scientist, a former Marxist, and the author of the highly influential book The Information Age — predicted the rise of a “network society.” By this he meant an emancipatory society that has been changed forever by new information and communication technologies. The basis of such a society is the direct interaction between the net and the individual, bypassing traditional seats of power like the patriarchal family and the nation state. Thus, according to Castells, the network society is an open structure and in itself quite different from a society based on classes or social strata.

We can thus see how the discourse on knowledge was strongly characterized by the interpenetration of consulting expertise, technological enthusiasm, and late Marxist ideas about humanistic socialism and the humanization of work that were already flourishing during the 1970s. Added to that in the 1990s was European governments’

search for an adequate globalization strategy. There was probably no place in the world where this blend of heterogeneous ideas exerted more influence than in Europe.

III.

By the end of the 1990s, a large majority of European political actors had enthusiastically accepted the paradigm of “knowledge” and the “knowledge society.” Advised by social scientists, economists, and practical advocates of the concept such as Manuel Castells, Anthony Giddens, the Portuguese economist Maria Joao Rodrigues, and the German politician and consultant Thomas Mirow, the European Union (EU) made the language of the knowledge society the basis of its political agenda. A society based on knowledge was supposed to enhance Europe’s cultural and economic power, secure Europe’s place in the world, and ensure Europe’s future. In 2000, the so-called Lisbon strategy was adopted, which aimed to make “Europe, by 2010, the most competitive and the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world.”

Under the subtitle “An information society for all” the Presidency Conclusions proclaimed: “The shift to a digital, knowledge-based economy, prompted by new goods and services, will be a powerful engine for growth, competitiveness and jobs. In addition, it will be capable of improving citizens’ quality of life and the environment.” Thus, technological, economic, competitive aspects as well as notions of personal well-being and the “good life” were included in the new strategy.

The Lisbon strategy was developed by a small EU network of leading politicians and experts, “a new kind of alliance between the intellectual community and the political community,” as Maria Rodrigues put it. Whereas the dominant part among the scientific experts was played by economists, the politicians involved were mostly Social Democrats and had a technological and technocratic outlook. The knowledge society envisioned by this group was not confined to an increased commitment to research and development. The European Union linked its ideas and programs for research and development to the imperative of economic competitiveness. Thus, in 2004 the “Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Employment” described the European knowledge society in the following manner:

It covers every aspect of the contemporary economy where knowledge is at the heart of value added — from high-tech manufacturing and ICTs through knowledge intensive


16 Ibid.


18 Besides Rodrigues herself, Luc Soete (Maastricht), Robert Boyer (Paris) and Bengt-Åke Lundvall (Aalborg).
services to the overtly creative industries such as the media and architecture. Up to 30% of the working population are estimated in future to be working directly in the production and diffusion of knowledge in the manufacturing, service, financial and creative industries alike. A large proportion of the rest of the workforce will need to be no less agile and knowledge-based if it is to exploit the new trends. Europe can thus build on its generally strong commitment to create a knowledge society to win potential world leadership.19

In order to implement the idea of knowledge as a transformational resource, the European Union developed a new sort of governance: The so called “open method of coordination” introduced in 2000 sought to overcome the EU’s rather cumbersome political procedures. The new system was to provide a framework in which the EU would provide impulses, set benchmarks, and control the process of implementation, whereas the member states and their governments were supposed to implement the targets set by the European Council and the Commission.

In order to see how this might have worked in practice, one can look at the relationship between the June 2003 economic policy guidelines of the European Council20 and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s government declaration in the German Bundestag shortly afterwards, on July 3, 2003.21 Among other points, the European guidelines recommended making the tax and benefits system more employment-friendly, and reducing “tax and benefit disincentives to supply and demand for low-paid labor.” Schröder promised lower taxes to unburden citizens and employers “dramatically,” and from 2004 the top income-tax rate was lowered to a historic 45 per cent.

The guidelines also recommended making sure that “wage-bargaining systems allow wages to reflect productivity, taking into account productivity differences across skills and local labor market conditions.” According to Schröder, “a turnaround of thinking is taking place. Germans are ready to accept changes. Here, I include explicitly the trade unions. . . Their members want to be the actors of change not its victims let alone its brakemen.” Furthermore, the guidelines recommended reviewing “labor market regulations, notably by relaxing overly restrictive employment protection legislation”, thereby facilitating “labor mobility” and ensuring “efficient active labor market policies”. Schröder, for his part, referred to the so-called Hartz-Reforms
through which the low-income sector had already generated increased employment opportunities by facilitating the use of “temp work” organized by temporary staffing firms and by introducing start-up grants to help the unemployed become self-employed — the so-called “Ich-AG’s”. Thus, Schröder was optimistic that he had shaped a “labor market that is much more open and flexible than has been the case for decades.”

These examples demonstrate the close relationship between the European Union’s concept of the knowledge society and the German social and economic reforms in the era of the red-green coalition under Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer. Further research would certainly reveal more examples of such an interrelationship between European guidelines and national policies.

The issue of education offers a further example. As a concomitant of market liberalization, education became a key arena for Europe’s political efforts to address the exigencies of globalization through the notion of the knowledge society. A UNESCO report of 2005 characterized education as the “cornerstone of human security and knowledge societies.” As early as during the 1980s, the main challenge for the discourse on education came from the dynamic process of internationalization that was connected to the accelerated development of new information technologies. Parallel to these developments, a tendency to discuss new technologies of the social began to spread. Many observers and consultants coming from business and technical milieus began demanding concrete educational policy measures. The challenge of the new technologies demanded new requirements for the education and training of men. If, in fact, one could not evade the new technologies, it seemed necessary to adjust human beings to the new technologies: to modernize their habits, capabilities, and working techniques in order to achieve a new, progressive and growth-oriented “man-machine-system.”

New technologies brought advantages such as the “humanization of work” — a much discussed theme in the 1970s — but what was now badly needed was the optimization of the “man-machine-interface” in the process of production. This was above all a cultural and educational problem. Technological progress itself required the integration of working people into new, more flexible professional organizations. Against that backdrop, political advisors were speaking of a “new crisis of education.” In the face of explosive technological development, the traditional educational system had, from this point of view,
definitely lost its legitimacy. In the “humanely computerized society” the educational system required a complete overhaul. Appropriate education could only mean educating and qualifying people for their life in a world structured by information technology.26

Any such educational program implied a rather severe process of adjustment even though it seemed to be softened by the promise of a new workplace culture. New semantic strategies placed emphasis on individual and communicative qualities. “Creativity”, “communication skills,” and the “ability to work in a team” became much discussed key qualifications. Again, the influence of consulting is highly visible here. The acquisition of these competencies, however, was imposed more and more on individuals and education systems. In a large-scale 1987 advertising campaign, for instance, the German Post Office announced that: “Further training becomes the motor of economic development”; and: “The ability to use the modern information and communication technology creatively becomes increasingly important.”27 Thus, the industrial society needed to be complemented by a “learning society,” because capital as the dominant productive force was being replaced by knowledge and creativity.28

There is probably no political sector in the history of recent European integration that has undergone more significant changes than education policy. At the beginning of the 1980s, the educational aims of the European Community still corresponded to the mission statement of the “Europe of citizens.” Education was considered a complement to strengthening the democratic consciousness of European citizens. By the end of the 1990s, however, education had become more or less completely an instrument for European globalization strategies. Thus, education formed a key element of the Lisbon strategy. “Europe’s education and training systems,” the European Council postulated in 2000, “need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment.”29 Accordingly, the High Level Group of the EU, chaired by Wim Kok, demanded in 2004 that workers be able “constantly to acquire and renew skills” and be trained “to make moving from job to job as easy as possible.”30

The individual’s employability on the market became the central target of education, and it was in this context that the European Commission set up a highly sophisticated benchmarking system. National educational institutions were expected to orient their policies towards this target: from primary schools all the way to higher

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27 Advertisement in Manager-Magazin (Nov. 1987), 140 f. See also Bundespostministerium, Chance und Herausforderung der Telekommunikation in den 90er Jahren (Bonn, 1987).


30 European Commission, Facing the Challenge, 31.
education, for which “employability” now became the leitmotif in line with the “Bologna process,” which had been adopted in 1999. European bureaucracy aimed at a strong and complete chain of “reliable and responsive lifelong learning systems.” Together with active labor market policies, these were supposed to help people “cope with rapid change, unemployment spells and transitions to new jobs.” Since then, all European countries have implemented far-reaching reforms of their education systems — reforms that are continuously guided by European benchmarks and supervised by European institutions.

IV.

The question of how the concepts of “knowledge” and the “knowledge society” were implemented politically requires more research, making this a productive field for new research projects. Any project of this kind, however, would need to consider the problems and ambiguities of the concepts. To put it briefly, the main problem of these concepts lies in the way in which they target the individual. Efforts to improve the competitiveness of the European economy have caused immense changes in labor markets and working conditions. The concept of knowledge as a transformational resource is about providing the ways and means for individual adjustments to changes in the job market. There has been a clear shift from collective responsibility for work and labor markets to individual responsibility. If working conditions are increasingly shaped by new technologies, and labor markets are made increasingly flexible, workers will need to improve their occupational knowledge and skills. In the knowledge society, the individual is responsible for his or her own competitiveness in the labor market. The individual has to invest in his or her own areas of expertise in order to secure and maintain employability. Consequently, the individual is also liable for the wrong choices he or she has made and, consequently for any deficiencies in his or her employability.

If one compares the optimistic forecasting of the 1960s, 1970s, and even 1980s with today’s realities, the result will be disillusionment. It has often been observed that the exigencies of changing labor markets present the danger of giving rise to new forms of social polarization and exclusion. Those who are not capable of meeting the new requirements of flexibility, creativity, and better education risk being left behind on the job market. Social scientists, therefore, were quick to point to the growing trends of social marginalization.


32 For an important case study, see Jenny Andersson, The Library and the Workshop: Social Democracy and Capitalism in the Knowledge Age (Stanford, 2010).
and social inequality. They warned about a purely “negative individualism” that would cause new and profound vulnerabilities in the market. Increased flexibility and the fragmentation of the labor market would cause decreasing job security and insecure breadwinning options. While the EU and the OECD hoped for “more and better jobs,” sceptics predicted an increase in “bad jobs.”

Thus the problematic aspects of the “knowledge society” concept cannot be ignored. Undoubtedly, the concept entails a technocratic tendency, the threat of social engineering, and the subordination of the education system to a narrow business logic. As such, the knowledge society may also appear as a kind of ideological tool invented to accelerate and legitimize ongoing structural changes and adjustments. Such modifications are also rather useful for those businesses that profit from globalization and technological change.

Behind the language of the “knowledge society” we find, of course, specific interests of capital utilization. The Association of Bavarian Entrepreneurs, for example, has recently put it this way: “Universities and polytechnics are responsible for the employability of their students. That is why we demand from all programs of study that they enable students to acquire practical experience.”

To put it more pointedly, three seemingly improbable bedfellows conspired to produce the new language of the knowledge society: utopian late Marxist thought, the more worldly interests of shareholder capitalism, and political preoccupations with how to cope with globalization. In Europe, this discourse has created a social and economic climate in which education runs the risk of becoming the plaything of a strategy for technocratic modernization — or globalization. Thus, what Dominique Pestre has called “today’s financial-industrial-academic complex” requires a good deal of scepticism.

Europe is facing several great dilemmas, which the debate on the European knowledge society throws into sharp relief. These dilemmas stem from the awareness of at least three recent developments that call into question any purely optimistic vision of making Europe fit for globalization with knowledge.

First, the age of utopia sketched by such different authors as Daniel Bell, Peter F. Drucker, Adam Schaff, and Manuel Castells is gone. Today, Europeans have to admit that, as a general benchmark for labor markets, the vision of the highly educated and well-trained sovereign of his or her own professional biography has proven
unrealistic. Instead of minimizing socio-cultural differences, the new global science-based knowledge and digital economies risk reinforcing old divisions and creating new ones. If the promise of increasing prosperity for all and future collective well-being long characterized the European narrative after the Second World War, it has apparently lost its spell.

Second, this development is closely connected to the fact that Europeans are not alone in the world. Tendencies towards what may be called “knowledge societies” are global. To be sure, the gap between the richer regions of the world and those countries that continue to have little access to education and new ICTs is still growing. But it is also undeniable that the spread of ICT and education has accelerated significantly since the end of the 1990s. This is at least true for the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), which, together with the OECD countries, are the driving forces of globalization. In the case of China, everyone would agree that here is a giant of knowledge and power in the making. Thus, any concept of European knowledge societies is part of a much larger global process, in which the different world regions will have to define their place and interests.

Europe therefore needs to take into account its historical and cultural peculiarities when debating how to develop its own modern, knowledge-based economy and culture. And these European peculiarities are indeed highly visible. They come to a large extent from historical experience. Europe was the first continent to live with the dire consequences of a fully developed industrial society and unfettered scientific progress. The results of this experience with modernity were, to say the least, ambivalent. That is why Europeans display a certain uneasiness with regard to the interrelationship between science, society, and individual lives. Current examples include the still unresolved debates on genetically modified foods, pre-implantation diagnostics, and stem cell research. For this reason, the preoccupation of European governing elites with science and innovation risks coming into conflict with a rather innovation-averse European public. Technocratic visions and democratic answers might part ways.

This is all the more true for the question of social security. Compared to other world regions, Europe continues to derive a significant part of its identity from the idea of social welfare, which is to be implemented collectively. The tradition of the European welfare state has come under fire from both neoliberal policies and the idea of the
entrepreneurial self that is closely connected to the concept of a knowledge society.

On the other hand, there are powerful countervailing forces at work against these European traditions. No one can really doubt that there is a tough, economic necessity to cope with global competition, and that the danger of international investments in technology and science being transferred to other parts of the world is not a fantasy. In order to survive this competition, continuous technological progress, a highly trained workforce, and more flexible labor markets are, indeed, necessary and desirable. And it is equally true that “it will not be possible to progress simultaneously towards economic growth, social development and the protection of the environment without reliance on knowledge resources, scientific research and technical expertise.”

Facing this dilemma, Europe should not discard those traditions that are worth preserving. The organizational role of the democratic state, the principle of solidarity, a specific sense of social justice, and an education system aiming at the development of free personalities are crucial for these traditions. The challenge is to find a balance between economic imperatives and these traditions. European governing elites need to find a middle ground in accepting and even accelerating the necessary changes and implementing the concomitant reforms. The concept of the “knowledge society” can certainly contribute to this balance — as long as its inherent dangers of social engineering and technocratic approaches are discerned and, as far as possible, avoided.

The third and last dilemma that should be mentioned concerns the very nature of knowledge and science. Only in recent times have we learned that science and expert knowledge do not guarantee the right answers. Certainly, the total amount of knowledge has increased exponentially during the last three or four decades, and it continues to grow every day. But knowledge is accumulating at a much faster rate than the pace at which new information can be transformed into new concepts and theories. This is probably why there will always be uncertainty about making decisions based on science. The recent Euro crisis may be the best example. All of the knowledge accumulated by generations of economists and financial experts is of little help in finding the right answer. On the contrary, politicians and experts have discovered that they are facing genuinely political decisions. These have to be made without the reassurance of scientific exactitude and

37 Ibid., 142.
within a context that is determined by both global influences and inner European contradictions.

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It should have become clear that the concept of the “knowledge society” is both very promising and highly ambivalent. In Europe, the concept has fed on the dramatic global economic and technological changes that have occurred since the 1980s. For European governments and populations, the idea of promoting science and education has not only made sense but has been highly seductive. It seems to offer the most efficient strategy to cope with the crisis of the late 1970s, to face increasing competition, and to make the continent — so poor in natural resources — fit for the future. But the knowledge society concept also entails the dangers of technocratic rule, social engineering, and greater social polarization. This is all the more true if the concept of knowledge is exclusively understood in economic terms and is primarily applied in a functional way. But it makes little sense to relate knowledge, science, and education only to the economy, the labor market, and the employability of the individual. Knowledge, science, and education are always closely connected to cultural traditions and path dependencies. In this respect, Europe is much more than a big labor market. It needs to draw its strength not only from economic processes and their principles, but also from the development of personality, which must not be separated from the traditions of the Enlightenment, moral individuality, pure research, and the pursuit of knowledge for its own ends.

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TOWARDS A NEW EUROPE? A COMMENT
COMMENT ON ANDREAS WIRSCHING’S ANNUAL LECTURE, WASHINGTON DC, NOVEMBER 13, 2014

Jeffrey J. Anderson
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It is a great privilege to have the opportunity to serve as a commentator for this well-respected lecture series. Dr. Wirsching, the guest of honor this evening, has provided a comprehensive and thought-provoking analysis of the role of knowledge as a possible agent of progressive change in Europe over the past thirty years, drawing attention to the great potential that lies at the intersection of science, technology, and education. In his remarks, he discussed the origins of the concept of the “knowledge society,” and the sources of the high hopes and expectations that accompanied it. He also traced the formulation and implementation of public policy based on the idea of the knowledge society at both the national and European levels, drawing attention to the intimate ties of these initiatives to the neoliberal revolution in the late 1970s and 1980s, which took the form of sweeping deregulation and privatization schemes at the national level within Europe as well as completion of the single market at the European level.

Dr. Wirsching also notes that “knowledge society” policies were a follow-on and complement to the neoliberal revolution, seeking to unlock the potential of the individual worker and, by extension, economy and society by targeting the development and improvement of “human capital.” It is important to underscore that this was a powerfully attractive idea across the political spectrum. On the right, approaches based on the concept of the knowledge society were consistent with the ideology of individual responsibility and liberty: workers could achieve liberation through education. On the left, these policies were consistent with the ideology of equality and egalitarianism, promising knowledge for all, regardless of class origin or social station. At the EU level, the policy approach represented a technocrat’s dream: solving problems efficiently and consensually through the application of knowledge.

Dr. Wirsching concluded his remarks on a somewhat gloomy note, pointing out the contradictions, pitfalls, and unintended consequences of the knowledge society phenomenon. It appears that the concept
has yet to produce results, and where one can identify the effects of knowledge society policies, they appear to be system-reinforcing, exacerbating inequality and social exclusion, not liberating.

I share Dr. Wirsching’s conclusions. It is indeed appropriate to be sober-minded about the possibility of transformation through knowledge. It strikes me that what we have here is a classic case of the fallacy of composition. As you know, the fallacy of composition arises when one implies that something is true of the whole from the fact that it is true of some part of the whole. In the case of knowledge, transformation of the individual through knowledge is not only possible, it is virtually a cliché. And yet, it does not necessarily follow that transformation of the collective through knowledge is possible. What one might call “Wandel durch Aufklärung” appears to be little more than a pipe dream or fantasy.

I will confine myself here to two sets of general comments on the presentation. The first relates to knowledge as an independent agent of change or transformation. Of course, we can trace this idea back to the Enlightenment. The most recent chapter in this uplifting narrative is the social media revolution, which promises the instantaneous diffusion of information and — arguably — knowledge via Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter. It appears that this revolution holds the potential to bring down authoritarian regimes, as the Orange Revolution and the Arab Spring suggest. It can even shine a light on injustice within established democracies; witness recent events in Ferguson, Missouri.

In short, there exists at least some evidence that the information/technology revolution, or the rapid diffusion of knowledge, can, under the right circumstances, challenge and even overcome existing structures of power and influence in modern societies. But not always. Indeed, the explosion of information and the widening access to knowledge has coincided with an unprecedented expansion of socio-economic inequality around the world, both within and between nations. It would not take much effort to link the explosion of knowledge to growing disparities in wealth and income, with the mechanism of unequal access to knowledge as the smoking gun. Thus, it appears that the knowledge revolution exerts contradictory impacts on the world around us. It can challenge political structures under certain circumstances, but at the same time it reinforces and perhaps even exacerbates existing economic and social divisions.
My second set of comments is directed at the notion of “knowledge as empowerment,” in particular the ensuing political implications. As Dr. Wirsching rightly notes, the doctrine of knowledge is about societal impact, but its actual impact, viewed in terms of where policy is actually implemented, takes place at the individual level. The individual is responsible for his or her own success, and thus bears responsibility not only for improvement and success, but also for failure — or at least it can be portrayed this way. There is, I believe, an oft-overlooked political dimension to this phenomenon. Take the example of Silicon Valley. The new generation of “techies” making careers there fit the description of Drucker’s “knowledge worker,” who disposes of an advanced education and great spatial and professional flexibility; he can swiftly change jobs and employers and he is able to repeatedly acquire highly specialized knowledge. All this enables him to act in complete autonomy on the labour market and to choose between many different options vis-à-vis his personal career. In the end, power in the workplace will shift from bosses to knowledge workers.¹

My question: is this phenomenon, which is intimately related to the knowledge revolution, providing new impulses for libertarian politics and ideas? Here, one’s personal experience — the technologically savvy master of the universe, in complete control of his or her own personal destiny — fosters support for a collective ideology: libertarianism. The irony, of course, is that libertarianism as a political movement is backed by powerful vested interests and resources. And so we return to the dark side of the knowledge revolution: inequality.

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THE MEMORY OF DICTATORSHIP AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY: THE EAST GERMAN PAST TODAY

LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE GERMAN UNIFICATION SYMPOSIUM, GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE, OCTOBER 3, 2014

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Modern democracies have developed either from colonies, from revolutions or, in an evolutionary process, from monarchies. In the twentieth century, however, a new path for the development of democracies was added: the transition to democracy from a military dictatorship (e.g. Argentina, Chile, Portugal, Spain, Greece) or from a Communist dictatorship. This new path to democracy also created a new problem: How should a post-authoritarian or post-totalitarian democracy deal with its past? For new kinds of questions there are, of course, no established answers. It often takes time before people realize that they are facing a new kind of problem; that we are facing a new problem in this case has now become clear. Comparative studies on how different countries have dealt with this problem are still rare. The topic of this lecture fits into this larger context.

I. Remembrance in a Democracy

Who remembers? Certainly not “democracy”: that is the name of a form of government. The state does not remember and commemorate, even when it issues orders and prohibitions. The state is nonetheless responsible for legal holidays, and it approves memorials for public spaces or builds them itself. It is the public or the nation that remembers.

We usually understand “society” to be the result of the anonymous interactions among individuals living together. But society does not denote a collective identity that can articulate a will. For that reason, talk of a society’s responsibility is not accurate. Appeals along the lines “Society should ...” are wishes or are addressed to the wrong party. But there probably is a responsibility for society. In the Fall of 1989, the demonstrators in Leipzig chanted “We are the people” (Wir sind das Volk). It did not occur to anyone to chant “We are society.”
By “state,” we understand the structure of institutions represented by professional functionaries or bureaucrats who set themselves apart from the citizenry as a whole. The state first came into existence in the modern era. For the democrats of ancient Greece, the polis was nothing more than the body of citizens. The state is not and does not have a collective identity. Louis XIV’s putative declaration “L’état, c’est moi!” is cited as evidence of the eccentricity of absolutism. The line “We are the state!” did not come to the lips of the Leipzig demonstrators. It would more likely have appeared on the posters of the SED. According to Marxist-Leninist theory, the state is supposed to be the means by which the ruling class exercises power and the Communist Party is the representative of the ruling class. The fathers and mothers of the Federal Republic of Germany’s Basic Law, by contrast, originally wrote in the opening article “The state exists for the sake of the people, not the people for the sake of the state.” Borrowing from Jesus’s explanation of the purpose of the Sabbath (Mark 2: 27), they were responding here to the Nazi dictatorship.

The question of commemoration in a democracy raises the question of how far the form of government determines commemoration — of how democracy stands in contrast to dictatorship in this regard. When it comes to 1989, it is a question of the contrast to a communist dictatorship. There are other cases of the contrast between a democracy and an earlier dictatorship, for example Chile, Argentina, Greece, Portugal, and Spain.

In each of those cases, it was a question of the contrast between political freedom and political unfreedom. It is therefore a twofold — and at the same time opposing, bipolar — commemoration, and it is important how the relationship between the two in the different countries balances out, whether the contrast in these countries still looks as it did in 1989 and whether memory of the dictatorship has become more positive and to what extent democracy has disappointed.

It is always the people or the nation that remembers. According to Ernest Renan’s still applicable description, a nation is a willed community joined together by common memories and the desire for a common future. Nations are actually collective identities. Renan’s description takes into account that nations are not substantive, metahistorical entities such as the Volksgeist of Herder or Hegel. The Austrians want to be their own nation today even though, following the collapse of the Hapsburg monarchy, they had printed
“Deutschösterreich” on their postage stamps and wanted to become a part of Germany. The desire for a common nation can weaken or, indeed, dissipate. There are, in fact, separatist movements in Europe, including in Germany, that say a narrower collective identity is shattering the broader collective identity within which it had until now been incorporated.

Some people question the premise that common memories can be constitutive of nations by arguing that democracies are characterized by pluralism and that common memories are thus incompatible with democracy. Pluralism is actually the result of the freedom of belief, opinion, and religion. Freedom of opinion does not mean that all opinions are equal but rather that even mistaken and crazy opinions ought not to be punished. There is also the distinction between opinions that can be permitted to be put into action and those that are punishable if acted upon. Political parties that pursue goals; that is, beliefs; contrary to the constitution by action can be banned in a democracy. When common memory — the memory of the majority — fades, a nation collapses, not pluralistically into individuals but rather into smaller nations that again, are bound by common memory and the desire for a common future.

Nations are not the only collective identity we experience. There is the narrower identity that is called Heimat in Germany that builds on first-hand experience. At the same time, identifying oneself as a German by no means rules out seeing oneself as a European as well. A Saxon is delighted to meet a fellow Saxon on the Zugspitze; likewise, he is glad to meet a Dutchman in China. These identities can be fit together in concentric circles. Others cannot: we women, for instance, or we Christians, or we doctors. Even in a Europe that is growing together, the nation and the nation state will continue to have a certain weight for the foreseeable future because the national state provides citizens with legal and social security. Europe does not pay old-age pensions. That is in line with the European Union’s subsidiarity principle. It is also thus entirely in order that we take a comparative perspective on commemoration in different democratic states. Looking at 1989/90, we observe differences in the relationship between nation and democracy in the formerly socialist countries. In Poland, the nation freed itself from dictatorship by wringing free elections out of the communist government. The Baltic peoples, on the other hand, freed themselves from the suppression of their nationality, from Russification. There was a risk that the process of
liberation might give rise to an exclusionary nationalism that might collide with basic democratic rights. In Czechoslovakia, the people overthrew a communist dictatorship, but afterwards Czechs and Slovaks went their separate ways. Seventy years together did not suffice to establish a stable, common shared identity. A thousand years of divided history were stronger.

And finally the special case: the German Democratic Republic. The division of Germany had led to the remarkable situation that many West Germans viewed the GDR as a foreign country. The Basic Law, however, committed the Federal Republic to the unity of the German nation. In the GDR, by contrast, the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) under Honecker had rejected that unity and spoke instead of two nations on German soil, whatever German soil might be. Nonetheless, East Germans were uninvited guests of the West every evening as they tuned into West German television. Those who wanted to leave the GDR wanted to go “over there” (nach drüben), and “over there” never meant Austria or Switzerland. As a result, 1989 is remembered with different emphases in East and West. In the West, 1989 is the year the Berlin Wall came down and the opening of the way to German unity. For East Germans, the autumn of 1989 is first and foremost the time of the demonstrations, of conquered fears and civil courage — the time, in short, of the Autumn Revolution. Many of the actors who brought about the Autumn Revolution were quite skeptical about the opening of the Berlin Wall and have maintained that German unity is to blame for the fact that the Autumn Revolution remained an unfinished revolution. They thereby estranged themselves from the East German demonstrators and ensured their own defeat in the free elections for the Volkskammer. However, the call for German unity came first from the East, from Saxony; not from the well-known human rights activists, but from protesters, first in Plauen and then in Leipzig. Shortly after the opening of the Wall, the East German demonstrators chanted the suppressed text of the GDR national anthem Deutschland einig Vaterland and then switched from the motto “We are the people” to We are one people,” (Wir sind ein Volk) which many West Germans indignantly interpreted as nationalistic and extremist.

There was considerable conceptual confusion in Germany, unified by surprise, in 1989/90. During the first session of the freely elected East German parliament (Volkskammer) the deputies listened to the reading of a letter from a West Berliner who vehemently warned them to
oppose German unification and to preserve the GDR as a democratic alternative to the capitalist Federal Republic. Of course, that was not the majority view, but there were demonstrations in the West against unification with prominent members of the Greens at the forefront. In the East, the year 1990 was dominated by joy at the fall of the Berlin Wall and unification. But the mood darkened as a result of the bitter experience of the collapse of the East German economy, which was suddenly exposed to the world market without protection and without its traditional markets in the Eastern bloc. Although most of the blame for the collapse lies in the economic policies of the SED, the agency that oversaw the privatization of the East German economy, the Treuhandanstalt, was widely blamed.

The German problem of commemoration can be illustrated by the fight over the national holiday. Together with memorials, national holidays are always the clearest statement of what is most important in a nation’s self-understanding. In the GDR, the national holiday was very traditional: October 7, the day of the GDR’s founding. Two days after the fortieth anniversary of that event, October 9, 1989, the state capitulated to the Monday demonstrators in Leipzig and thereby opened the way for the end of the GDR. In the old Federal Republic, it was not the anniversary of the state’s founding, the ratification of the Basic Law on May 23, 1949, that was celebrated; rather, June 17, the anniversary of the 1953 popular uprising in the GDR that was crushed by Soviet tanks, was celebrated as the Day of German Unity. Aside from a few noteworthy speeches in the Bundestag, June 17 degenerated into an emotionless occasion. Commemorating that day in the East was absolutely taboo. The new national day of commemoration became October 3, the day that German unification took effect, that unified Germany obtained full sovereignty with the ratification of the Two-Plus-Four Treaty, and, consequently, that World War II formally came to an end under international law.

The objection is often raised that October 3 represents a bureaucratic action and is a day that arouses no emotions. November 9, the day of the opening of the Berlin Wall, would be a fitting national holiday, but it is also the day of the 1938 “Kristallnacht” pogrom, an event that marked a major escalation in the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis. It is precisely because of this ambiguity that former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer recommended November 9 as the national holiday, because it was characteristic of Germany’s history. That is certainly true, but it is simply not possible to be happy and to mourn
simultaneously. Nobody can celebrate ambivalently: it would be like putting Christmas and Good Friday on the same day.

Since October 3, 1990, Germany has been living within universally recognized borders surrounded by friends. If that is not reason to celebrate, what is? In 2013, some people renewed the call for making June 17 the national holiday once again. That day, they maintained, represents the East Germans’ desire for freedom, and German unity had actually been among their demands in 1953. But no nation should choose to identify with the date of a defeat, of a suppressed uprising. The Serbs did themselves no favors by linking their national identity to the date of their defeat at the hands of the Turks at Kosovo.

Memory in the democracy that arose in 1989/90 is, as noted above, bipolar. There is, on the one hand, the memory of the toppled communist dictatorship; on the other, the memory of the toppling of the dictatorships, the revolution of 1989, which was, with the exception of Romania, by and large peaceful. What is the relationship between these poles? The German government’s 2013 report on the Aufarbeitung (historical examination) of the SED dictatorship lists seven memorials and historical sites devoted to Germany’s division and twenty-eight devoted to surveillance and persecution in the GDR. The report does not list any sites dealing with opposition and resistance to the SED or with the freely elected Volkskammer and government because none exist. However, under the heading “Monuments and Memorial Sites” (Denkmäler und Mahnmale) three memorials to freedom and/or unity are mentioned, namely the memorials in Plauen, Berlin, and Leipzig. The Aufarbeitung of the SED dictatorship is thus strongly skewed, which I would explain by pointing to an inability to take joy in freedom that is widespread among us Germans.

But why should we remember the dictatorship and its dark, even horrifying side? Wouldn’t it be preferable to forget it?

II. Why Remember?

In his 2010 book, *Das Gebot zu vergessen und die Unabweisbarkeit des Erinnerns*, Christian Meier noted that since the conclusion of peace between Athens and Sparta in 404 BC, in the aftermath of wars and civil wars it has been demanded that all the horrible things that happened during the conflict be forgotten. Sometimes, even mentioning atrocities was made a punishable offense for the sake of peace. An amnesty of that sort was included in the Saar treaty of 1956: “No one
should face repercussions for his position on the Saar question in the past.” Annex 1 to the treaty stipulated that even bodily assault fell under this amnesty.

The connection between amnesties and peace treaties was probably first dissolved with the Treaty of Versailles, which accused the Germans, or more precisely the Kaiser, of war crimes (Part VII, Art. 227–230). The old idea that the desire for justice should be set aside in favor of the desire for peace and pacification was abandoned in favor of the idea of punitive justice, which, however, was pursued in a very one-sided manner. The Versailles treaty, with its new and scandalous terms (incalculable reparations, for instance), failed to achieve the goal of pacification.

Christian Meier defends the old strategy of “peace through amnesty before justice” in principle. But he sees in Auschwitz — in the Nazis’ genocide of the Jews — a crime so monstrous that amnesty and forgetting would be entirely inappropriate. I agree. The genocide of the Jews was neither a war crime nor an atrocity committed during a civil war. For that reason, it cannot be addressed by a peace treaty.

Maier asks why forgetting was not chosen as a strategy after the end of the GDR, and he offers three reasons. First, the Autumn Revolution was peaceful; with no casualties, there was no reason to fear revenge. Second, the rulers of the GDR were so completely stripped of power that they could be ignored. And finally, the West German approach to remembering the Nazi era served as a model. Meier concludes, however, with the observation that “the ancient experience whereby such events are better forgotten and suppressed than allowed to function as active memories, has by no means been superseded.”

The argument that the peacefulness of the revolution was one of the main reasons militating against forgetting gains credibility by comparing the German case with the Italian and French approaches to dealing with collaborators after the end of German occupation. Both of these countries experienced brief phases of excessively violent score-settling: it would not be wrong to speak of lynching. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people were killed in Italy and at least 10,000 in France. Amnesties followed that covered the misdeeds of both sides. Joseph Rovan defended this approach as late as 1992, advising that “after the end of a dictatorship, the cleaning-up should be quick and bloody.”
I would like to offer three observations on the peacefulness of the revolutions of 1989. First, these revolutions were possible only because Mikhail Gorbachev revoked the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine and explained that the Soviet Union would not interfere (again) in the internal conflicts in the socialist countries. If the revolutions had turned bloody, the Soviet Union would probably have intervened to ensure the safety of its troops stationed in the countries concerned.

Second, for the demonstrators, the slogan “No Violence” promoted in particular by the churches, legitimated their actions and thus eased their consciences and provided motivation. “We are not counterrevolutionaries as you imagine them.” In theory and practice, nonviolence thoroughly confused the communists and their image of their enemy. That was part of the demonstrators’ success against the heavily equipped security forces, who were prepared for a “counter-revolution” along the lines of the revolutions they had carried out.

Third, we should remember that the consequences of forgetting — of the amnesties — in Italy and France were not entirely positive. The confrontation with the Fascist past in Italy was so feeble that Fascism has become socially acceptable again. Mussolini’s granddaughter is thus able to play a political role because she is his granddaughter. In France, almost everyone claimed to be a member of the Resistance until President Francois Mitterrand broke the silence about Vichy and acknowledged that he too had collaborated.

The connection between pacification and forgetting in peace treaties might make sense because both sides in wars (and civil wars) usually stand accused of injustices and crimes. In a dictatorship, however, the injustice is asymmetrical and one-sided. The Nazis’ “racial enemies” and the communists’ “class enemies” were not also “perpetrators” or somehow complicit in the persecution or discrimination they suffered. They were victims, pure and simple. If there is no basis for a counterbalancing of injustices, large-scale forgetting loses its plausibility.

But when it comes to the individuals, I want to cast my vote with Christian Meier in favor of forgetting. The concept of the statute of limitations is firmly anchored in our legal system, and rightly so. The statute of limitation for manslaughter is twenty years, as it once had been for murder. The Stasi Records Law originally envisioned that for fifteen years individuals applying for civil service jobs or related positions would be investigated for complicity in nonprosecutable
offenses committed during the era of the GDR — in other words, for having cooperated with the Stasi. As a result of two extensions, this period has been extended to thirty years. This seems out of proportion to me. On the individual level, the past has to be forgotten at some point — even for those who unfortunately lack the courage to acknowledge their guilt.

As for dictatorship itself, however, I am opposed to forgetting and drawing a line under the past. Spain and Poland initially opted for the strategy of closing the door on the past because the elites of the dictatorial regimes in both countries continued in office during the transition to democracy; in each case, there was a sort of cohabitation of the revolutionaries or democrats with the ancien régime. That had to be tolerated because change had to be carried out gradually, not all at once. But in neither case did forgetting lead to pacification. The question of injustices under the dictatorship arose belatedly.

III. Unpersuasive Justifications

Before I argue why memory after a dictatorship is justified, I would like to address several justifications that I do not find persuasive.

“Remembrance is the secret of redemption.” This sentence appeared on a postage stamp issued by the Federal Republic in 1988. It appeared along with a burning synagogue in remembrance of the so-called Kristallnacht pogrom. Despite much effort, I have not been able to make sense of this sentence. It was borrowed from the Yad Vashem memorial site in Jerusalem. There, the author is identified as Rabbi Israel ben Eliesar (1699–1760), known as Ball Schem Tov, the founder of Hassidism. The full sentence reads, “Forgetting prolongs exile; the secret of redemption is remembrance” — remembrance, that is, of the messianic promise of the Jews’ return to Jerusalem, not remembrance of death and destruction. That memory does not redeem/save, as we all know, but rather burdens us immensely. But there are reasons to take that burden upon us.

“There are no victories. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Thus wrote George Santayana in 1905. Whether that holds true for individuals is open to question, but I do not want to hide my doubts. In any event, it does not apply collectively. The Nazis remembered the First World War — their interpretation of it — and unleashed another
world war. The communists experienced the Nazi dictatorship and suffered under it, then they recreated a dictatorship.

“We must learn from history.” This is, of course, is always true in some respects. The loss of memory renders both individuals and groups incapable of acting. This is true for individuals, but also for peoples, because their relationship with one another is considerably informed by historical memory. Without a knowledge of history people are blind, especially to fears arising from painful memories. A knowledge of history allows for consideration and tact in interactions with other peoples. Nonetheless, historical knowledge does not make anyone a prophet; even with a strong understanding of history the future remains uncertain.

The ancient saying Historia magister vitae — history is the teacher of life — rested on the assumption that there is nothing new under the sun. The elderly were once respected for their experience of life. That is still true in many respects, but unfortunately my grandson is often right: “Grandpa, you don’t understand.” Since the beginning of the industrial era, there has been constant and inexorable change. History does not repeat itself. The next danger facing us is usually a different one from the preceding one. Those who concentrate too much on what happened in the past are likely to recognize new developments too late. An example from recent Germany history: focusing on the left-wing terrorism of the Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Faktion, RAF) blinded some to the right-wing terrorism of the National Socialist Underground (Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund, NSU).

“The better we understand dictatorship, the better able we are to build democracy.” This is the motto of Roland Jahn, Germany’s Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (Bundesbeauftragter für die Stasi-Unterlagen). This formulation, too, does not clarify the idea of learning directly from history for me. The implied connection is largely fictitious. Studying dictatorship can, it is true, communicate a tangible impression of what it is like to live under unfree conditions and to be deprived of basic human rights. But democracy as we understand it and as it is anchored in the Basic Law is more than the absence of dictatorship.

Democracy and dictatorship were not always regarded as opposites. From Aristotle to Kant, the word “democracy” had negative connotations. It was understood as simple majority rule. Kant thus counted democracy among the forms of despotic government. Aristotle saw
in democracy an absence of law. The tyranny of the majority is still a form of tyranny. The word “democracy” took on more positive associations after the principle of majority rule was limited by the recognition of basic rights that are not revocable by majority vote, by the rule of law, and by the division of powers. Nobody would come up with those principles solely from the study of dictatorship. Understanding the SED dictatorship does not necessarily make a person a good democrat. It is possible to become lost in trivial details and lose sight of the forest for the trees.

The communists believed that they had drawn the true lesson from history, namely the logic of reversal or inversion: Who does what to whom? Do you want to be the hammer or the anvil? After the collapse of the Nazi dictatorship, they established a dictatorship of their own with the best of conscience. They derided parliamentary democracy as a pseudo-democracy and celebrated the “dictatorship of the proletariat” — what Marx understood as the majority’s absolute rule over the minority — as a true form of democracy, unrestrained in its use for power. As Lenin explained “the scholarly concept of dictatorship means nothing more than power, unlimited, unrestricted by any laws or rules, that uses violence directly to support itself.” In this way, Lenin prepared the way for Stalin.

This confusion of concepts has had a lasting influence. Even today, many people in East and West alike criticize representative parliamentary democracy as inadequate, as insufficiently democratic. True democracy, they believe, is direct democracy: ideally, everybody should decide everything. That however, would result in the tyranny of the majority or totalitarian democracy. Such confusion cannot be cleared up by studying dictatorship. On the contrary, only a sound understanding of democracy allows for a well-founded critique of dictatorships. After all, no one has argued that we need to understand planned economies in order to better organize market economies. It is evident that those who administered planned economies were usually failures in market economies.

IV. Reasons for Remembering the GDR Dictatorship

We need better reasons for remembering the dictatorship. One powerful reason is the need to combat the immediate consequences of dictatorship and to eliminate them if possible. This includes prosecuting so-called governmental criminality, rehabilitating the politically persecuted and political prisoners, providing counseling...
for individuals still suffering from the effects of persecution, and restoring illegally seized property to its rightful owners. That is a finite task that has been largely accomplished in Germany. Checking the backgrounds of individuals in parliament, in the civil service, and in a few other fields also falls under this heading. It is intended as way to determine an individual’s suitability for a position, not to punish him or her. Background checks are intended to prevent the formation of cabals and harm to the standing of the civil service. This, too, is a finite task. It was necessary during the transition period, but it has lost much of its original importance with the passage of time.

A second reason is the need to make up for the GDR’s lack of an open public sphere in the GDR. Wolf Biermann captured this deficiency in a song with the line: “In this country, we live like strangers in our own home.” (“In diesem Land leben wir wie Fremdlinge im eigenen Haus.”) We citizens of the GDR were very poorly informed about what was going on in our country. The situation only began to improve somewhat when West German television journalists began reporting from the GDR. We learned about East German opposition figures by watching West German television.

Another reason for remembering the East German dictatorship is the need to correct the official history written by the SED. That history was based in part on omissions. SED history was silent about Stalin’s show trials and the gulag, the imprisonment of some German communists who had fled the Third Reich, the special camps the Soviet security forces maintained after 1945 (often in former Nazi concentration camps), the June 17, 1953 uprising, and much more. These gaps were filled by distortions, by the false information one encountered in every museum, aside perhaps from those devoted to natural history. To summarize, we want to know what actually happened. All considerations of how limited and dependent on one’s position any examination of the past is does not change the fact that the question of what actually happened is legitimate and, in many areas, can be answered conclusively. If there are no bare facts, aliqua facta, that does not mean there are no facts at all and that everything is simply a matter of perspective.

In the context of the task of getting the historical record of the GDR right, let me say a few words about the Stasi and the Stasi records law. We GDR citizens generally knew who the SED functionaries, the army officers, and the professional Stasi agents in our everyday environments were. School children typically learned who was who
from their parents or fellow students. What we did not know was who the “unofficial collaborators” (Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter) of the Stasi — the informers in our midst — were. That is why, in the fall of 1989, so many East Germans asked the question “Who has been spying on me?” and demanded access to the Stasi’s records. The Stasi Records Law enacted by the last, freely elected, East German Volkskammer in 1990 was, however, excluded from the Unification Treaty at the insistence of the West German government. Faced with massive protests in the East, just before the Volkskammer was scheduled to vote on the Unification Treaty, the West Germans agreed that the Bundestag would pass a Stasi Records Act that addressed the issue of protecting privacy while allowing people to view documents related to them. All in all, the regulations on access to the Stasi files have worked well.

The concentration on informers and the Stasi files is understandable, but it has led to unwelcome consequences. The GDR long seemed, and to some extent still seems, to have been “the Stasi state.” It was, however, the SED state, and the Stasi, as its logo declared, was the “sword and shield of the party.” The focus on the Stasi has had the consequence that the SED’s misdeeds remain hidden behind those of the Stasi. Thus investigations often focused exclusively on collaboration with the Stasi even though many SED functionaries and members of the so-called Blockparteien (the officially sanctioned, non-socialist allied parties of the SED) had much graver offenses to answer for than the run of the mill Stasi informer.

Four tasks will potentially never be fully accomplished and are therefore infinite. First, the memorialization of the victims. Others would make them nameless and we must stop that from happening. Second, there can, of course, be no end to teaching coming generations about our history, including the history of the GDR. Third, the debate about what was wrong with the rule of the SED will never be settled because it is a debate about the criteria of evaluation. Fourth and finally, there is potentially no end to historical research. Not only because new material comes to light but also because new questions lead to new findings. One area of inquiry that has yet to be exhausted is the comparative study of dictatorships encompassing all of the formerly socialist countries. A glance toward North Korea and Cambodia or at the Cultural Revolution in China and Stalin’s reign shows that, under the SED, we East Germans did not have to endure the worst that dictatorship might bring: to a certain extent, we were lucky in our misfortune. Another comparison of dictatorships, namely of the
two dictatorial regimes that arose on German soil, still provokes strong feelings that extend into everyday politics. When the SED state is called an Unrechtsstaat (unlawful regime/unjust regime), some people consider this a malicious denunciation of the GDR; others consider it a trivialization of the Nazi dictatorship, which they think is the only German state that deserves to be so labeled. I believe that a state that explicitly used the law as an instrument of power exerted by the ruling class deserves the polemical attribute Unrechtsstaat.

It is safe to say that the GDR is now probably the most thoroughly researched chapter of German history because the great majority of its records have been open since 1991. The Stasi files are only partially accessible on account of privacy protections, but the fact that secret police files are open to research is without precedent. Findings that will suddenly change the way we see everything are no longer to be expected. We know enough to arrive at a historical assessment of the SED dictatorship.

V. Shortcomings and Dangers in the Public Memory of the GDR Dictatorship

I see three shortcomings in the way the SED dictatorship is being remembered and discussed. First, opposition and resistance in the GDR are greatly overshadowed in public awareness by the division of Germany and the repressive nature of the regime. Second, the final year of the GDR’s existence, the period from the fall of 1989 to October 3, 1990, is undervalued. When people speak of the fall of 1989, they are usually referring to the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, and what followed and completely disregard the earlier sequence of events that led to Erich Honecker’s resignation in mid-October and to the opening of the Wall. The reason for this is that West Germans first encountered the East Germans in the processions of exhaust-spewing Trabbi that followed the opening of the Wall. But by that point, the most difficult point of the revolution, namely, the demonstrators’ confrontation with the security forces, had already past. Remembering the extraordinary civil courage and prudent nonviolence that characterized the East German protest movement that resulted in the fall of the wall would do relations between East and West Germans enormous good and would correct some Western prejudices. Likewise, the work of the freely elected Volkskammer in the last year of the GDR plays almost no role in public memory because Westerners like to believe that...
the West German government was responsible for bringing about German unification. Some say this with pride; others charge that the West took over or colonized the East. Both sides forget that only the freely elected Volkskammer, not the Bundestag, could decide on the GDR’s acceptance of the Unification Treaty, so that only with the Volkskammer’s approval could the treaty take effect.

The third major shortcoming is that there is not enough awareness of the economic situation of the GDR in the 1980s. A direct consequence of this shortcoming are the legends which claim that the Treuhand destroyed the East German economy. These legends, beloved in both East and West, gloss over the failure of the SED’s economic policies — policies that SED functionaries at the time, above all SED planning head Gerhard Schürer, had sharply criticized internally. They gloss over the fundamental deficiencies of the centrally planned economy and scapegoated the West for allegedly plundering a clueless East. It is deplorable that there have been few scholarly studies of the Treuhand thus far because its records are effectively off limits to researchers. As a result, conjecture rules.

That brings me to several dangers in the way the SED dictatorship is being treated in contemporary Germany. First, there is still a danger of trivializing the SED dictatorship, especially when granddad tells stories about “the old days.” To be sure, GDR citizens who never took a critical stand and went along with everything did not have to endure repression. When someone says today, “I never had a problem with the Stasi,” he might be telling the truth. But everyone knew that, for whatever minor reason, things could take a turn for the worse with the Stasi, that a person could suffer some other disadvantage or form of harassment. The danger of this form of trivialization is self-evident. Karl Schroeder conducted a poll of high-school students from two western and two eastern German states. The children from Bavaria had the best knowledge about the GDR. They had received their information from well informed teachers, while in the East many teachers and parents are hesitant to speak about their thoughts and actions during the GDR. This problem is an inherent part of post-totalitarian situations. Thankfully, as a result of unification, this problem is less severe than it was after 1945.

Less readily apparent is the contrary danger, the exaggeration of the GDR’s evils. I have in mind, for example, the controversy over IKEA that has been going on since 2012. Many people think that IKEA made use of forced laborers in the GDR and profited from doing so. In fact,
however, this was impossible given the organization of the GDR’s economy and foreign trade. IKEA did not have an East German subsidiary, nor did it contract directly with any East German manufacturer; rather, it dealt solely with a foreign trade agency, which charged Western customers prices that had little relation to production costs in the GDR. One accusation can be raised here: Western firms that traded with the GDR could never be certain whether prisoner labor was being used in production. We GDR citizens could also never be certain about that, but we did know for sure that prisoners were used in mining brown coal. East-West trade in general was therefore morally questionable. But even without it, however, there would not have been prisoner-free production; there would have been only very limited German-German contracts, and perhaps the GDR would not have collapsed.

No less misleading is the accusation that 50,000 GDR citizens were used as guinea pigs by Western pharmaceutical companies. Thinly supported speculation has been treated as if it were fact. To date, as far as I know, no evidence has been put forward indicating that, with the approval of the East German authorities, experiments were conducted on patients without their consent. The laws and relations on testing medications were no laxer in the GDR than in the West. In the context of the division of labor between socialist countries, the GDR exported its resources for developing new drugs; as a result there was greater capacity in the GDR for medical tests. Because of a lack of foreign currency in the GDR, there was no western medicine available for purchase (other than in government pharmacies); therefore these tests were, in fact, the only chance for East German patients to obtain western drugs. Since the protocols of the East German trials had to be presented to the West German pharmaceutical licensing authorities, they had to meet Western standards. Those who started this disinformation campaign were most likely targeting not the GDR, but the hated pharmaceutical industry. In the process, they overlooked that they are accusing hundreds of doctors of having grossly violated medical ethics. The danger in exaggerations and scandal-mongering is that they play into the hands of those who would trivialize the SED dictatorship. If the exaggerations can be exposed as false, they suggest, all accusations against the SED must be exaggerations.

Consideration of the victims (Opfer) legitimately plays a large role in public discussions and commemorations of the East German past. But there are pitfalls here, too, notably the ambiguity of the German
word *Opfer*. The German language uses the same word for “victim” and “sacrifice.” The *Opfer* as “victim” (from the Latin *victimus*, the defeated) is the injured party, the person affected, the sufferer of misfortune. It is this sense we have in mind when we speak, for instance, of *Verkehrspf*er (victims of traffic accidents). To be an *Opfer* in this sense of the word is to experience something that nobody would have chosen to experience. It is neither a meritorious act nor an honor. Nor does it bestow a particular competence. It does, however, demand our sympathy and, under some circumstances, might warrant claims for compensation. But it must not be overlooked that it makes a difference whether a claim for compensation is filed against the party responsible for the injury, as in the case of traffic accidents, or if it is founded on the principle of solidarity, that is if we fellow citizens (and taxpayers) are paying compensation for an injury for which we are not responsible. Strictly speaking, the claim for compensation is fully justified only in the former instance. *Opfer* in the sense of “sacrifice” (from the Latin *sacrificium*, a cultic offering), on the other hand, is an offering or an act of renunciation on someone else’s behalf, which presupposes a choice or decision. “He died for us,” the New Testament says of Jesus Christ; Fontane wrote the same of the helmsman John Maynard. The willingness to sacrifice one’s self that we see, for instance, in firefighters and emergency rescue workers deserves public acknowledgement and our admiration.

In the past, the commemoration of war dead was always the commemoration of *Opfer* in the sense of sacrifice: the fallen gave their lives for us. Commemoration of *Opfer* became the commemoration of heroes. In many cases, though, that was not the case. Many of those killed in wars died wretchedly as victims who had not chosen that end for themselves. Nowadays, we see a similar confusion of the senses of *Opfer*. One example is Peter Fechter. On August 17, 1962, the 18-year-old Fechter was shot as he attempted to climb over the Berlin Wall; as Western witnesses looked on, he was left by the East German border forces to bleed to death in the so-called death strip. A stele on the site of his death honors his memory, rightly so. The Berlin Senat has been criticized for having declined to erect a memorial to Fechter. According to the law, the Senat can build memorials to pay tribute only to individuals responsible for “outstanding achievements with close connection to Berlin.” The critics of the Senat’s decision have overlooked that Peter Fechter was a victim, not someone making a sacrifice.
Another danger is associated with the distinction between perpetrators and victims. It seems clear where an upright person should stand: on the side of the victim. But things are not quite so simple. Victims, too, are not always right. Their perspective can also be one-sided or too narrow. They too have their own interests. This is not an accusation, merely a statement. Victims are by no means immune from criticism.

Nowadays in court, a third party stands alongside the victim and the perpetrator, namely the judge. That is perhaps the greatest civilizing innovation in human history. In the Anglo-Saxon legal system, there are also the jury and the public. There was once a legal system with only victims and perpetrators and no judges, namely the system of the blood feud. While that system tends to excess, there is no danger of this returning to Germany. But the enthusiasm for identifying with victims can seriously cloud people’s judgment.

One frequently heard argument for banning symbols of the SED is that their display injures the feelings of the victims. Whether that is true, I cannot consider here. Nonetheless, it is very problematic to argue for the restriction of a basic right on the bases of this or that person’s feelings. That type of argument tends toward totalitarianism. In the controversy over cartoons depicting Mohammed, for example, fanatics and Islamists bring in arguments about their religious feelings and “the honor of the prophet” and use those sentiments to justify even the murder of the cartoonists.

When someone claims to speak as an advocate for victims, we are initially sympathetic, especially when it comes to victims who have not had an advocate. But our society often bestows a “victim bonus,” and victimhood is worthwhile in the eyes of some because it enables one to make demands. Someone who declares himself or herself an advocate of the victims is thus declaring that he or she is a participant in a conflict and not a neutral party. Not taking sides and nonpartisan judgment has almost come to be discredited by our Betroffenheitskult, our cult of identifying with the victim.

In conclusion, commemoration in our democracy should incorporate remembering the dictatorship, and it should also include remembering the Opfer, both the “victims” and those who made “sacrifices.” But above all, it should recall the establishment of a free political order — because no person and no nation can find encouragement and inspiration solely in contemplating failure and suffering.

Translated by David Lazar
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WHY CONSIDER THE POPULAR PRESS IN POST-1848 GERMANY?

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“I skimmed the papers every day for news from home — German leaders were too heavy for my taste, in fact they are so at the present day! — and read short pieces of poetry and an occasional story in the Gartenlaube or Über Land und Meer. But I kept carefully in abeyance whatever looked like literature.”

Upon reaching Göttingen in 1861 to begin his philological training, the American James Morgan Hart decided that he would restrict himself to grammar and light reading while coming to grips with the German language, the better to savor its “literature” later. Hart’s unambiguous judgment on two illustrated magazines in that stubborn tongue was pronounced in passing, but it prompts a valid question: why devote serious attention to such things?

On the one hand, a proponent might argue from the standpoint of cultural impact, a perspective missing amid the personal recollections and Matthew Arnold quotations in Hart’s account. Yet what to Hart were merely functional illustrated magazines, known in their day most consistently as “family papers” (Familienblätter), commanded by the mid-1870s an effective readership of several million, handily outstripping any other German-language press genre. Their “naïve optimism about progress, the credulousness about science, the enlightened ambitions, the sentimental inclinations” struck a German writing during the Cold War, with reference to the Gartenlaube and its period, as an alien combination. Yet in the mid-nineteenth century these were fresh and compelling qualities; they also generated sales, and they helped to make the family paper the first modern mass print form in the German language.

On the other hand, there was more to the family papers than popular success, noteworthy though this was. They owed their takeoff to one man’s calculated response to the disappointment of the Revolution of 1848, namely Ernst Keil’s publication of the Gartenlaube (Leipzig, 1853–1944), which was followed by a host of

1 James Morgan Hart, German Universities: A Narrative of Personal Experience, Together with Recent Statistical Information, Practical Suggestions, and a Comparison of the German, English and American Systems of Higher Education (New York, 1874), 33-34.

less urgently principled competitors, such as Über Land und Meer (Stuttgart, 1858–88). For Keil above all, the weekly periodical format, tailored to the perceived tastes and requirements of a more general reading public, seemed to offer a way to turn the intimacy of the home into a training ground for left-liberal political ascendancy in Germany, as well as for the democratic national consciousness that would be its natural complement. Of course, for both Keil and his imitators, this press genre also offered a potential path to profit in a rapidly changing print market. Lest one wax Arnoldian, however, let there be no mistake: applied liberalism and democratic nationalism indelibly shaped the medium, informing its textual and visual content. Indeed, it underlay the very premise of popularization, which was not without a political charge all its own. What is at stake in this story, then, is not so much an unconventional definition of politics — if in fact a pithy definition of the political is possible or desirable — but rather the ever relevant question of what constitutes effective political advocacy via new and exciting media, where the line between latent and overt political activism lies, and whether the profit motive is compatible with idealism and meaningful change.

What proceeds from this must therefore be a political and a cultural history at the same time. My subject of study — the rise, dominance and as it were the eventual domestication of the family papers — compels me to liaise between German culture and politics after 1848, areas whose kinship remains vague. The family papers constituted an attempt at popularization and were conceived by those in German publishing as popular creations, but I propose that we also regard them as having been born of the interplay between capitalist cultural producers and styles of non-learned consumption among the broader middle class, if not exclusive to it. In this case, liberal political actors were also cultural actors. Through the family papers, political advocacy and cultural democratization intertwined.

The third quarter of the nineteenth century may no longer resemble the “no-man’s land” reconnoitered by Wolfram Siemann over two decades ago, but our knowledge of it continues to lack the layered complexity and fullness that a pivotal epoch demands. In my dissertation I stake out a middle ground — both socio-culturally, between “high” and “low,” and methodologically, in the synergies and slippages between discourse and practice — in order to retrieve the contingency of German history in this period. Three powerful forces

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3 Wolfram Siemann, Gesellschaft im Aufbruch: Deutschland 1849-1871 (Frankfurt, 1990), 12ff.
converged after 1848: an optimistic faith among liberal German publishers, editors, and authors in the emancipatory potential of their craft; the growing diversity and reach of print capitalism across the Western world; and the receptivity of audiences unaccustomed to the attentions of the press but capable of supporting the first mass circulations in Central Europe. The convergence of these forces requires an approach that navigates print culture and political culture, in order to show how the earliest sustained expression of an incipient mass culture in Germany began not merely as a capitalist business venture, but also as a rearguard weapon for a liberal movement in momentary retreat.

Such an aftermath befits the ambivalent character of the Revolution of 1848, or better the “midcentury revolutions,” a polycentric welter of insurrections and reversals that shattered what was left of the Metternichian system between 1848 and 1851, bringing the cyclical drama of the French Revolution to a halting close. On its own, liberal nationalism had shown itself too weak on the continent to topple a restored ancien régime after 1815. With the shockwaves generated by the fall of the July Monarchy in France, however, it managed to tap social unrest, urban tumult, and radical mobilization to compel an array of concessions and reforms, many of which outlived the supposed “failure” of the midcentury revolutions and set a brisk tempo for subsequent state-building. In the heart of Europe, the challenge to the princely regimes of the restorationist German Confederation never enjoyed the unanimous enthusiasm of its parliamentary protagonists, finally withering in the frigid headwinds of revived state repression and internecine quarrel. The collapse of the Frankfurt Parliament, a revolutionary national convention, dealt a chastening but instructive setback to German liberalism, sharpening ideological divisions that transcended the factional splits of parliamentary debate.

These developments informed the rise of the most ubiquitous German-language press genre of the age. Like many a popular book or periodical in Western Europe and North America, the family papers emerged from a broadening nineteenth-century print market. As general-interest magazines produced for domestic consumption, they emphasized variety, accessibility, and wood-engraved illustration, a successful formula in an increasingly competitive publishing environment. It was expected that they would be read chiefly at home, perhaps even by several generations huddled together fireside, in the evening, sometimes aloud. Yet we know that the reach of the family

7 See Wolfram Siemann, Die deutsche Revolution von 1848/49 (Frankfurt, 1985).
papers actually extended as well to lending libraries, reading clubs, spas, confectioners, and coffeehouses. As for what they contained, the family papers featured, for instance, poems, serial novels and short stories, miniature biographies, anthropological sketches, current affairs pieces, travel literature, simplified scientific essays and, last but certainly not least, beguiling wood engravings. Though for reasons of affordability and literacy their readership consisted mainly of those in the middle class and higher, the family papers were conceived of by their proponents and opponents alike as being popular in nature. Indeed, “family” formed a kind of metonymy with “popular” for mid-nineteenth-century cultural producers, because the family represented a logical common denominator of the general public, a kind of step up toward the universal from the educated male reader. Everyone belonged to a family, one reckoned, and thus to produce for a “popular” audience was to produce for it.

What most distinguished the family papers from penny press analogues in Great Britain, France or the United States was the precise political inflection of their origins. This stemmed from the historically strained position of German liberalism between the state and the people, as well as from its characteristic optimism about the redemptive power of knowledge. By bringing a subtle mixture of education and entertainment into the home, Keil intended not only to capture a market, but also to galvanize civil society at its putative core and so resume the work of an abortive revolution. Harnessing the popular press to what was at first a wary crypto-liberalism, he would mold the politics of German readers without getting into trouble. To be sure, competitor publications of the Gartenlaube — most prominently Illustrierte Welt (Stuttgart, 1853-1902), the aforementioned Über Land und Meer, Illustirtes Familien-Journal (Leipzig, 1854-69) and the conservative, Prussia-endorsed Daheim (Leipzig, 1864-1944), an important ideological outlier — showed varying degrees of political discretion and engagement. Yet all were compelled by Keil’s juggernaut to perform — or, in the case of Daheim, cleverly redeploy — its foundational assumption that diffusing knowledge in an entertaining manner would bring about a desired political outcome, ideally without risky political confrontation. The political ambitions behind the Gartenlaube were inextricable from its successful commercial formula, one that proved impossible for subsequent family papers to ignore. With the growth of the genre, however, came a routinization and to that extent a depoliticization of its popularizing premise.
Executed as a study of editorship, material textuality, comparative publishing trends, censorship, visual culture, gender, and the history of reading, my dissertation tracks a set of coeval developments in German (and modern) history. The family papers modulated social change, cultural ferment, and the contest to define the uses of information in a complex society. In the decades before German unification they anchored an expanding layer of middle-class culture and liberal political tutelage. We encounter a situation in which profit-seeking as well as idealistic cultural mediators found themselves thrust into the position of cultural producers, a role that entailed ramified influence and painful compromise alike.8 The family papers allowed liberal middlemen—a function closely tied to purveyors of print in a variety of contexts—to assume a posture of careful activism between resignation and provocation, reassuringly buttressed by improved technology, capital flows and communications networks.9 Their story shows the resourcefulness of German liberalism after 1848, particularly to the movement’s left, yet it also reveals the weaknesses of what could be a superficial media liberalism, one prepared to make concessions to power, to public visibility, and to what it considered the needs of a more popular readership than what the press typically targeted.10

This overview of my dissertation is divided into three sections: first, an attempt to situate the family papers within the context of German liberalism and the post-1848 political situation in the German states; second, a genealogical and socio-economic gloss of the family paper as a press genre; and third, the interpretive stakes entailed by a historic popularization effort that consciously situated itself between public and private. I close with some concluding reflections.

I.

To understand the political strategy behind Ernst Keil’s project, one must know a bit about liberalism in Germany. Well before 1848, liberalism had won a diffuse presence in German society, thanks in no small part to the associational life of the Bürgertum, roughly translatable as “bourgeoisie” or “burgherdom.”11 Bürgerlich sociability centered on the emancipatory experience of the Verein (association, club). Vereine tended to erode traditional status distinctions by uniting participants in the pursuit of mutual pastimes like art, literature, theater, and music, as well as for explicitly political purposes as the decades wore on. They constituted an intermediate instance between civil society and the bureaucratic state that had made such creeping politicization possible,


11 Since the 1980s, one has tended to interpret the Bürgertum as much according to its sociocultural comportment, its Bürgerlichkeit, as to its social make-up. See the summary in Jürgen Kocka, “Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit als Probleme der deutschen Geschichte vom späten 18. zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert,” in Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert, ed. Kocka (Göttingen, 1987), 21-63. Scholars have thus shifted attention to the pastimes, interests and dissonant moral outlooks of the Bürgertum, as well as to its aspirations, desires and fears. See, for instance, Dieter Hein and Andreas Schulz, eds., Bürgerkultur im 19. Jahrhundert: Bildung, Kunst und Lebenswelt (Munich, 1996).
indeed had imparted to burghers many of the scribal and organizational practices that would eventually be marshaled to contest the state’s authoritarianism. If the Verein lost much of its luster in the wake of 1848, all but snuffed out by the reaction and then increasingly marked by social exclusivity and a particularism of various causes, it fostered cohesion between what historians have labeled a Bildungsbürgertum (educated bourgeoisie) associated with state service and a Besitzbürgertum (propriety bourgeoisie) newly enriched by trade and industry.\(^2\)

In the Vormärz, the communicative vanguard of German liberalism, that small reservoir of university-educated men from which the Frankfurt parliamentarians would emerge, occupied the foreground of a regionally diverse canvas of mostly local activity.\(^3\) The composition of the formative liberal movement, which at the local level also encompassed merchants and tradesmen, suggests that what united early German liberalism was less shared economic interest than a mindset of municipal self-government. This also helps to account for why liberals hazily envisioned their constituency as a universal Mittelstand, or “middle estate,” which signified as much a moral marker as an archaic-utopian social category lying somewhere beyond class. Here resided not only the wellspring of progress and concord but the virtuous “real nation” (das eigentliche Volk), as distinct from the unruly “masses” (Pöbel) who were neither self-supporting nor capable of independent reason.\(^4\) This unease spilled over into uncertainties about where to locate sovereignty in a constitutional polity, particularly given the relatively statist bent of German liberalism.\(^5\)

Since anti-populism characterized European liberalism as a whole after 1792, there was nothing idiosyncratic about liberalism in Germany in this regard.\(^6\) Yet like post-Napoleonic political discourse across the German spectrum, preeminently in Prussia, liberals were wont to espouse some form of stabilizing accommodation with monarchism, and they believed in the importance of popular education as a means to political harmony.\(^7\) Indeed, the ethos of Bildung, or self-cultivation and spiritual refinement through education, came naturally for Verein-patronizing burghers, and in its at once inclusionary and exclusionary thrust it served the needs of both meritocratic ideology and the maintenance of social boundaries.\(^8\)
For what was the most energetic political force in Germany until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, all of this presented a dilemma. Ideologically, leading liberals envisioned politics as a pedagogy of spiritual reform in the manner of *Bildung*, with liberalism its sole enlightened pedagogue. Where institutions came into play, even once the reaction had abated in the late 1850s, liberals tended to focus their engagement on the forums most familiar to them, and which they dominated: *Vereine*, chambers of commerce and town halls, all nodal points in a compact nexus of familiar bonds. After 1840, liberal notables took advantage of infrastructural improvements to build a national complement to their local bases of power, though at an altitude where the regional, confessional, and social seams of their patchwork constituency remained indistinct.

Liberalism did not want for support that transcended interstate borders in Germany (ties to Austria were weak), as witnessed ca. 1847 by memberships of up to 100,000 in the burgeoning gymnastics clubs and choral societies, which rekindled the spirit of the fight against Napoleon. Most newfound popular momentum in the 1840s, however, stemmed from economic hardship, which rendered liberalism’s political stewardship conditional. Cooperation between the wider population and the liberal movement collapsed from late 1848 into 1849. The *Nachmärz*, or “post-March” period, may have seen liberal intellectuals dabble in “realism” and “political positivism,” but they continued to grapple with their relationship to the German people and with the contours of a public opinion that many still regarded as the prerogative of the educated elite. Some went so far as to harp on the fallibility of the people’s judgment and the political unreliability of the masses. The German revolution, so the logic went, had gone awry due to the effects of post-Napoleonic repression. Only with a “sweeping political activation and mobilization of society,” whatever that might mean in practice, would liberals stand a chance of asserting themselves against the conservative establishment.

German liberalism “had constantly been a bourgeois movement” and, for that matter, a predominantly Protestant one. These affinities ossified as liberals showed themselves incapable of addressing
the needs of a growing working class, on the one hand, and in the 1870s allied with Otto von Bismarck to wage the Kulturkampf against Catholicism, on the other. The loss of potential labor and Catholic blocs severely damaged the prospects of liberal democracy in Imperial Germany, enabling right-liberal and conservative forces to take the lead as shapers of nationalist discourse in an era of mass politics.27

But this ultimate stagnation at the state level should not be read back onto the Nachmärz. The myth of prevalent inner emigration among post-1848 liberals has been put to rest, as has the notion of a servile or ineffectual public opinion among liberal elites in the 1850s and 1860s, whose influence officials themselves could not always resist.28 Below these rarefied climes, figures on the liberal movement’s democratic left, many of whom found themselves in exile or prison once the princes had regained control, now seriously pondered what bringing the people to their side might entail. Some explicitly called for the “resurrection of a political mass movement,” indeed a resumption of revolution by popular means. Few entertained visions of armed resistance. Yet however metaphysical, imprecise or pliable this populism was, its frank criticism of liberalism’s shallow roots in the populace bespoke the lessons of the revolution.29 As to the means of redress, the printed word retained pride of place, and for good reason. In the Vormärz, radical printers like Heinrich Hoff had begun to seek a more extensive readership with hybrid takes on elite print forms; such print entrepreneurs conceived of their work as principled civic intervention and pushed a definite “agenda.”30

Nor can the explosion of incendiary and satirical fliers, leaflets, and handbills in 1848-49 have escaped the notice of those who wished to enlist the German people in the fight to translate liberalism’s cultural vitality into real political power. This profusion of cheap print had amounted to a “media revolution” in its own right, and it had proven itself as a tool for popular mobilization.31

German liberals, then, had seen print bear political fruit before. The candor of rabble-rousing broadsheets became impossible to sustain in the repressive atmosphere of the early 1850s, but their populist impulse did not simply vanish with them. By a process of foreign and domestic adaptation, as well as adjustment to state controls and the imperatives of print capitalism — a process that must be reconstructed at the archival level — this popular political energy went indoors, so to speak, whence it might reemerge with renewed vigor. The family papers, first and foremost the Gartenlaube, were

27 Sheehan, German Liberalism, 274-78; Krieger, German Idea of Freedom, 275-76.

28 Mark Hewitson, Nationalism in Germany, 1848-1866: Revolutionary Nation (Basingstoke, 2010). See Sheehan, German Liberalism, 76.


the most potent successors to the early democratic experiments in the world of German print, reimagining the nascent activism of the Vormärz and the bold agitation of the revolution.

That the specific origins of the German popular press could have attracted so little notice points up the continued need to seek filiations between politics and networks of cultural production in scholarly practice. But a fuller explanation must also take into account the role of nationalism as a dominant *explanans* in scholarship on modern Germany. The family papers were not only nationalist but frequently liberal-democratic in orientation. Their nationalism must be considered alongside multiple analytical handholds and in historical context. Otherwise one risks underestimating the emancipatory valence of nationalism during the first two thirds of the nineteenth century — when it was more typically cosmopolitan and democratic than autarkic or paranoid — and overemphasizing ideology at the expense of practical causal factors in the development of German political culture. Indeed, if German liberalism hardly conceived of itself, to quote Elaine Hadley, as “a practical politics” like its British counterpart, here we see German liberalism in a practical mode, in fact, eager to engage the sensibilities and curiosities of ordinary people. This requires looking at the day-to-day actions of figures in the popular press and the physical texts they produced, at political actors who were simultaneously cultural actors.

II.

Commercially, the family papers could command the unprecedented circulations they did because their pioneers carved out new market niches from social formations that had been developing since the eighteenth century; they leveraged low subscription costs and aggressive methods of distribution to reach a readership weaned largely on religious texts and simple printed miscellany. The family papers took root in the shifting soils of sociocultural change.

They also accreted amid transnational cultural transfers, to which we first turn. The genre would have been unimaginable without the popularizing precedent set by the British penny press, a creation of the publishing laboratory that Great Britain became after the late seventeenth century. Of paramount importance abroad was Charles Knight’s *Penny Magazine* (1832–45). Friends in high places allowed the *Penny Magazine* to evade the stamp tax, and the artistically

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informed Knight kept abreast of developments in printing and illustration. He valued classically inspired wood engravings as aesthetic aids to popular education. And it was to illustration, paired with a one-penny price, that the *Penny Magazine* owed a volcanic debut: sales surpassed 50,000 copies in a matter of days, and circulation held at around 200,000 before rising competition eroded its reader base, more dramatically after the 1836 relaxation of the stamp tax and paper duties.35

Yet ripples from the splash made by the *Penny Magazine* in Britain reached American, French and German shores almost immediately. In the United States, a Yankee penny press roared to life in 1833 with the *New York Morning Post* and *Sun*.36 In France, Édouard Charton, a Saint-Simonian and self-professed enemy of ignorance, followed Knight’s lead even more closely that same year with his *Magasin pittoresque*.37 The studious Charton would go on to launch *L’Illustration* in 1843, which followed one year in the wake of the *Illustrated London News*, the world’s first illustrated newsweekly.38 And what is more, the evidence suggests that this French penny connection formed a decisive channel of influence between the British and German popular presses. The Frenchman Martin Bossange, likewise in 1833, arranged to have his Leipzig publishing affiliate produce a German-language imitation of the *Penny Magazine*. The aptly named *Pfennig-Magazin* (1833–55) was a joint effort between Bossange’s German branch and publisher F. A. Brockhaus. Although the *Pfennig-Magazin* may have achieved a circulation of 35,000 copies by the end of 1833, with an eventual peak of around 100,000, there is reason to doubt that the dry, technical *Pfennig-Magazin* made lasting headway into any but educated strata.39 Regardless, the *Pfennig-Magazin* honed the craft of editor Johann Jacob Weber, who later founded the celebrated *Illustrierte Zeitung* (1843–1944), like *L’Illustration* a continental imitator of the *Illustrated London News*. Just as the latter was comparatively expensive, the *Illustrierte Zeitung* remained too costly through mid-century to win anything approaching a six-figure circulation, but it set benchmarks in illustration and exerted an undeniable pull on the family papers.40


Other forerunners of the family paper genre had already existed in Germany, yet always in dialogue with European developments. German periodicals participated in the steady but never absolute differentiation of newspapers and magazines that began in northwestern Europe during the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, the trend was in full swing, buoyed by the success of the enlightened, self-improving moral weekly.\textsuperscript{41} Between 1750 and 1850, the German periodical landscape gained a colorful assortment of instructive, literary, humorous, and eventually political journals and magazines, but this specialization came at the expense of the ecumenical moral weekly. Nor did the moral weekly’s successors enjoy the same cultural prominence, not least on account of rising competition from daily newspapers and cheap print. As such the German genealogy of the family paper becomes muddled after 1815 in the belletristic crosscurrents of the Biedermeier period, many local and ephemeral.\textsuperscript{42} Furthermore, an essential conduit in this period may not have been a periodical at all. As James Brophy has made clear, the folk calendar, analogous to the famous Anglo-American almanacs, occupies a special place in the lineage of popular political advocacy in nineteenth-century Germany. It set a precedent for subversive reinvention by engaged print entrepreneurs, furnishing a reserve of practices and insights upon which someone like Ernst Keil could draw.\textsuperscript{43} Like the folk calendars, the family papers would locate their work in the home, and like them, they sought a way into the circle of readers’ sympathies with a mixture of the familiar and the new, the quotidian and the partisan. German print culture already offered models for such tactics, in publications that both wove between categories and spoke to the family as an audience.

Together, these foreign and domestic influences provided a latent cultural toolkit that found broad, consistent appropriation and application from the early 1850s onward, as Keil’s political project quickly became a business success. Only then did the family papers take off in the German-language press.\textsuperscript{44} One survey has counted roughly a hundred foundings of family papers between 1848 and the late 1870s, when their dominance began to wane, about two-thirds of them in Germany. Vienna produced a handful, followed by Switzerland, in addition to Philadelphia and New York.\textsuperscript{45} In the American case a German founder was likely; how many Swiss family papers had German political refugees behind them is harder to determine. In any case, the most successful family papers issued from Germany.


\textsuperscript{43} James M. Brophy, Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland, 1800-1850 (Cambridge, 2007), 21.

\textsuperscript{44} Kirschstein, Familienzeitschrift, 67-69; Kirchner, “Redaktion und Publikum,” 466. Cf. Barth, Zeitschrift für Alle, 52-55.

\textsuperscript{45} Data drawn from Kirschstein, Familienzeitschrift, 153ff.
Structurally, how did their breakthrough become possible? Next to diminishing production costs, including for paper and printing machines, makers of family papers capitalized on ambitious, and sometimes illicit, methods of distribution and promotion.46 The colporteur, or book peddler, has long been recognized as a key to the startling circulations of the family papers.47 Dauntless scavengers for customers, the subjects of caricature and the objects of official dread, colporteurs roamed city, town and countryside at the behest of German booksellers and publishers. They peddled printed wares to readers, many of them isolated and without regular exposure to such products.48 In other words, when a family paper reminded readers that a subscription was “obtainable at all bookshops and post offices,” the simplicity of this message belied the intricacy of operations on the ground.49

Such efforts bore fruit. According to the estimate of one contemporary, journals and magazines made up over half of total German literary production in the early 1860s. However one might view the vicissitudes of the German book market at mid-century, non-newspaper periodicals were booming.50 This held for family papers in particular, which ushered in a veritable “age of mass subscription” even as other print media caught their breath.51 While sustained print runs for the major German newspapers dropped after 1848 and generally remained confined to the 5000-15,000 range, by 1860 the Gartenlaube had bested the old 100,000 circulation record of the Pfennig-Magazin, en route to 230,000 copies by 1867 and a zenith of 382,000 in 1875. Competitor family papers regularly sold tens of thousands of copies or more by the mid-1860s: Illustrirte Welt had a circulation of 100,000 in 1868; Illustrirtes Familien-Journal peaked around 1861 with 70,000; Über Land und Meer possibly reached 170,000 in 1870; and even the conservative Daheim saw a figure of 70,000 that same year.52 Thanks to their enduring topicality, as well as forms of shared subscription or reading aloud between friends and relatives, a nominal circulation of even one hundred thousand for a family paper may have translated to an effective reading public of over a half-million. In total, millions came to know the family papers. No other print medium of the day could boast of such feats in Central Europe.

At the same time, commercial success for the family papers was more constrained than meets the eye. The family papers stretched the structural limits of a society in transition to capitalism. Besides
distribution networks, the unparalleled circulations of the family papers rested on truisms easily forgotten: readers wanted to read them; readers could do so or could find someone to read them aloud; and they could afford a subscription or afford membership at a lending institution that subscribed. In the German case, what these factors meant together demographically is that the family papers drew their readership from social layers no lower than those in society’s middle, among materially self-sufficient readers with a basic to intermediate education, whose relative numerical dominance in the middle class made them a vital subscription base.53 The task of delimiting this readership requires two essential topographical markers.

First, literacy. What the term “literacy” denotes is neither geographically nor temporally constant, and its consequences are situationally dependent.54 Historians of early modern Europe have debated how best to gauge literacy and demonstrated the fluidity of “oral” and “literate” cultures over time.55 Asymmetries between town and country, men and women, regions and social groups patterned the spread of literacy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hence estimates of how many among the 35 million people living in Germany around 1850 may have possessed a reading proficiency sufficient to read a family paper must be taken with a grain of salt.56 According to one oft-cited assessment, the “optimal” percentage of Central Europeans classifiable as possible readers of popular texts stood at 15% ca. 1770, 25% ca. 1800, 50% ca. 1830, 75% ca. 1870 and 90% ca. 1900. The ability to read, of course, describes a quality distinct from the inclination to read.57 If by mid-century even a tidy majority of the population had acquired functional literacy, this does not mean that a majority read actively. On the contrary, a working-class culture of habitual reading developed only around 1900, and for reasons economic as much as educational.58 In the main, the available statistical and descriptive sources lead to the conclusion that regular reading remained, if not rare, then at least unusual. Only a fraction of those in Germany who could read the family papers in fact did so. The circulations of the family papers, half to a third of what leading British magazines reached in the mid-nineteenth century, are a testament to the economy of the print market as much as educational.

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53 See Barth, Zeitschrift für Deutsche Landeskunde (1973), 2:381-82.
56 Schenda, Volk ohne Buch, 444-45. Cf. Kirchner, Zeitschrift f nerwesen, 2:381-82.
century, simultaneously overcame social barriers and demonstrated their tenacity. Restricted literacy constituted the most elemental curb to textual access, but it operated in concert with hard material realities.

Second, affordability. At a few thalers annually, the family papers were cheaper than any German periodicals before them and more economical than books. Yet by no means did decreased production costs and razor-thin profit margins — four years passed before the Gartenlaube, at a circulation of 60,000 copies, became profitable — translate to widespread affordability. Around 1850, even a comfortably middle-class German household made do with 800 thalers over the course of a year; households of the lower-middle class could see 400–700 thalers, while a sort of poverty line becomes discernible at 200 thalers. For working families able to support themselves, saving remained a virtual impossibility, and what set off the lower reaches of the middle class from laborers and the indigent poor was often a dozen or so thalers in discretionary money. A yearly subscription to a family paper, then, might require a baker’s household to give up a tenth of its disposable income, and the situation was only slightly better for the medical doctor down the lane. As such another way for readers to get hold of a family paper was the private lending library, which became a locus of communal reading culture in the nineteenth century.

In sum, the family papers contributed impressively to the nineteenth-century formation of networks of capital, raw materials, expertise, and consumer engagement. Their immediate reach stretched well beyond publishing centers like Leipzig or Stuttgart, indeed beyond the northern German states themselves. In a seemingly straightforward 1853 advertisement from the Wiener Zeitung (see figure 1), one sees how a bookseller announces an assortment of magazines, including family papers, to the owners of restaurants, cafés, Vereine and reading circles. This is an important point twice over: firstly,
because the postal service was not yet an important means of delivery for periodicals, the interests of subscription-selling booksellers were intimately bound up with the astonishing success of the family papers; and secondly, although as mentioned only the northern German states and then the German Empire gave notable rise to this German-language genre, potential readers (and customers) existed wherever German was understood, stretching the cultural web of the family papers far beyond the initial remit of their political genesis. How the political as such fared alongside this success and visibility brings us to another set of considerations.

III.

With the family papers, we win access to intermediaries between high and low, a chance to see agents of acculturation in action. We behold peripheral groups interacting with novel cultural forms. Above all, however, not only do we miss the full extent of the modern sociocultural field without such popular media, but we also miss the richness and vulnerabilities of modern political contestation. From a liberal-democratic point of view, strengthening the purchase of public opinion on German politics necessitated a firmer footing in the political nation. By now, of course, the concept of the “public sphere” (Öffentlichkeit) proposed by Jürgen Habermas in 1962 has stimulated a discipline’s worth of monographs and collections, which in their criticism of his schematic view of bourgeois political authority — most notably for its totalizing bent, elitism, and effective aggrandizement of the male property owner as rational-critical discussant — have pointed up its momentousness for English-language scholarship. What must be foregrounded here, and what has attracted comparatively little notice, is Habermas’s dismissal of the intimate sphere as a nucleus of politics from the mid-nineteenth century onward.

With respect to the eighteenth century, Habermas depicted the “institutionalization of a public-oriented privacy” in the family, an intimacy whose claim to “purely human” autonomy from the market was fictitious yet crucial to the formation of the public sphere. It was from within the idealized preserve of the family that the subjective basis for bourgeois political authority, literary publicity, emerged. According to Habermas, the “structural transformation of the public sphere” to which the title of his study refers, indeed its “disintegration,” came about in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the end of a strict separation between state and society, which elided the

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64 Habermas, Strukturwandel, 107-16. By now this complex architecture has been limned in works too numerous to mention, but see in particular Dena Goodman, “Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime,” History and Theory 31, no. 1 (1992): 1-20.
intermediate space that had accommodated the public sphere as an outgrowth of bourgeois privacy. State interventionism merged public with private concerns, destroying the ensconced of enlightened debate at their boundary. The family sacrificed its sociopolitical basis function for the bourgeoisie as the development of capitalism continued apace, while the intimate sphere was shunted to the margins of the private sphere it had formerly anchored; consumerism, meanwhile, peddled “pseudo-public or mock-private” wares in place of the literary publicity that had distinguished the two. For Habermas, consumer culture represented the inversion of a reasoned debate (Räsonnement) whose political efficacy had rested on freedom, in the ancient Greek sense, from the constraints of need and want.

Habermas’s complicated intellectual inheritance from the Frankfurt School, in particular from his teachers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, is perhaps nowhere more palpable than in the pages composing the final third of his influential book, not only its least read but its most dogmatic section. To his credit, and indeed in a study characterized by attention to detail, Habermas granted that commercialization and consumption per se were never extrinsic to the literary publicity he eulogized. That they somehow left its formative works untouched, however, while the later nineteenth century saw its debasement with the expansion of the reading public and the rise of the mass media, must strike us today as an uncharitable and untenable position. As Brophy has proven with regard to the Rhineland in the early nineteenth century, participatory political communication has never been confined to a tiny social elite in the modern era. Furthermore, the cultural products conveying information, ideas and partisan standpoints to commoners and literati alike have always been saturated with the logic of the market. Although the numerous expressions of a more egalitarian public sphere uncovered by Brophy were most frequently of a veiled political nature, owing to the restrictions of the Restoration, they tilled a substrate for the legendary Rhenish defiance of 1848-49, and eventually for mass politics in the German Empire. How this popular political energy would be channeled by subsequent historical actors remained an open question.

In the Nachmärz, I suggest that we look for this energy in the intimate sphere. For engaged publishers who wished to reach a wider audience, going into the home could be a conscious political tactic — and eventually a very profitable one — in the face of a reaction that permitted little else. Yet the family papers were confident and conscious

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65 Habermas, Strukturwandel, 225-26.
66 See ibid., 238-42, 248-49.
68 Habermas, Strukturwandel, 252-61, 277-78.
69 James M. Brophy, Popular Culture and the Public Sphere, 304.
70 Ibid., 8-12, 300-302, 310-12.
of their clout, and they grew bolder as the years passed. Before their interiority, familiarity, and coziness had become the stuff of cliché, such tropes served as experimental conduits for liberal pedagogy in an often illiberal political culture. The family papers seem indeed to have occupied Habermas at least somewhat, for he pointedly wrote of them as commercialistic epigones of their eighteenth-century forebears. He singled out the pathbreaking Gartenlaube as a bellwether of “hollowed-out” intimacy, “an idyllic form of glorification in which the middle-class family of the small town receives and almost only imitates the living tradition of self-cultivation in the high-bourgeois reading family of previous generations.”71 Thus Habermas anticipated the present-day consensus that the family papers succumbed to obsolescent self-parody in the late nineteenth century, but in a harsher sense: they were compromised, he implied, from the start. My study demonstrates, on the contrary, that the intimate sphere depreciated by Habermas furnished an important platform for popular political advocacy in postrevolutionary Germany, if one with definite constraints. Rather than invoke Manichaean explanations, I examine the intentions of historical actors, the role of cultural practices, possible contours of reception, and the capacity of acute crisis moments to shape the popularizing liberalism of the family papers. Openness to the people meant openness to the market. With the foreclosure of a Habermasian reasoning public arises an opportunity to conceive of political inclusion along different lines, ones less black-and-white.

The techniques and processes associated with print capitalism possessed no inherent political charge. What they could effect hinged on how they were deployed structurally, by whom and to what ends they were applied, by whom and within what frames of reference they were received. The optimism of the family papers, however, tells us that their liberal pioneers thought otherwise: not only did the potpourri of knowledge contained within them appear to share an affinity with progress, but the technologies, genres, and networks swept up in their train seemed to move in tandem with the forward motion of history.

In my dissertation I demonstrate that the political efficacy of the family papers was in fact as conditional as anything else. What they could achieve as a mass reading phenomenon was subject not only to contests across specific sites in German society, but also to conflicts bound up with their own material textuality and with the reading styles of those who welcomed them into their homes. This plea

for contingency com-
ports with the find-
ings of recent studies
on the populariza-
tion of knowledge, a
prominent feature
of Western societ-
ies in this period.
Andreas Daum has
made a convincing
argument for the
coercive pull of suc-
cess on novel realign-
ments of culture,
showing how as-
similation into the
main channels of German society tended to dampen the incendiary
content of popularized natural science and transform it from a liberal
concern into something politically defanged, especially as memories
of 1848 receded.\footnote{See Andreas W. Daum, \textit{Wissenschaftspopularisierung
im 19. Jahrhundert: Bürgerliche Kultur, naturwissenschaftliche
Bildung und die deutsche Öffentlichkeit 1848-1914},
2nd ed. (Munich, 2002), 417, 189-91.}

The family papers were less invested in the popularization of natural sci-
ence than one might expect, but they were exposed to similar pressures.
Yet here structural explanation benefits from episodic investigation
as well. Consisting of interconnected vignettes with a strong archival
foundation, my study is able to relate not only the formal qualities and
macro-level scope of the family papers, but also the stories behind them,
which permits an appropriate sense of historical openness and possibil-
ity. I argue that the family papers cleared a space for liberal-democratic
public opinion in German politics during the 1850s and 1860s. They
owed this to their brief monopoly position as exciting new entrants to
the German-language press. If their political texture proved delicate and
their cultural dominance transient, what interests me in this regard is not
any reductionist opposition of education versus Entertainment, or profit
versus principle, but rather the particular warp and woof of the family
papers, as well as the passage of a decisive moment for their evolution
into more outspokenly political publications.

Following a structural overview, my study begins by focusing on
the everyday demands of running a family paper, as well as on the
challenges of magazine journalism in the family paper’s shadow:
the former by charting the rise of the \textit{Gartenlaube} under Ernst Keil
and reconstructing, on the basis of dozens of personal letters, how he understood ends and means in the popular press; the latter by dramatizing the clash of viewpoints and the “popular” challenges that could accompany the production of a family paper manqué, namely Unterhaltungen am häuslichen Herd, which author, critic, and erst-while Young German Karl Gutzkow edited from 1852 to 1862. From here the perspective shifts to material textuality and visual culture. Liberal notable and publicist Karl Biedermann’s cultural-historical contributions to the Gartenlaube give occasion to examine the dynamics of serialization in the family papers, particularly with regard to political content. The interaction between Biedermann’s message of almost self-generating progress and the family paper as a medium, I maintain, conveyed a liberalism both confident and self-defeating. Taking up several successful family papers in its sweep, the study moves on to inquire into the relationship between the technical and economic particularities of the wood engraving, so integral to the appeal of the family papers, and the genre’s characteristic projection of a world that could be visually possessed and mastered by the industrious hand (see Figure 2), rather than one that had to be changed through political struggle.

The dissertation ends with a showdown. The climax of the cultural-political joust mediated by the family papers in their heyday, I argue, arrived with Prussia’s ban of the Gartenlaube between 1863 and 1866. Sparked in 1862 by a short story that fictionalized the sinking of a Prussian navy ship in order to slander the aristocracy, the Amazon affair witnessed a direct confrontation between the conservative Prussian state and the liberal popular press. Berlin officials emerge not as line-striking censors of an older type, however, but rather as negotiators of a newly constitutional system of censorship; they also prove sensitive to the democratic resonance of the family papers. They are stymied by Keil’s ingenious attempts to subvert the ban in Prussia, a situation exacerbated by their growing commitment to due process and the rule of law in matters of censorship. If no clear winner emerged from the Amazon affair, I suggest that Prussian pressure moved the Gartenlaube — always a trailblazer and trendsetter for other family papers, indeed synonymous with the genre in the wider German press — to drop its liberal-democratic program in favor of a less trenchant liberal-nationalist advocacy. This speaks to the ductile nature of the family papers as political organs, as well as to the continuing power of repressive measures to impinge on the course of politics in post-1848 Germany.
Conclusion

The family papers, these “popular” creations according to the standards of the day, were inexpensive, illustrated, and appealing. They were the most innovative periodicals in existence during the third quarter of the nineteenth century in German-speaking Europe. It was these factors that together won them millions of readers between the 1850s and 1870s, when both their average circulations and their cultural influence peaked. For inspired trailblazers like Ernst Keil, the family papers might pick up where direct political action had left off, once the Revolution of 1848 had given way to reaction in the German states. In the family papers, instructive entertainment and entertaining instruction would form a cultural-political chiasmus that might, even amid such unfavorable conditions, make readers more progressive, at least in the sense of nineteenth-century European liberalism. Obviously, in the case of Keil’s imitators, who surely noticed that he was becoming a rich man as he fought the good fight, the ratio of political activism to profit motive might appear less noble; the Gartenlaube was certainly the boldest and most explicitly political among the family papers. Even as they exploited it for commercial gain, however, all exemplars of the genre were participating in what remained for a time an unavoidably political enterprise, until finally the family papers’ political capital had been all but exchanged for the old-fashioned kind. The full dawn of mass print in Germany broke not with newspapers but with the family papers, in their way the children of a revolution; they owed their commercial success not only to structural factors, but to a specific political constellation in Germany.

Such a variegated portrait of ambition and self-interest does not, I maintain, detract from an overarching lesson in this story. It is not just that the family was being exploited in post-1848 Germany as an incubator of liberal political authority in contest with a conservative establishment. The trope of upright domesticity and private property as bases for liberal political power is far from unknown to historians and literary scholars. Nor can this project’s rejoinder to Habermas — that the commercial infiltration of the family has occasionally had sincere political intentions behind it — shake up a historical discipline whose Habermasian phase has passed. Rather, we see here a convergence in which widely influential sociocultural phenomena seem to have had political origins, not vice versa. We see how something so ramified and so tangible, how something of an everyday nature — a magazine discussed by neighbors, perused
in cafés, even consulted by early manufacturers of mass-produced art for clues as to what sorts of picture might sell — could in a very real sense owe its genesis to the high drama of political conflict. This interplay is fascinating, for it brings together worlds easily kept separate in historical writing, as though our political decisions past and present did not inevitably return to us, in ways that change us whether we like it or not, as changed consciousness, changed bodies and changed habitus, which then shapes our politics all over again. When German liberalism came down to earth, so to speak, via the family papers, it affected lives and sensibilities in the astonishingly rapid way that new media continue to do. And then as now, politics may play out in surprising ways in the culture of capitalism.

In short, post-1848 German liberalism shows itself here not merely as a political movement with popular aspirations, but as a popular cultural force reaching down in some quarters to the fundament of people’s everyday lives. Yet, thus applied, German liberalism also proves susceptible to the constraints of business and early consumerism, the limitations of ideology, state repression, and even the logic of the printed page. The family papers almost single-handedly launched the popular press in Germany, and particularly once they became politically more explicit, they opened a space for liberal-democratic public opinion that one would be short-sighted to discount.

What drove the family papers, who read them and what they achieved all speak to the possibilities and perils of German history at a crossroads, and on a far broader terrain than one might assume. Indeed, there was much more than meets the eye where the family papers were concerned. They crystallized in a situation of political deferral and reorientation, hopefulness and experimentation, suffocating reaction and exuberant capitalism. They vexed editors, attracted authors, alarmed the police and delighted readers. They set to paper a convincingly popular side of German liberalism and led Central Europe into the era of mass print. The family papers, in other words, were tautly overdetermined and highly ramified in their reach. One would therefore be remiss to counter James Morgan Hart’s characterization of the family papers with an equally monochromatic summation of what they accomplished in German culture and politics. That they did their work on both fronts, however, and changed the fabric of each, shows the worth of looking for big changes in unassuming places.
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I.

In 1978, the East German intellectual Hermann Klenner wrote that “illusion and hypocrisy may be able to delay recognition of truth in the question of human rights, but progress is inevitable both in theory and in practice. The people will see to this.”¹ This kind of optimism for the cause of human rights sounds familiar today in the wake of the recent celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The narrative of the late twentieth century is often told with the same framing as Klenner’s: the people rose up to demand their human rights, bringing down the illusions of state socialism in the process. In East Germany, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) could only rule as long as it could suppress the people and forcibly prevent outright rebellion.

Yet, when Hermann Klenner spoke of human rights, he was not speaking against the rule of the SED, he was not decrying the Berlin Wall, nor the abuses of the Stasi and its apparatus of mass surveillance. The illusion he denounced was the world capitalist system; the hypocrisy he saw as doomed was Western liberal democracy. Klenner’s human rights revolution began in 1917 on the streets of Petrograd; it advanced with the establishment of socialism on German soil, and eventually it would triumph around the world.

The rise of the human rights movement in the GDR is usually attributed to the signing of the Helsinki Accords, an international agreement signed by thirty-five countries from both sides of the Iron Curtain in 1975. According to this narrative, the SED’s decision to affirm the principles of human rights in a binding treaty created an unstoppable combination of diplomatic pressure from abroad and a dissent from within that eventually brought down the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and eventually state socialism altogether.² The brutal and perfidious East German state was thus brought down by the hubris and hypocrisy of its short-sighted leaders, who cynically

gambled on agreeing to human rights provisions that clearly con- 
tricted the basic structures of the GDR. Helsinki simply unmasked 
the true feelings of the populace, which had been tamped down 
through threats of force, coercion, and the fearsome retribution of 
the secret police, the Stasi. The narrative of Western victory in the 
Cold War is thus integrated into broader historical accounts of the 
history of human rights as the inevitable march towards egalitarian 
liberal democracy, based on the “bulldozer logic” of human rights 
that relentlessly pressed forward towards progress.

Upon closer inspection, however, this narrative raises several ques- 
tions: How could the SED, and indeed the rest of the Eastern Bloc, 
have been so careless as to have signed on to human rights commit- 
ments that would fatally undermined its legitimacy? If such agree- 
ments were so damaging to the regime, why did it then take until 
1989 for the system to collapse? In the case of the GDR, why was there 
not a single independent human rights organization until 1986? Why 
did East Germans only take to the streets in the thousands in the 
name of human rights almost a decade and a half after the Helsinki 
Accords were signed? Furthermore, the idea that the human rights 
promises of the Helsinki Accords naturally aroused popular revolt 
is complicated by the fact that the SED had first claimed fidelity to 
human rights as far back as 1946. The East German state did not 
hide from the language of human rights in the early postwar period, 
but rather embraced the concept as an element of socialist ideology 
and of the legitimizing discourse of SED rule. In 1959, it created the 
state-directed GDR Committee for Human Rights, which mobilized 
parts of the East German population in the name of human rights 
against West German anticommunism and remilitarization. The 
Helsinki Accords were preceded by the SED’s commitment in 1968 
to sign on to the United Nations Human Rights Covenants of 1966 
as soon as the GDR became a member of the U.N., which then oc- 
curred in 1973. These commitments went beyond simple slogans and 
propaganda, as the regime created a whole philosophy of “socialist 
human rights” and spearheaded an initiative to draft an international 
“Socialist Declaration of Human Rights” in the 1980s.

While the SED was exceptional in its early adoption of human rights 
as a discourse of legitimization and propaganda against the West, 
the East German people were noteworthy for their late adoption of 
human rights as a tool of political dissent. When East Germans did 
revolt against the SED in June 1953, there was no talk of human rights
in the demonstrations and protests that ensued. In 1968, while the Prague Spring rocked neighboring Czechoslovakia, the SED peacefully held a plebiscite on the adoption of a new “Socialist Constitution.” As leaders like Walter Ulbricht called this new foundational document a step forward for human rights in the GDR, few sought to turn these words against the SED to demand political reform or to challenge the party’s monopoly on power. In the 1970s, as human rights became a global movement, East Germany remained an outlier in the socialist world: while thousands invoked human rights to legitimize their petitions to emigrate, the GDR was one of the few countries in the Eastern Bloc without an organized human rights movement demanding systemic change. Although those who sought to leave the GDR invoked international treaties, those who remained did not challenge socialist rule based on the idea of human rights. The most prominent dissidents in that decade avoided the language of human rights, and some East German intellectuals even attacked the human rights movements as reactionary.

Speaking in 1978, Hermann Klenner could survey the domestic and international political scene and hold to his faith in the global socialist project and its respect for human rights. By 1989, however, the intellectual elite of East Germany was far less confident. As the East German political system was about to collapse in the face of mass protests in September 1989, the GDR Committee for Human Rights celebrated its thirtieth anniversary under a cloud of uncertainty. The group was treated to a speech by Frank Berg, a member of the group’s Presidium, who lauded the fine work of the East German state and its intellectuals in furthering the cause of socialist human rights, but cautioned that work still had to be done to come to terms with the mistakes of the past. The crimes of Stalinism needed to be examined and laid bare, but he warned the audience against going too far: “The history of socialism would, however, be turned upside down if it was represented as a history of human rights violations.” At that time, Berg could not have known that in less than two months the Berlin Wall would be opened, or that exactly four months later the headquarters of the once feared Stasi would be occupied by protestors, or that a year later a treaty for the reunification of Germany would have been approved by parliaments in both Bonn and East Berlin. In that short span of time, however, he was proven correct about one important thing: when East Germans collectively viewed the SED as violators of their human rights everything would indeed be turned upside down.

More than twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is difficult to see how Klenner or Berg could have viewed a regime that denied the rights of its citizens to free speech, free assembly, unrestricted travel, and of course the right to vote in competitive elections as not only compliant with human rights norms, but as an international leader in the field. The tens of thousands of East Germans who took to the streets in the fall of 1989 with banners demanding “Human Rights and Freedom” seemed to conclusively demonstrate that these claims were no more than cynical and hypocritical propaganda. The Berlin Wall and the actions of the Stasi are held up today as prime examples of human rights abuses committed by a modern dictatorship. Yet for decades, the SED asserted its claim to be a champion of human rights with minimal backlash from the populace. The first dissident East German human rights organization, the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights, was only founded in 1986. How do we reconcile the revolution of 1989, arguably driven by mass popular demand for human rights, with the long and almost completely forgotten socialist human rights politics of the SED?

II.

While human rights were an almost completely neglected topic among historians until the end of the 1990s, since then it has exploded as a subject of inquiry. But where does the story of human rights begin? Some scholars have approached human rights as a timeless concept stretching back to philosophical principles of justice and equality found in antiquity. In this interpretation, the universal morality of the Stoic philosophers of Ancient Greece, the Babylonian legal system in the Code of Hammurabi, and the Persian guarantees of religious freedom for conquered peoples in the Cyrus Cylinder represent the beginnings of a process to realize human rights, even if the term itself was not yet in use.

Others have disputed this lineage as anachronistic and instead traced the idea of human rights to the development of the theory of natural law and the Enlightenment in Europe. For Jonathan Israel, the concept of human rights is the end product of the rational materialist thinking of Spinoza and others in the Radical Enlightenment. According to Lynn Hunt, the origins of human rights can instead be traced to a moral awakening caused by a revolution in sensibilities brought about by the mass reading of accounts of torture and epistolary novels. These experiences created “brain changes” that aroused new forms of

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empathy leading to demands for universal rights. Although both the intellectual and moral theories of the Enlightenment origins of human rights are sharply disputed, most scholars agree that at least the modern terminology of human rights can be traced back to this era.

While language similar to that employed by the human rights movement was first put into action during French and American Revolutions, drawing a clean line from that era to human rights as they are understood today is problematic. Dan Edelstein has pointedly argued that rights language functioned to legitimize the Terror and the brutal destruction of the counterrevolution in the Vendée and not just freedom, democracy and equality. Laurent Dubois, among others, has demonstrated the reluctance of the French to apply the concepts of universal equality to its colonial subjects. Empathy for the suffering of others did not necessarily lead to a belief in universal equality and democracy but it could also spur on imperialism and interventionism in the name of spreading the ideals of civilization. In the nineteenth century, human rights language was applied to the cause of abolitionism, but even this movement rejected the idea of civic equality of Europeans and non-whites. In spite of proclamations of human equality, women remained disenfranchised throughout the “enlightened” world. Although there were some rudimentary international legal structures in connection to anti-slavery, human rights was a concept tied to nationalism and sovereignty rather than supra-national universal morality.

By the mid-twentieth century, the idea of human rights may not have been universally accepted or employed, but it did begin to play an important role in global politics through the creation of United Nations. Passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights represented the first near-global agreement on a list of specific rights held by, theoretically, all human beings. Yet the meaning of the Declaration, like that of the Enlightenment, remains hotly contested: some have portrayed its creation as the expression of a pan-global moral awakening following the horrors of the Second World War while others see the it as little more than an arrangement between superpowers to secure a new international status quo at minimum cost to either side.

III.

It was in the midst of these global developments that the story of human rights in East Germany began. In German history, the vocabulary

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of human rights had been rare with political actors and movements focusing on civil rights (Bürgerrechte) or human dignity (Menschenwürde). Social Democrats were the earliest to adopt the language to promote their own agenda, particularly after the First World War, but this was not a popular and widespread discourse. The SED initially adopted the vocabulary of human rights in response to competition for political legitimacy with the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). Running on the slogan “No Socialism without Human Rights,” the still independent SPD in the Western Zones of Occupation soundly beat the SED in city-wide Berlin elections in 1946. In response, the SED sought to appropriate the language of the SPD. While moving away from liberal democratic principles towards the creation of a dictatorship of the proletariat, the new SED party slogan became “No Human Rights without Socialism!”

This rhetorical acquisition deepened in the late 1950s when the SED needed ammunition for its propaganda campaign against the outlawing of the West German Communist Party. Founded in 1959, the GDR Committee for Human Rights took up the cause of fighting for human rights on behalf of the SED. As the Eastern Bloc’s only state-directed human rights organization, the Committee was created to coordinate the mobilization of GDR citizens in protest against mass arrests of Communists in West Germany following the banning of the KPD. Founded two years before the creation of Amnesty International, the Committee organized protest letter-writing campaigns to apply pressure on West German officials and raised money for the family members of those affected by the state crack-down on communist organizations and left-wing activists protesting increased militarization. By directly promoting activism by East Germans along state-approved lines and by tightly controlling public discourse, the SED was able to mobilize GDR citizens to fight for human rights on behalf of the state without sparking backlash against SED rule in the name of these same principles.

In the 1960s, the GDR became more concerned with its lack of diplomatic recognition outside of the Socialist Bloc and its deficit of international, as opposed to just domestic, legitimacy. In order to integrate into the emerging postcolonial international order, the SED shifted to a new strategy of engaging the newly founded Afro-Asian states through human rights politics. East German intellectuals, including the aforementioned Hermann Klenner, created an ideological conception of “socialist human rights” drawing on Marxist ideology and the
human rights claims of anti-imperialist activists and leaders from the developing world. The GDR sought to join the United Nations in order to gain widespread diplomatic recognition and as a means of entrenching GDR sovereignty against West German claims to represent the whole of the German people. The SED used the language of human rights to try to demonstrate that it was a state fit for membership in the international community and one that would support the struggle of the postcolonial states against western domination. The U.N.’s International Year for Human Rights in 1968 presented a perfect opportunity to promote the GDR to the world as a champion of self-determination. The adoption of the new “Socialist Constitution” of 1968 following a nation-wide plebiscite was thus used as evidence of the regime’s popular support and official embrace of human rights. While this campaign did little to convince the world community that the GDR was a leader in the field of human rights, it led the SED and loyal East German intellectuals to internalize the notion that they represented the highest ideals of human rights in comparison to the hypocrisy and self-delusion of the capitalist west.

The SED’s internalization of its own propaganda would have important consequences for international diplomacy in the 1970s, most prominently the GDR’s signing of the Helsinki Accords. The leadership of the GDR had developed its conception of human rights at a time when notions of state-sovereignty, self-determination, and non-interference were paramount due to the new power of the postcolonial bloc in shaping the discourse of international affairs at the United Nations in the 1960s. In negotiating first the Basic Treaty with West Germany in 1972 and then the Helsinki Accords, the SED worked from the assumption that the norms of the United Nations human rights system were inherently favorable to state socialism and would further the GDR’s claims to sovereignty in the face of Western efforts to interfere in internal affairs. Just as the international human rights discourse was shifting to a focus on individual rights rather than state sovereignty and anti-communism, the SED saw no threat from committing the GDR to further human rights provisions.
IV.

During the constitutional plebiscite of 1968 the idea of human rights began to be re-appropriated by East German citizens. The SED invited East Germans to comment and make suggestions to improve the new document that would serve as the ideological basis for the GDR. Thousands of East Germans took the opportunity to demand greater rights for free expression, free movement, and the right to strike. In particular, East German Christians demanded that the SED restore a number of constitutional protections for religious freedom that were to be eliminated. In adopting the language of human rights, however, GDR citizens worked within the dominant SED discourse and argued that the inclusion of greater commitments to human rights would provide greater legitimacy on the world stage and allow for the better participation of those citizens who supported socialism as a political and economic system but held different worldviews from those of the atheistic state.

While citizens were willing to use the language of human rights to have a “voice” within the East German dictatorship when provided a safe opportunity by the state, the GDR failed to develop a domestic dissident human rights movement. When conciliatory requests failed to produce results, those who sought the right to travel outside the GDR in the 1960s turned to demand immediate emigration in the name of human rights. Although Christians were amongst the loudest voices calling for the entrenchment of human rights during the adoption of the new constitution, in the wake of the Helsinki Accords the Protestant church leadership decided to endorse the SED’s position that the GDR was fully compliant with international human rights treaties in order to gain leverage in privately protesting abuses against congregants. Soon the church hierarchy itself, not just the Stasi, took on the task of disciplining clergy who used the language of human rights to demand political and legal reforms. Since so many GDR dissidents still believed in the ideals of socialism even if they had soured on SED rule, supporting US President Jimmy Carter’s new human rights stance against the Eastern Bloc was deemed ideologically untenable. East German dissidents who gained international prominence at this time thus chose not to employ the language of human rights as a vehicle for change because they believed the concept to be corrupted by its connection to anticommunism.

In the 1980s, finally, human rights in the name of political reform came to the fore by way of the peace movement. Increasingly disillusioned
East Germans dropped out of the official social system and created a parallel civil society, at first within the confines of the church. The emergence of an independent peace movement marked the beginnings of an important antipolitical mass movement striving towards disarmament, demilitarization, and environmentalism. While these activists sought to eschew politics, the SED’s refusal to allow for a social sphere outside of party-approved organizations and the ensuing repression by the security services demonstrated to many that political reform was needed even to achieve purely moral goals such as peace or non-political aims such as environmental protection. In 1986, a small group of activists created the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights, and the idea of human rights rapidly became a rallying point for the disparate groups of dissident and disaffected East Germans. These activists invoked human rights not as the antithesis of socialism, but as its true core value, which had been forgotten and abused by the SED.

At the same time, the ideological bulwark of “socialist human rights” crafted by the SED was crumbling. As peace activists were coming together under the banner of human rights, Ideology Minister Kurt Hager attempted to create a socialist version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that could unify the communist world in the face of Western pressure. Despite initial enthusiasm from socialist allies, one country after another pulled out of participating in the Socialist Declaration, because they were scared off by various human rights guarantees contained within the proposed Declaration. In 1988, when human rights was becoming the rallying cry for change across the Eastern Bloc, solidarity amongst communist elites on the matter collapsed, and they abandoned the joint effort to combat the growing movement from within and pressure from without.

In 1989, the intersection of those demanding human rights to obtain a political voice, in order to support democratic reform, and those who demanded human rights in order to be able to leave the GDR combined to create an terminal crisis for the SED. Party elites and loyal intellectuals who had once bought into the concept of socialist human rights that had legitimized the SED dictatorship now turned to the human rights ideals of the dissidents in the hopes of renewing the cause of socialism through the embrace of political and civil rights as well as the rule of law. Human rights served not just to rally a heterogeneous coalition of dissidents but also provided an ideological justification for SED officials who set about dismantling their own political system and abolished the party’s monopoly on
power in response to popular demonstrations and mass emigration. In planning for a new East Germany, the intellectual elites of the GDR actually worked with dissidents to draft a constitution that would secure liberal democratic rights and freedoms alongside rights that would preserve the ideals of the socialist project, including substantive gender equality, strong social and economic rights protections, and greater provisions for direct democracy.

In 1990, however, the shared hopes of dissident activists and pro-reform communists to remake the GDR through this democratic socialist vision of human rights were dashed as the realities of East German economic collapse turned the population away from new utopian ideas. Rather than seeking to achieve the socialist ideal through internal reforms in the GDR, mass support turned towards realizing human rights through reunification with the Federal Republic. The idealistic anticapitalism of the dissidents alienated a population that sought guarantees of both democracy and prosperity through human rights. While the dissidents were successful in ending state-socialist dictatorship through their campaign for human rights, they ultimately failed to expand what they viewed as the narrow and unsatisfactory human rights system of the capitalist West.

V.

This account of East German history challenges the common Helsinki narrative by rethinking the role of human rights in the ideological, political, and social life of the GDR. Most importantly, this interpretation examines human rights as a fluid concept that is both socially constructed and historically contingent. In recent years, some historians have shifted from a focus on origins and discoveries towards a history of political conflict and social construction that seeks to understand what human rights meant to historical figures themselves. At the same time, “critical human rights” scholarship has rejected the concept of human rights as a single unified ideal, and maintained that historians should instead look at the historical contingency of human rights and the diversity of conceptions and practices from a non-teleological, polycentric, and transnational perspective.14 As Jean Quataert has argued, “rights are not self-evident, self-policing, or ethically monolithic; they are historical constructs rooted in struggle and are even at odds with one another.”15

Instead of searching for the moment when human rights were invented, this historical approach focuses on how differing groups

chose to employ the idea of human rights, how it was implemented, and how it was contested over time. According to Upendra Baxi, “the originary narratives that trace the birth of human rights in the Declarations of the Rights of Man need replacement by a history of human rights struggles for human rights futures.”\textsuperscript{16} It is from this same perspective that this article has focused on what problems, ideas, and topics were specifically connected with human rights and what social, political, and cultural function human rights ideas had within the history of the GDR.

Following the Second World War, the meaning of human rights was contested across all of occupied Germany and not just the Soviet Zone. From the perspective of today, the concept of human rights appears inexorably intertwined with the principles of the rule of law and democracy. In the late 1940s, however, the meaning of human rights was far from settled. The SED and its supporters claimed that human rights could only be achieved through the socialist revolution and the imposition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. By contrast, amongst conservatives there were many who saw individual-focused human rights as a root source of totalitarianism and Christianity as the sole path to moral regeneration and authentic human rights. Others saw irredentism and the return of their lost lands in the East as crucial to fulfilling the German people’s right to a \textit{Heimat}.\textsuperscript{17} There were voices calling for political democracy and social justice as a means to realize the cause of human rights, but they represented one interpretation amongst many within Germany alone.

Rather than focusing on moral inspiration, the source of individuals, parties and movements adopting the language of human rights was almost invariably based on the need to demonstrate legitimacy or challenge the legitimacy of opponents in political conflict. The example of the GDR helps to elucidate Costas Douzinas’s argument that “human rights are Janus-like, they carry the dual ability to emancipate and dominate, to protect and discipline.”\textsuperscript{18} Human rights, as a discourse of legitimization, can act to challenge power but they can also sustain it by appeal to higher moral authority. The SED’s embrace of human rights came at times when political pressure inspired the adoption of new discourses. The SED initially co-opted the discourse of human rights through slogans in response to pressure from Social Democrats in 1946. In 1959, in order to attack the West German persecution of the KPD, the SED created the GDR Committee for Human Rights. When the SED sought to gain acceptance from the

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\textsuperscript{18} Costas Douzinas, \textit{The End of Human Rights: Critical Legal Thought at the Turn of the Century} (Portland, 2000), 175.
\end{flushright}
Third World on the international stage, it proclaimed its support of the UN covenants on human rights and, when it wanted recognition from the West, it signed the Helsinki Accords.

Similarly, East Germans adopted the language of human rights as a means to make their case to an unfriendly audience. As the SED sought to impress the world with its activities in support of the UN International Year for Human Rights in 1968, East German citizens used this rhetoric to demand a right to travel, a right to free expression, and increased freedom of conscience and religion. After the Helsinki Accords, its human rights provisions became discursive fodder for those seeking to see loved ones from whom they had been separated since the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Within the East German church, human rights politics were seen as a means to make an active church relevant in the officially atheist GDR. The idea of human rights did not inspire these feelings or demands, but rather created a new vocabulary outside of the normal boundaries created by the SED and a periodic opportunity to effect a new kind of politics.

Instead of seeing human rights as a concept imported wholesale directly from the West, it is important to examine these currents in the broader regional and global context. In seeking legitimacy through human rights, ideas and discourses were borrowed from a wide variety of sources. SED ideology represented a blend of nineteenth-century Western philosophy, Soviet ideology and, importantly, borrowed heavily from contemporary Third World ideas about self-determination and human rights as a weapon against imperialism. East German Protestants were strongly influenced by the work of Christians from the global South through engagement with the ecumenical World Council of Churches. The various dissident movements drew from the ideas and experiences of other Eastern European activists, third-world liberation movements, western NGOs, and even SED propaganda itself. New forms of human rights activism were formed through a constant process of appropriation across borders and ideologies.

From this initial adoption of the discourse of human rights came a transformation: once introduced as a strategy of legitimization, the idea of human rights took on new meanings and social power. In the process of campaigning for human rights, the SED and ordinary East Germans came to internalize the concept and connect their particular beliefs to a broader systemic struggle. What began as a rhetorical strategy came to alter existing political dynamics, as mere slogans
became transformed into statements of belief both by the state and dissidents. The SED’s cynical reaction to Western criticism and opportunism in seeking Third World support led to party officials and bureaucrats coming to identify with the concept of human rights so thoroughly that they could not perceive that their own propaganda and diplomacy posed a potential threat to the established order. For SED officials, East Germany truly was a world leader in the field of human rights. Those seeking to emigrate who had at first simply made a trip to the library to find a new argument for possibly their fifth application to visit family members in the West soon found themselves connecting their personal desire to travel to an universalistic moral system. They were not just demanding to travel; they were invoking their right as a human being to do so. The grassroots activists of the 1980s who looked to the UN documents and the Helsinki Accords for cover to practice the campaign against militarization in schools or environmental devastation began to see themselves as fighting for the right to peace and the right to life. It was the engagement with human rights through political activism that generated genuine belief in the concept of human rights, rather than the other way around.

While human rights did not have a fixed and eternal connection with the cause of democratization and pluralism, the capacity for this discourse to create new spaces for dialogue and activism was crucial to the democratization of East Germany. Usually working from church basements and seeking to avoid the ire of both the clergy and the Stasi, those who sought changes to the status quo in East Germany in the early 1980s were thoroughly fragmented: some sought emigration, others wanted to repair the damage to their local environment; peace activists wanted to demilitarize society; and there also were socialists who thought that they could still achieve the long-dreamed of utopian revolution. The concept of human rights provided an umbrella under which all of these movements could gather, working towards similar goals with varying causes. When an independent human rights movement took shape in the GDR with the creation of the Initiative for Peace and Human rights in 1986, it was composed of a broad coalition of dissidents and the disaffected. International human rights diplomacy and activism did not simply inspire the civic movement or the dissidents, but rather provided a social glue that could hold together the diverse movements that arose organically in response to the failures of real existing socialism in the GDR. Human rights provided a way to move everyday problems from the realm of the particular to the realm of universal principles.
On November 9, 1989, there occurred a remarkable series of events leading to the opening of the Berlin Wall. First, SED spokesman Günter Schabowski appeared to announce the legalization of free travel across the border in a confused press conference. After that, crowds gathered at checkpoints to demand to be allowed to travel to the West. Rather than use deadly force against the crowd, the border guards gave way and simply opened the gates. In the 1960s, the order for guards to shoot to kill at the border legitimized this lethal act as a means to prevent “a crime against the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic, against peace, humanity, and human rights.”

It was a matter of ideology and party dogma for the SED and the East German state apparatus that deadly force could be used against a fleeing human being because to do so ultimately protected the broader cause of human rights. By 1989, however, the party leadership, its bureaucracy, and much of its security services had lost faith in this idea. The dissident conception of human rights had fully displaced the SED’s claims to “socialist human rights.”

The transformation of human rights from a concept that legitimized SED rule and the deadly force required to maintain it into an ideal that fueled the peaceful revolution is too often attributed to impersonal forces and to qualities inherent to the discourse of human rights. In such narratives, the bulldozer logic of human rights toppled the power structure of the GDR by the sheer force of its moral power. Yet, this version not only elides the SED appropriation of human rights, it also diminishes those activists and dissidents who made such a transformation possible. Only by re-imagining the meaning of human rights in the local context and in the vernacular of the GDR were East German human rights activists able to spur on such a movement and effect such immense change. By rethinking human rights as a mutable and evolving concept, we do not undermine its value but restore those who used it so effectively to their rightful place in the history of the German Democratic Republic and its dissolution.

WHY NOT BUY? MAKING THINGS ONESELF IN AN AGE OF CONSUMPTION

Reinhild Kreis
GHI FELLOW IN THE HISTORY OF CONSUMPTION, 2013-14

German teacher J. Elsenheimer was pessimistic about the future. Like many of his contemporaries around 1900, he meticulously observed the profound changes of recent years, and found little that he liked.1 It seemed highly symptomatic to him that

[O]ur boys today don’t have a clue how even the simplest items around them are produced. In my youth, boys used to build their own kites, bows, and whistles. Today one buys these things and does not take good care of them because they only cost a few pennies. Knives are taken away anxiously even from adult students [for fear, R.K.] they might hurt themselves, and these poor boys see their blood shed by just looking at a knife. Overly anxious, they of course act clumsily and then indeed cut themselves.2

In Elsenheimer’s view, purchasing a kite or a whistle was not simply a convenient way of getting a toy. It was a sign of loss and decline. What “real boys” wanted to have, they would make themselves; they would be neither anxious nor helpless or careless. Against this vision of a society of the helpless, spendthrift, ignorant, and, not least, the unmanly, Elsenheimer invoked nostalgic images of his childhood as the “good old days.”

Despite his idealization of the past, Elsenheimer and many who shared his critical stance towards modern practices of consumption pointed at fundamental changes that had come along with those seemingly simple shifts such as the one from building to buying a toy. Elsenheimer associated goods with practices, skills, knowledge, norms, and values. He feared a loss of skills which would leave boys, and later men, helpless, not to mention the spread of anxiety and carelessness in society. Only the return to the old practices of making things oneself, he suggested, would help guarantee the prevalence of norms and values he thought important.

Elsenheimer’s complaint illustrates why consumption was never regarded as a purely private matter but drew the attention of social commentators, social scientists, manufacturers, marketing experts,

environmentalists, and many others. The great interest in consumption is due to its dual function as a “marker” and a “maker,” as historian Heinz-Gerhard Haupt has put it.3 As “markers,” forms of obtaining goods indicate gender, generation, class, norms and values. Consumption practices interrelate with concepts of identities and the social order; they allow for social distinction as well as for communicating belonging to a social group.4 As “makers,” changing modes of consumption involve new professions, markets, and forms of trade.5 Things mediate social relations; they embody skills, knowledge, and practices; they can evoke new practices and make others disappear.6

As markers and makers, forms of consumption both reflect and create structures and ideas that affect large parts of society. The coming of the mass consumer society in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, its breakthrough and further development during the following decades thus involved sometimes heated debates about its impact. In this context, debates about self-made goods in contrast to store bought items, as exemplified in Elsenheimer’s complaint, took place in any modern consumer society in which people could choose from different ways of obtaining goods.

I argue that these debates were fought so heatedly because of the transformative potential ascribed to different forms of obtaining goods in the sense of “make or buy” decisions.7 Preferences such as those revealed in Elsenheimer’s plea for boys to build their own toys are bound up with broader interpretations of the past and the present, and with expectations about the future. The future, from this perspective, is affected and can be changed by how people acquire goods. The nexus between individual forms of obtaining goods and social developments on a larger scale invested these debates with a great sense of urgency for many contemporaries.

Making things oneself as one particular form of obtaining goods in a consumer society has so far been neglected by most historians of modern consumption. While a few studies examine certain practices such as sewing and home-improvement or conflicts such as the debates about the one-kitchen-house,8 they do not inquire into the overall meaning of the prevalence of seemingly outdated practices or their impact on the development of mass consumer society. At first glance, it is a seeming paradox: Why did people choose to make things themselves when they could simply buy most goods or services? In this context, the question “Why not buy?” carries two

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5 Haupt, Konsum und Handel, 110.
meanings. Why did people not simply buy things such as a chair or a cake instead of making them themselves? In stressing the “not,” by contrast, it can also emphasize the opposite: why did people choose to make things themselves instead of purchasing particular goods and services?

The focus of my research project is on practices of “making things oneself,” that is, the production or repair of goods, and their meaning in Germany. This approach allows for connecting users, things, tools, competences, and desires, all of which are crucial in shaping modern consumer society. What things did people make themselves, and how did they do it? How were practices of making things oneself related to social groups in terms of role expectations, identities, and ideas of the social order? These questions are at the center of my project, which covers the 1890s to the 1980s as a period that saw the emergence and breakthrough of modern consumer society in Germany.

While a multitude of other case studies is conceivable for the study of do-it-yourself, this project focuses on two particular fields: home improvement and the preparation of food. Home improvement can be defined as work around the house by private persons in their leisure time, even when other options are available. It encompasses maintenance and repair work, but also renovation and improvement. Dwellings indicate — to differing extents — the status, social relations, and personal taste of their inhabitants, and therefore make an excellent object for the study of social and cultural histories. Food, on the other hand, is not only part of the outside world around us, but is incorporated in and becomes a part of the body. Therefore cultures, societies, and individuals have always been particular about food and its preparation. The common perception that people “are what they eat” and the fact that all societies and cultures attach symbolic meanings to the acquisition, preparation, and consumption of food have made nutrition a preferred field of regulation and intervention for politicians, social scientists, social reformers, nutritionists, and others.

In this article, I will first outline how a focus on “making things oneself” can contribute to social history and the history of consumption. In a second step, I will present some thoughts on why contemporaries thought the “make or buy” decision of consumers so important, and will elaborate on the transformative power that was thought to be inherent in such decisions.
I. Did You Make This Yourself? Norms, Values, and Role Expectations

Elsenheimer’s critical outburst calls our attention to four major perspectives on practices of making things oneself: first, the relation between manufactured and handmade or homemade items; second, the norms and values that are attached to such practices; third, the skills and knowledge necessary to perform such practices; and fourth, the interpretations of what making things oneself meant at a given time.

1. Cross-References

In an age of mass production and consumption, the practice of making things by hand that could easily be purchased must always been seen in relation to store-bought items as well as the services provided by professional carpenters, bakers, tailors, or technicians. Conversely, the hand-made or home-made remained an important point of reference for ready-made items. Marketing firms have continued to advertise products as “better than home-made” or “as good as home-made,” to refer to the joys of making things oneself, or to emphasize how nice it is to not be compelled to make a certain thing by hand but to be able to buy it. When making things oneself, the alternative of buying an item or service is always present. This holds even true for items that cannot be bought because they are not (yet) available in stores, and for those who cannot really choose between buying and making because they lack money or skills. Despite such restrictions, alternative ways of obtaining goods remain present as points of reference. This built-in relational perspective helps to identify and to explain changes in practices and meanings of making things oneself.

It would be wrong to assume a linear development in which making things oneself was simply replaced by market relations. Contradictory tendencies and hybrid forms existed simultaneously, and in many cases the consumption of ready-made items and do-it-yourself practices not only co-existed but correlated with one another. Products such as cake mixes, sewing kits, or wallpaper paste soluble in water eased and sometimes only made possible that people made certain things themselves. As hybrids that left only some steps in the process of production to the customer/maker, practices of both making and buying are inherent to them, thus advancing the intellectual nexus between them.
2. Norms and Values

Individuals are judged and classified according to their decisions whether to make certain things themselves or not. The question “Did you make this yourself?” can provoke either embarrassment or pride. Depending on the context, making things oneself can be seen as adequate or non-adequate behavior. It is expected of certain demographic groups but not of others, as demonstrated in particular by Elsenheimer’s complaint about boys. The consumer and leisure choices associated with practices of making things oneself express norms and values and reveal preferences in the employment of time, money, and material resources. Unlike the boys he criticized, Elsenheimer clearly preferred spending time on something over spending money.

Consumer and leisure choices of this kind can be seen as “moral judgments,” as Mary Douglas has put it, about what constitutes a man or a woman, how children ought to be raised, or how one ought to behave as a member of a certain profession. By indicating norms and values, discourses on and practices of making things oneself reveal changing role expectations and ideas of social order, which are, in turn, related to the material environment. Who is supposed to do what, how, and for which reasons? Ever-changing consumer and leisure choices put norms, values, and role expectations permanently on the negotiating table. New products and modes of production, changing political or economic circumstances, and also shifts in values and attitudes prompted the renegotiation of what making things oneself meant.

3. Skills and Knowledge

Elsenheimer’s fear of lost skills suggests a third point. In his youth, Elsenheimer knew practices that the children of the early twentieth century were never introduced to, or seemed to not care about. Changing circumstances in particular raised questions about which skills one should possess and what one should know, as the example of Erna Barschak, a German emigre to the United States, illustrates. Barschak, a psychologist and vocational training teacher, had fled Nazi Germany in her fifties. Upon her arrival in the United States in 1940, she started looking for a job but had to admit at the employment agency that she was not qualified for taking on a position in a household:

I really did not understand how to do housework. Brought up in the way [in which] upper middle-class German families

in the big cities educate[d] their ‘intellectual’ daughters,’ I had never learned to cook, sew, or (I hesitate to confess this) to clean... Now for the first time I felt how badly prepared we European intellectuals were for living in ‘another world.’ Why had I not learned to keep house, to cook, to sew? I could find a job immediately if only I knew what every woman in the world was supposed to know!13

Americans, on the other hand, were quite handy. Barschak noted carefully that professors, lawyers, and bankers took pride in such tasks and knew how to bake bread, fix the attic, or paint a fence in their leisure time — something unthinkable among German Bildungsburger (educated middle-class) of the time.14 Barschak’s experiences in the United States shook up her ideas about skills she thought certain individuals or groups should possess. Emigrating from Germany to the United States placed her into a new environment where she found herself in a new position: that of a job-seeking immigrant rather than a settled, metropolitan intellectual, and with unfamiliar concepts of appropriate leisure activities. All of a sudden, Barschak felt that skills and the knowledge that had been quite important for her middle-class Berlin life might not be sufficient in America. Nothing in her memoirs says that she finally learned how to keep house or engaged in home improvement, but the quote tells us that she started to re-think what useful skills were.

Changes like a new cultural environment, the invention of new products, the emergence of new ideas (such as environmentalism, socialism, or feminism), generational change, economic upswings and crises, or political change challenge notions of which skills are regarded as useful and which bodies of knowledge one should possess. As with norms and values, individuals had to constantly renegotiate a changing environment. This raises a number of questions, including: How did people acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to make things themselves? What did societies deem important and appropriate for different social groups to know? Who taught such skills and knowledge to whom, and for which reasons? Where and how did Elsenheimer learn how to build a kite or make a whistle, for instance? Did he learn it from his father, other children, a book, or at school? These questions also direct our attention to different learning contexts, including family and friends, formal education, self-education, how-to-books and mass media such as TV shows.

13 Barschak, My American Adventure, 10f.
14 Ibid., 55.
4. Interpretations

The fourth perspective on making things oneself highlights the interpretations of such practices offered by the media, social scientists, marketing experts, pollsters, charities, teachers, representatives of various crafts, and many others. These interpretations must be placed in historical context, not only with regard to their content but also the background of their explanations. Did they follow a social, economic, or political agenda? Which activities and social groups did they focus on? Historicizing the interpretations given over the decades about why people would (not) or should (not) engage in making things themselves adds to our knowledge of norms, values, and concepts of social order that shaped the field of such practices.

Making things oneself, as a practice and as a discourse, stands at the center of three influential categories, all of which have been used to interpret western societies of the twentieth century: consumption, work, and leisure. Andreas Wirsching recently suggested a paradigm shift “from work to consumption,” stating that the prime source of identity no longer is work but consumption. Wirsching raises an issue that gets at the heart of how individuals and social groups make sense of their world and of themselves in a dynamic and complex mixture of practices, possessions, self attributions, and ascriptions by others. By examining practices of making things oneself, I complicate such narratives and seek to show the inconsistencies in the development of modern consumer societies, their complexity, and how the meaning of such practices was constantly renegotiated.

Practices of and discourses on making things oneself do not belong to the realm of wage work; yet in making things oneself, nonprofessionals often perform the work and tasks by which others, such as trained carpenters, tailors, bakers, or computer specialists, make their living. Condemnations of do-it-yourself as illegitimate “black labor” illustrate how hard it is to draw a clear line in this regard. On a more theoretical level, social scientists have long been emphasizing that work and leisure are almost inseparably intertwined with one another. Theodor W. Adorno, for instance, stated that under capitalism...


16 Wirsching, “Konsum statt Arbeit? Vom Wandel von Individualität in der modernen Massengesellschaft,” Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (2009), 171-199. The English version of his article is titled “From Work to Consumption” without the question mark, Contemporary European History 20 (2011), 1-26. The same issue contains a critical comment by Frank Trentmann (pp. 27-33) and a reply to his comment by Wirsching (pp. 33-36). Their brief debate emphasizes the importance of how work, consumption, and leisure interrelate and how their interplay impacts individuals as well as societies.

“free time is the unmediated continuation of labor as its shadow,” and more recently authors like Chris Rojek have stressed the fusion of work and labor and the emotional work in leisure activities.

If we are looking at unpaid activities of nonprofessionals, can practices of making things oneself be described as leisure and an outgrowth of modern “leisure societies”? True, many such activities are pastimes, and their upswing was related to decreasing working hours. Yet how about those who sewed, tinkered, or fixed their attics because they could not otherwise obtain clothing, electronic devices, or more living space, and therefore did not have too much of a choice? The problem of defining practices of making things oneself as leisure becomes obvious when looking at household chores such as cooking and baking. On the one hand, cooking and baking can be hobbies. But they have mostly been domestic obligations and therefore not leisure which is supposed to consist of voluntary activities. On the other hand, women and men responsible for the family meals increasingly had the opportunity to resort to restaurants, delivery services, or convenience food such as canned meals, frozen food, packaged cakes, and the like. Over time, being responsible for the family’s meals was less and less limited to preparing them from scratch but could be handled by opening, heating, or buying. Preparing home cooked and home baked meals became optional. Yet while many women and men kept choosing this option (not least because of cultural norms), the example of homemade food shows the ambiguity of concepts of work and labor. “One person’s leisure is another’s torture” write Joy Beatty and William R. Torbert, suggesting that it is a question of one’s attitudes towards an activity that makes it work or leisure.

The different ways of obtaining a meal direct our attention to consumption as the third category in which to place practices of and discourses on making things oneself. Whereas for many decades it was more expensive to purchase processed food such as cans or pudding, which were therefore considered luxuries, today convenience food is in many cases cheaper than buying fresh ingredients for preparing the same dish from scratch. Making things oneself is both a way of avoiding purchases (of ready-made items) and a reason for buying, be it ingredients for a fresh meal, or be it semi-finished goods like cake mixes that help to make something (at least partially) oneself. In the field of home improvement, jokes are legion about how home improvers spend way more money on equipment and materials (not to mention time) than a prefabricated item or even a professional
handyman would have cost. Making things oneself creates a market — as home improvement centers, home canning devices, or, more recently, the overwhelming success of online-platforms such as Etsy or Dawanda show. But it also still is a way of escaping the consumer society. Alternative groups such as the ecological communities of the 1970s tried to strictly observe a sustainable, eco-friendly lifestyle in the countryside not least by baking their own bread, recycling, and building their own furniture.23

Equally rooted in the spheres of leisure, work, and consumption, practices of and discourses on making things oneself are ideally suited for investigating the contradictory history of the coming of a consumer society characterized by the “availability of things.”24 Looking into both practices and the interpretations that accompanied them allows us to ask how individuals and social groups shaped and were shaped by the emergence of the consumer society. Making things oneself blurs the boundaries of production and consumption, work and leisure, and does not necessarily follow an economic rationality in terms of efficiency.

II. The Power Is in Your Hands— Or Is It? Making Things Oneself and Change

Unlike thinking, writing, or speaking, practices of production or repairing have an immediate, obvious, and visible transformative dimension. If one knew how, one could shape one’s environment according to one’s wishes. This quality is often reinforced by adding notions of time and temporality in the sense of social development.25 An example from the German home improvement journal Selbst ist der Mann illustrates this dimension. In 1960, the journal’s editors commented on the British royal family. Reportedly, Princess Margaret’s butler had refused to help with the expansion of the wine cellar. While the magazine depicted the butler as a hopeless case of “yesterday’s man,” it lauded Princess Margaret’s husband for being a “man of today” since he did not shy away from such work.”26 Here, making things oneself is depicted as inherently modern and progressive, since it corresponded to modern consumer standards as expressed in the idea of remodeling and the willingness to engage in manual labor and therefore practices that the butler seemed to think of as beneath him. Yet the magazine depicted his refusal to help as being outdated and old-fashioned. By helping with the wine cellar, Anthony Armstrong-Jones not only transformed the wine cellar but

25 In this essay, I concentrate on references to the past, present, and future as connected to social development and leave out the related issues of time as a resource, of individual experiences of time while making things oneself, and of individualized time, which are nonetheless of greatest importance to this project.
also himself. In doing so, he became a modern man, a “man of today.” In this perspective, not making things oneself meant sticking to old rules and traditions that had been rendered superfluous or even a little ridiculous.

Being “up to date” was only one way of connecting practices of making things oneself with time. Others focused on the future, regarding traditional forms of how to make things as an important step towards mastering the future, and sometimes as the only way to do so. Depending on which future they thought desirable, their views on making things oneself differed considerably. First, there were those who, like Elsenheimer, wanted the future to look pretty much like an idealized version of the past. Their nostalgic, often highly gendered notions of temporality and social development evoked ideas of a past in which making things oneself not only helped guarantee high quality standards of production and an aesthetically pleasing environment, but also the prevalence of social order including family and other social relations.

Otto Speck, a well-known education researcher and sociologist, for example, compared present with past circumstances in his influential work *Kinder erwerbstätiger Mütter* (Children of working mothers) from 1956. According to Speck, “latchkey kids” were a “contemporary problem.” He felt that latchkey kids lacked maternal care, especially as expressed through home-cooked meals. Speck frequently pointed out that children desperately wished to have lunch prepared and served by their mothers and hated heating up prepared food or eating with their care providers. He concluded that “food prepared and served by the mother herself is of great psychological importance for children,” helping to keep families intact and to prevent juvenile delinquency. The traditional housewife and her cooking as imagined and depicted by Speck and many others guaranteed the social order and the persistence of established gender roles, an order Speck wanted to see retained well into the future. Such notions of making things oneself the traditional way often went hand in hand with nostalgic views of the past and the perception of loss and decline. Implicitly evoking idealized and romantic views of the good old days, Speck and Elsenheimer tried to make sure that the future would look like the past rather than the present.

In contrast to such nostalgic views, a second perspective stressed the potential for change towards a different future that was inherent
in making things oneself. The founding members of the reform colony Monte Verita in Ascona, Switzerland, debated various forms of doing so. They were part of the Lebensreform movement, which tried to improve its members’ physical and mental health by means of a “natural” lifestyle, focusing on topics such as nutrition, clothing, education, and healthcare. Ida Hofmann for example, challenged traditional gender roles by claiming that both women and men could and should saw, smooth boards, cook, and sew. Her fellow founder Karl Gräser even felt that the entire colony should be built by its members without the help of “unnatural” machines.31

Taking up and advancing some of the ideas developed by the Lebensreform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, environmentalists of the 1970s stressed that only making things themselves would save the future by making sure that “at least some beautiful parts of the world could be saved” from destruction, that it was an important “attempt to overcome the [current] crisis,” and was “an appropriate lifestyle in order to secure survival in the long run.”32 Here, notions of limited global resources and, therefore, of limited time lent extra weight to their efforts. Doing work by hand, avoiding consumption, and “going back” to traditional forms of obtaining goods — for example, baking one’s own bread, canning jam, making furniture, repairing and reusing things — constituted both a form of protest against current lifestyles and economic systems and a way of overcoming them. Thus, Rudolf Doernach, author of the two-volume Handbuch für bessere Zeiten [Handbook for better times], spoke of “Forward to nature!” instead of using the common phrase “Back to nature.”33 This phrase makes clear that the future Doernach and others envisioned was to look different from the past. Unlike Elsenheimer and Speck, the Lebensreformer and the environmentalists of the last third of the twentieth century wanted a different, better future. Traditional practices of making things oneself were used to improve and transform ways of living together, of education, economic activity, and so on towards a new and improved society.

Still others claimed the opposite, stating that making things oneself was old-fashioned and outdated and certainly not a way of mastering the future. Already in 1930, Die kluge Hausfrau [The clever housewife], a journal provided by Edeka, a large German supermarket corporation, wrote about hand-made pasta as if it was an old fairy-tale:

31 Andreas Schwab, Monte Verità — Sanatorium der Sehnsucht (Zurich, 2003), 85, 94. Gräser, however, did not succeed and left Monte Verità soon afterwards.
“In the past, in the old days, women stood in the kitchen and prepared their pasta dough more or less successfully themselves." This old-fashioned way of making pasta was not necessary any longer, the author claimed. Nowadays one could buy pasta at the Edeka store that was just as good as the home-made version. Doing otherwise would be a waste of time and energy.

Such references to an an “outdated” way of doing things often came with a degree of condescension, as a 1969 advertisement for salad sauce from Kraft Foods (Germany) illustrates. “Mother still took cilantro,” the headline read. Nowadays, preparing salad was so much easier, the text explained, since one did not have to worry about complicated seasoning anymore, and it made the housewife independent of seasons and the availability of certain herbs and spices. Around the same time, Kraft Foods started a large, multi-year campaign targeting the younger generation as future customers of their products. In full-page advertisements in the well-known youth magazine Bravo, the fictional character Cherry, a young girl, talked about episodes from her life that always included references to Kraft products, usually by making a little fun of how unnecessarily complicated things had been in the days of her grandmother and by emphasizing how modern and convenient using Kraft products was.

Buying what used to be self-made was a sign of progress and modernity, these examples suggest, and it set the “modern” present or future apart from the past. The same narrative can be found in stories about of people who made things themselves when they either did not (yet) have the money to buy them or the items were not available, thus compensating for their lack of money or the general scarcity with their skills. Sometimes makers of such items tried to hide the items’ being hand made, trying to make them look mass-produced and store-bought. Such attempts could be described as anticipations of the future. Being handy gave people the power to bridge the time until they had more money, or until certain items became available in stores. Here, references to the temporal dimension indicate a past that had been or had to be overcome. To be free to not make something oneself was seen as a liberating or even emancipatory act. It meant independence from time-consuming duties and material shortages.

These few spotlights illustrate the importance of situating forms of making things oneself in time. While my remarks are only cursory
and each of the examples mentioned above deserves further contextualization and interpretation, they show how references to time in connection with questions of making things oneself worked. The consumer and leisure choices inherent in decisions about what to make oneself were credited with transformative power and the potential to overcome the present, to promote an alternative future, or to reclaim the past. “The power is in your hands,” claim Amy Carlton and Cinnamon Cooper, co-founders of the “DIY Trunk Show,” in their “Craftifesto” of 2008: “We’re not just trying to sell stuff. We’re trying to change the world.”

References to temporal categories therefore not only helped individuals position themselves in time but also to indicate their mastery of challenges in the transformation of the material environment and the self. Discourses on what to make oneself and what not to, and on the necessary skills and techniques, are used to communicate technological, cultural, and social — sometimes political — developments in terms of progress or regression: what can/must/should one make oneself now/still/not anymore?

Of course, marketing firms, as well as protest groups, social scientists, and pedagogues, used references to the past, present, and future as arguments to legitimize the choices they advocated and to “sell” them. But whether used deliberately or not, references to time and the positioning of consumer and leisure choices in a temporal framework offer insights into mechanisms of “making sense” of a world of choices in a given economic, cultural, social, and political situation. Temporal references allow for a comparative perspective and therefore for structuring time as well as society, and for positioning oneself or others in them. Taking into account the practices of making things oneself, their technical and training requirements, and the meanings attached to them offers new insights into the periodization of consumer societies in which various options of how to obtain goods existed simultaneously and continuously yet with shifting meanings.

The slogan “The power is in your hands” draws attention to questions of power inherent to practices of making things oneself. Does making things oneself really always indicate power? Depending on the context, making things oneself can open up or close off the reach and flexibility of the individual or social groups. To be sure, it can hold emancipatory power. Being able to make things oneself can reduce dependency. It means that an
individual or a group possess certain skills and knowledge and are capable of applying them. Products play an important role in this. Studies on home improvement have shown that the invention of new products led to a democratization of competence. However, marketers sometimes also purposefully try to undermine people’s confidence in their abilities to prevent them from doing things themselves. Food producers such as manufacturers of baby foods have employed such strategies in their advertisements in order to sell their products, for example stating that “no mother could make it better.”

At times, however, the ability (and monetary means) to buy rather than make something can be liberating. Having to do things oneself can narrow and severely constrain one’s spheres of activity. As an obligation it can be limiting, especially when alternatives are available in principle. States, families, and social scientists such as Otto Speck have sought to discipline and control women by imposing the duty of running the household on them, including the preparation of family meals, not least by connecting cooking to the psychological and physical health of both the family and society.

Are home improvement activities, one can further ask, really (only) an expression of power and the ability to change one’s environment, if it is “expected leisure” for men, as Steven Gelber has put it? Therefore, the opportunity not to make things oneself can also indicate emancipation. In these cases, power is only to a very limited extent “in your hands” since here power derives precisely from not using one’s hands for cooking, sewing, or working around the house but for dining out, opening a can, paying for clothes, or calling a plumber.

Concluding Remarks

Since the mid-2000s, references to past forms of making things oneself are again omnipresent. The “rediscovery” of “forgotten” or “neglected,” alleged or real “traditional” techniques and skills attracts attention not only in the media and among social scientists but also among economic actors. Online-marketplaces for hand-made items such as Etsy or Dawanda are highly successful, as are do-it-yourself-magazines, shows, and fairs. Phenomena like urban gardening, knitting men, repair cafes, or “the new domesticity” of women who leave their well-paid jobs in order to bake and sew in the countryside have led to heated debates about their meaning.

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41 See, for example, the advertisements of Alete and Herhana in the German women’s magazine Brigitte (March 1962): 43, 60.

42 Speck, Kinder erwerbstätiger Mutter, 20, 45, 54; Schlegel-Mathies, Im Haus und am Herd.

43 Steve Gelber, Hobbies, Leisure and the Culture of Work in America (New York, 1999), 268 ff.
and impact: Are the new crafting, gardening, and cooking movements expressions of a new feminism that reclaims traditional techniques, or are they a new and subtle form of oppression? Do repair cafes, crafting centers, and community gardens help to change the economic system and consumerist lifestyle, and to overcome the throwaway society? Are they just another variety of capitalism?

To this day, making things oneself is not simply a vestige of older times and it is not likely to disappear in the near future. Utopian ideas about a future in which no one would have to do things like build, cook, and sew themselves have not been fulfilled, not least because many people continue to deliberately make things themselves. It seems that many people find it either undesirable to not make things themselves, or (economically) necessary to make things themselves. Researching the reasons behind this and approaching the field of making things oneself as a set of practices and mindsets as well as a market allows for fascinating insights into continual shifts in practices and skills and the renegotiation of their meaning. It challenges notions of the linear development of societies into consumer societies by highlighting the contradictions, continuities, and processes of mastering, initiating, and “making sense” of change.

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Conference Reports
STUDYING THE HISTORY OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND THE HOLOCAUST: TOWARD AN AGENDA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Conference at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and at the German Historical Institute, Washington DC, January 23-24, 2014. Conveners: Stefan Hördler (GHI) and Leah Wolfson (USHMM). Participants: Natalia Aleksiun (Touro College), Frank Bajohr (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich / Center for Holocaust Studies), Hartmut Berghoff (GHI), Richard Breitman (American University), Michael Brenner (American University), Christopher Browning (University of North Carolina), Anna Cichopek-Gajraj (Arizona State University), Wendy Lower (Claremont McKenna College), Jürgen Matthäus (USHMM), Mark Roseman (Indiana University), Jonas Scherner (NTNU Trondheim), Paul Shapiro (USHMM), Sybille Steinbacher (University of Vienna), Michael Wildt (Humboldt University Berlin), and Andreas Wirsching (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich).

Research on the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust has spawned an ever-increasing variety of new studies. It was the goal of this conference to discuss current and future directions, topics, and methods relevant to studying the Holocaust and the Nazi era, including: economic and social history; the history of everyday life; the impact of ideology, racism, and gender; perpetrators, society, and Europe in a cross-border context; as well as the postwar legacies of Nazism and the Holocaust. The program brought together a diverse group of approximately twenty scholars from the United States and Europe, including representatives of the GHI and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Presentations by senior and mid-career scholars in a series of panels and roundtable discussions culminated in a roundtable presentation that was open to the general public.

The conference convened at the USHMM on the first day. In his opening comments, Paul Shapiro emphasized the international and interdisciplinary character of the field, contrasted the numerous research questions with the nearly unmanageable body of sources, and called attention to the restrictions on access to sources in the European Union.

The first panel, “The Economic and Social History of National Socialism,” began with Frank Bajohr and Jonas Scherner, whose presentations featured different approaches. Bajohr argued that recent
research had given rise to a new assessment of entrepreneurs’ intentions and individual room for maneuver in the Nazi era. Numerous case studies on the history of various companies, he noted, have provided new insights into the Nazi economic system, including the question of political and economic priorities and interests. The value of ongoing studies also lies in the analysis of social practices in the interactive field of economy and society. Economic reasoning and doctrine derived from people’s worldview explain dynamics within the Volksgemeinschaft, from the “Aryanization” of companies classified as Jewish to plunder and genocide. Bajohr saw deficits primarily in transnational research and the European dimensions of profit and profiteers, confiscation, and restitution.

Scherer highlighted the use of combined macro- and micro-studies, which have enabled a better understanding of the economic order of National Socialism. He emphasized four points: First, there are still significant gaps in the study of the macroeconomic contexts of the Nazi war economy; the apparent “production miracle” of the Nazi era, in particular, needs to be critically examined using reliable quantitative data. The gaps in the historiography are related to a lack of reliable data. Secondly, an assessment of the German war economy in terms of its success or failure can only be arrived at by comparing the German war economy with other war economies during the Second World War. Third, the debate over the “room-for-maneuver” available to businessmen in the Nazi period requires further comparative studies. Fourth, there are still large gaps in the historical research on the Nazi economic exploitation of occupied countries during the war.

In his comment, Hartmut Berghoff largely agreed with both presentations and noted two major gaps in recent research: archives at foreign companies are still sealed and not accessible, and there are many blank spots in the research on German occupied countries. Moreover, there is still a need to focus more on the business practices, rather than the political affiliation, of German companies. Moreover: where are the stories of Nazi-era businessmen who were unsuccessful? The criminal practices and non-compliance of companies could also be promising topics, and white-collar crime needs further examination. The ensuing discussion of the papers generated a differentiated understanding of the concepts of perpetrator and bystander and an expansion of the categories of “parasite vs. profiteer.” In addition, the discussion problematized the relationship between pragmatism and ideology.
The second panel, on “History of Everyday Life,” featured papers by Natalia Aleksiun and Mark Roseman. Focusing on Jewish everyday life, Aleksiun advocated a shift in perspective so that Jews are no longer only viewed as persecuted persons from the perspective of Nazi sources but rather, drawing on Jewish sources, as an active community. Such an approach would restore Jews to the status of subjects rather than objects of scholarly study. It would also mean turning to microhistory and integrative perspectives. Seemingly trivial aspects of daily life like eating and sleeping, she argued, can provide new insights into the structures and routines of everyday life, in which regional, temporal, social, and gender differences play decisive roles.

In his paper, Mark Roseman argued for critical reflection on the concept of everyday life and called for making a distinction between “ordinary” everyday life and the extraordinary, exceptional everyday life of the Holocaust experience. From the vantage point of the former, the Holocaust is barely comprehensible; the latter was what living in the Holocaust was like. The concept of Alltagsgeschichte, Roseman argued, denotes three interlinked agendas: a locus of inquiry, a method or set of assumptions that structure that inquiry, and a mission that drives it. None of these translate easily into the Holocaust context. “Everyday history” is very much a part of social history and reflects the cultural turn of the 1980s. “Everyday” is especially interesting because the “everyday” changed so drastically in the prewar period. Everyday history should be about reclaiming history from memory, and it should also focus on the history of emotion.

In her commentary, Leah Wolfson emphasized that the sources themselves are responsible for the sharply varying impressions and interpretations of the “everyday.” In addition, depending on the time and place, it is unclear what a or the everyday really was. The discussion that followed focused on the problem areas of collective vs. collected memory, “constructed memory,” and the relationship between individual and collective daily life. In order for a history of emotion to contribute to resolving these issues, it would be necessary to apply an interdisciplinary expansion of methods for which historiography lacks appropriate means.

On the second day, the conference continued at the German Historical Institute. Wendy Lower opened the third panel on the “Impact of Ideology, Racism, and Gender” by calling for a differentiation of perpetrator categories based on gender. The various roles performed by women during the Nazi period — as wives, nurses, or camp guards,
for example — as well as the degree to which women identified with the *Volksgemeinschaft*, Lower argued, deserve greater consideration within the analysis of perpetrator testimonies. Lower also problematized the question of specific masculine and feminine forms of violence and advocated a differentiated discussion about the concept of “gendered violence” in the context of violence studies that would also address the period after 1945.

In the panel’s second paper, Sybille Steinbacher emphasized the need to make women visible as active agents with important functions within the power structures of the system. Established research questions on National Socialist ideology and racism should be reconfigured to include the category of gender and expanded to encompass a gender history of persecution. In addition to focusing more on the participation of women in violent crimes, especially in the occupied Eastern territories, and the interaction between female victims and female perpetrators during the war years, research needs to examine the way the justice system handled these issues after the war. In this context, special emphasis should be accorded to the discourse of innocence as it figured in the identity construction of the accused female perpetrators and in the latter’s perception by other subjects.

In his comment Richard Breitman welcomed the turn to previously neglected research areas, although he added critically that the productivity of the research question depends to a great extent on the availability of sources. The historical discipline should not close itself off from dialogue with the general public, Breitman advised, but rather follow the path opened up by Lower and Steinbacher.

The fourth panel addressed the topic of “Perpetrators, Society, and Europe in a Cross-Border Context.” In the first paper, Christopher Browning argued that perpetrator categories ought to convey causal relations as well as the diversity of historical experience in a nuanced way. Alongside German perpetrators, the Nazis also mobilized ethnic Germans and Eastern Europeans, who acquired power and status in an unsystematic, unorganized manner, thereby eventually profiting from the Holocaust. Browning concluded by questioning whether the KGB files were valid sources for a reassessment of perpetrator classifications and called for stronger ties between Holocaust and genocide research because the Holocaust and other genocides have two things in common: the dehumanization of the victims and the perpetrators’ drive to conform within their peer group.
In the panel’s second paper, Michael Wildt noted the far-reaching effects that the opening of Eastern European archives has had on research, expanding perspectives on the “middle men” of the Holocaust and fostering the turn away from the longstanding fixation on the final solution. He questioned the applicability of the definition of genocide set forth in the Genocide Convention in the 1990s to the Holocaust, because the Holocaust was not only willed by the state but also rooted in society and in social practice. According to Wildt, three new research approaches to perpetrator studies hold particular promise: First, the opening up of the triad of perpetrator — follower — victim in consideration of the complexity and mutual penetration of the categories; second, embedding the Holocaust in the history of violence of the twentieth century in the regional context of the “bloodlands”; and, third, a systematic comparison of the Holocaust with other genocides.

In his comment on this panel, Stefan Hördler took up a central theme of the previous discussions by interpreting the opening of the archives in the East as an opportunity, emphasizing the value of visual materials for analyzing perpetrators’ motives and networks. He also argued that in refining and revising perpetrator categories historians need to pay attention to gray areas and inconsistencies. Hördler thus argued for a dynamic conception of perpetrator typology, which is necessary in view of the study of perpetrators’ motives.

The fifth panel, “The Postwar Legacy of National Socialism and the Holocaust,” turned to the postwar period. In the first paper, Anna Cichopek-Gajraj stressed that Jewish life in Eastern Europe did not come to an end with the Holocaust. Yet the research literature on the period between the 1950s and 1990s does not appropriately reflect this circumstance. The postwar identities of Jewish survivors in Poland must be given greater attention by means of a stronger turn to local and comparative approaches on the contingency of their experience. Three aspects warrant particular attention in researching the postwar period: the coexistence of Jewish and non-Jewish people in everyday life, the assimilation of women, and the meaning of concepts of identity as a “survivor.”

In the following paper, Andreas Wirsching posed the question of the extent to which the popularity of presenting the Holocaust as a metaphor for “evil” contains the danger of reducing the Holocaust to a projection screen for empty and unreflected memorializing. Outdated approaches to explaining the Holocaust are thus presently experiencing
a revival in the public’s collective memory, a revival fostered by the internationalization and universalization of the Holocaust. Wirsching warned that this discrepancy between the historiographical treatment of the Holocaust and public historical consciousness could grow. He closed by calling for more critical attention to the problems of “commissioned research” on the history of companies, agencies, and ministries during the Nazi era.

In his commentary, Michael Brenner examined the dichotomy between historiography and discourses of collective memory; he also problematized the “survivor” concept. In postwar Poland, a comparatively high number of Jewish communities existed, but the history of victimization and the history of the contributions of these survivors, particularly in the 1950s, remain to be adequately addressed. Agreeing with Wirsching, Brenner also criticized commissioned research for its potential lack of innovation and transparency.

The concluding presentation, which featured Frank Bajohr, Christopher Browning, and Wendy Lower, presented the central insights of the conference to a broader public and highlighted the issue of access to sources on both sides of the Atlantic.

Stefan Hördler (GHI) and Julia Lange (AICGS)
ARCHIVAL SUMMER SEMINAR IN GERMANY 2014

Seminar in Germany, June 22 - July 4, 2014. Convener: Mark R. Stoneman (GHI). Participants and their dissertation topics: Curran Egan (McMaster University), "Gender and Justice in Nazi Germany"; Peter Gengler (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), "Flight and Expulsion from the ‘Lost German East’: the Creation, Instrumentalization and Institutionalization of a Master Narrative, 1944-1975"; Sebastian Huebel (University of British Columbia), "Stolen Manhood? The Emasculation of German-Jewish Men in the Third Reich, 1933-1945"; Steve McClellan (University of Toronto), "The Optic of German Civil Society: Debates on Politics, Economics and Social Reform in the Verein für Sozialpolitik"; Katya Mouris (Catholic University of America), "From Reform to Reformation: Caritas Pirckheimer and the Convent of St. Klara, Nuremberg, late 1490s-1532"; Josh Sander (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), "The Greater Germanic Reich: Nazification and the Creation of a New Dutch Identity in the Occupied Netherlands"; Sari Siegel (University of Southern California), "Medicine Behind Barbed Wire: Jewish Prisoner-Physicians in Nazi Labor, Concentration, and Extermination Camps in the Greater German Reich, 1938-1945"; David Spreen (University of Michigan), "Forward in the Spirit of Ernst Thälmann: Weimar Communism and the West German Left"; Carolyn Taratko (Vanderbilt University), "Energy, State and Society in Nineteenth-Century Germany"; Holly Yanacek (University of Pittsburgh), "Emotional Communities in the History and Literature of Wilhelmine Germany at the Fin de Siècle."

In what is now a twenty-two-year-old tradition at the GHI, with a twenty-third year in preparation, ten young scholars traveled to Germany from Canada and the United States to begin a new stage in their doctoral programs — learning how to use German archives and read German sources. To some extent, the ten applicants accepted into this program reflect current historiographical trends in German history: four of their projects are firmly rooted in the National Socialist period; two are devoted to the period after World War II, but are framed to transcend the 1945 boundary, whether reaching back to the end of the war or to politics in the Weimar era; two projects deal with the nineteenth century (one of them in German Studies rather than history); another bridges the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; one project is situated near the beginning of the early modern period. This chronological distribution also evinces exceptions to broader trends in the academy. The post-World War II era was represented
less strongly than it seems to be at doctoral programs at the moment. Furthermore, there were no students focusing on the GDR or doing an explicitly German-German comparison along the lines of the first books by Uta Poiger and Frank Biess (an alumnus of the GHI archive seminar). On the other hand, having three dissertations that focused on or included the nineteenth century was perhaps a happy exception to the current disfavor in which the nineteenth century seems to find itself.

Of course, the temporal context of the proposals had nothing to do with the selection of the archive seminar participants. Besides the extensive criteria listed in the call for applications and the need for excellent German (the course is held in German), the selection hinged on the quality of project exposés, including, for example, the questions being asked, the historiography with which the project will be in conversation, and how this might work in Germany’s archives, many of which now offer at least some useful information about their holdings online.

One might wonder why PhD students with such extensive qualifications and experience would need such a program. One major issue is the old German script, which only archivists, historians, and very old Germans can read. Even scholars working in the post-World War II era need to learn this script because sources relevant to them were often written by people who learned to write long before this period, and typewritten sources often still contain important handwritten comments. If students learn this handwriting after or just before their comprehensive exams, they are able to make far better use of their limited research time in Germany.

Of course, there are old schoolbooks with which historians can also prepare themselves. Nonetheless, reality frequently diverges from such norms. Thus, taking such a course is necessary because it provides insight into the scripts’ various manifestations in real life across time. Our teacher was the archivist and historian Walter Rummel, who directs the Landesarchiv (state archive) in Speyer. This was his twentieth year in a twenty-two-year-old program. Besides teaching old German script with verve, Dr. Rummel helped participants to decode the scrawl added to the documents in the course of their bureaucratic processing. He also began an important conversation about how files come to be in his archives — or become damaged or destroyed instead.

The challenging mental journey into German paleography began with Süttterlin (the last iteration of old German handwriting), then moved
quickly to Kurrent (Kurrentschrift or Alte Deutsche Schrift), where we spent the most time. There were also examples of highly individualized handwriting from the early twentieth century, as well as a taste of sixteenth-century script. Surprisingly, the latter was easier to read than the former in some ways because the officials who produced it wrote more consistently and neatly, albeit with different spelling, expressions, and grammar than we know from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of course, the one early modernist in the group received additional examples of the latter. The group spent mornings with paleography, and it met on two afternoons to present and discuss each other’s dissertation projects. Thursday evening, our last in the town, was spent at a beer garden on the Rhine with our instructor.

The group left Speyer on Friday afternoon and spent the weekend in Cologne. From there, the second portion of our trip — focusing on research institutions in Germany — began in earnest. During the course of the week we visited the Federal Archive (Bundesarchiv) in Koblenz, the Restoration and Digitization Center of the Cologne Historical Archive, the Munich City Archive (Stadtarchiv München), the Munich Digitization Center (MDZ), and the Main Bavarian State Archive in Munich (Hauptstaatsarchiv). One weakness of this year’s program was the absence of non-governmental archives, although some students were able to visit the Institute for Contemporary History (IfZ) and the Dachau Concentration Camp on their own in Munich. In line with the ongoing question of how materials came to be in specific archives, students learned about privacy law and about the two principals of archival organization: topic and jurisdiction.

All of the people we worked with were hospitable and helpful. Students were able to gain a better appreciation for how files came to be in these specific archives and how to look for files in them. At the same time, some grew impatient with the interesting tours of the stacks because they really wanted to get their hands on the sources. Of course, knowing how things work behind the scenes can help the scholar understand better how the whole system works in terms of its path dependencies and (im)practicalities, but scholars embarking on a dissertation will not always appreciate this perspective sufficiently until they are much deeper into their research. Be that as it may, we were all especially grateful to Monika von Walter in the Bavarian Hauptstaatsarchiv because she had read everyone’s project expose ahead of time and had pulled possibly relevant source material from the stacks for each student to examine. She gave the students plenty
of time to look at this material before we toured a couple select destinations of her archive. Having documents in hand is the kind of thing that gets any researcher excited, but especially the researcher embarking on a history dissertation.

In Munich, the group also attended a seminar given by two people close to finishing their own Ph.D’s. Noria Litaker, an alumnus of the GHI’s 2012 seminar, offered great practical information about registering to work in archives, taking into account the country’s very diverse landscape, and human interactions with archivists. She was able to tell the North American students things they needed to know that a German archivist or even a North American professor would be unable to. In addition, Christiane Sibille, who has long been active with the digital side of studying history, acquainted us with the ever-growing number of digital resources in German-speaking Europe for academic research.

This year’s seminar had one unusual feature: the World Cup was playing on television screens at outdoor cafés, in beer gardens, and on public squares. It was impossible to ignore the enthusiastic crowds during the Germany games, especially since our own group contained some big Germany fans. Fortunately, there were no schedule conflicts with our seminar events, although the reservation for our final dinner at a Munich restaurant, Hofer der Stadtwirt, had to be moved up an hour to accommodate that day’s Germany game.

Whether they loved, hated, or were indifferent to soccer, the Ph.D. students got to know each other pretty well during these two weeks, both personally and professionally. They formed networks that will be there for them in Germany when their research begins in earnest, and many of these connections will last much longer than that. In fact, I have already been able to see manifestations of these relationships on social media. This is important because scholarship depends not only on individuals’ research and writing, but also communication, cooperation, and discussion.

Mark R. Stoneman (GHI)
BOSCH FOUNDATION ARCHIVAL SUMMER SCHOOL FOR JUNIOR HISTORIANS 2014: AMERICAN HISTORY IN TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Archival Summer School in Chicago, Madison, Boston, and Washington DC, September 1-12, 2014. Co-organized by the GHI Washington, the University of Chicago’s Department of History, and the Newberry Library, with the generous support of the Robert Bosch Foundation. Convener: Mischa Honeck (GHI). Participants: Daniel A. Elkan (Bowling Green State University), Stefan Laffin (University of Bielefeld), Todd Barnett (University of Missouri), Christian Zech (Technical University of Berlin), Amy Coombs (University of Chicago), Philipp Wendler (Hamburg University), Johanna Ortner (University of Massachusetts), Jan Hildenhagen (University of Bochum), Elizabeth Stack (Fordham University), Felix Lütte (Humboldt University, Berlin).

The Bosch Foundation Archival Summer School for Young Historians convened for the second time under its new name in September 2014. Once again the tour spanned four cities (Chicago, Madison, Boston, and Washington DC), and the ten seminar participants from Germany and the United States were introduced to the holdings and policies of a broad spectrum of American archives and research libraries. The goal of the seminar was to prepare doctoral students from both countries working in diverse fields of American history for their prospective research trips; to teach them how to contact archives, use finding aids, and identify important reference tools; and to help them gain a greater appreciation of the various kinds of archives and special collections located in the United States.

The Bosch Foundation Archival Summer School 2014 began with a historic walking tour of downtown Chicago on Labor Day, September 1. The following day was spent at the University of Chicago, where Professor Jane Dailey hosted the traditional thesis workshop. The seminar participants, grouped into five transatlantic tandems consisting each of one German and one American student, commented on the work of their respective partners, exposed their projects to academic scrutiny, and received valuable feedback from their peers. On Wednesday, September 3, the Seminar met Diane Dillon, Acting Vice President of the William M. Scholl Center of American History and Culture at the Newberry Library, for a daylong introduction to the institute’s collections as well as for a general overview of American
archival policies and practices. Among the topics discussed were the purchase of rare books, how to browse manuscript collections, the expedience of maps for historical research, and the opportunities and pitfalls of digitalization. On Thursday morning, before the group departed for Madison, Wisconsin, the Bosch Archival Seminar visited the Cook County Court Archives. Archivist Phil Costello pulled a selection of spectacular items from the Court’s archival collections to demonstrate the breadth of legal sources that can be used for all kinds of history.

Our first destination in Madison was the Wisconsin State Historical Society, where chief archivist Michael Edmonds welcomed the Seminar participants on the morning of September 5. He spoke about the history and holdings of their institution within the broader context of American state historical societies and impressed the students with the Wisconsin State Historical Society’s dedication to accessibility and public education. After that, time was set aside for individual research before the group reassembled at the local University of Wisconsin history department for a roundtable talk with Steven Kantrowitz, Adam Nelson, and Thomas Archdeacon on doing U.S. history from a European perspective. The participants weighed in on the question to what extent locality and national origin mattered in the writing of national histories, making all kinds of connections to their own work.

On Saturday evening, September 6, the group arrived in Boston, the third stop on our itinerary. On the following morning, the participants got a chance to witness public history in action with a guided tour of the Freedom Trail. The rest of the day was free for recreation and individual explorations. On Monday, September 8, the Bosch Archival Summer School 2013 resumed at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library at Columbia Point. Enjoying a two-and-a-half hour tour of the museum and library archives, including the Ernest Hemingway Collection, under the supervision of Stephen Plotkin, the group benefited from staff presentations on audiovisuals, declassification, and the library’s manuscript collections and oral history program. The day concluded with a visit to the Massachusetts Historical Society in downtown Boston. Public Relations Director Kathleen Barker and members of the staff acquainted the students with the wealth of the Society’s holdings, which touch upon almost every issue pertaining to the history of the state from colonial times to present-day America. The Bosch Archival Summer School continued at Harvard University
the next morning. Our first stop was the Schlesinger Library, one of the leading U.S. research facilities for women’s history. Head librarian Ellen Shea showed and explained letters, pamphlets, books, and visual material related to topics ranging from domesticity and black women to the female suffrage movement. The final destination on our Boston schedule was Houghton Library, where Peter Accardo walked the group through the library’s precious Early Americana collections and gave valuable advice on how to use them for various research agendas.

After reaching Washington DC late in the afternoon of Tuesday, September 9, the Summer School resumed the following day at the Library of Congress. A guided tour of the Jefferson Library was followed by a presentation from archivist Bruce Kirby, who spoke to the participants about the breadth of manuscript collections available through the Library of Congress’ Manuscript Division. The group then put in a stop at the Prints and Photographs Division, where Sara Duke and her coworkers showcased illustration samples related to the participants’ individual projects, underscoring the significance of visual material for historical research. In the afternoon, the group met Ida Jones, curator at Howard University’s Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, who introduced the participants to the Center’s remarkable array of collections on African American history and culture.

On Thursday, September 11, the group visited the Smithsonian’s National Museum for American History. Craig Orr, one of the museum’s veteran curators, spent time with the students to talk about ways in which everyday objects from the realms of technology to fashion can enrich historical research. Next, Executive Director James Grossman and Special Projects Coordinator Emily Swafford hosted a brown-bag lunch for the group at the Washington headquarters of the American Historical Association (AHA). They drew the students into a vibrant debate over the ethical stakes involved in the study and teaching of history, touching on issues of plagiarism, civility, access to sources, trust, and truth-claims. Following this fruitful discussion, the Summer School put in a final stop at the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA I). Historian Richard McCulley welcomed the group and introduced them to the structure of the National Archives and ways to access source material pertaining to the different branches of government. In the afternoon, the group met for a wrap-up discussion at the German Historical Institute. They were greeted by Deputy Director Britta
Waldschmidt-Nelson, whose presentation focused on the institute’s work, research projects, as well as on the many fellowship and networking opportunities available at the GHI. The farewell dinner that evening concluded a successful Summer School. All participants were grateful for the useful information, contacts, and prospects for future collaboration the program had opened up for them.

Mischa Honeck (GHI)
SHADY BUSINESS: WHITE-COLLAR CRIME IN HISTORY

Conference at the GHI Washington, September 18-20, 2014. Co-sponsored by the Said Business School at the University of Oxford. Conveners: Edward Balleisen (Duke University), Hartmut Berghoff (GHI), Christopher McKenna (University of Oxford). Participants: Gavin Benke (Southern Methodist University), Susanna Blumenthal (University of Minnesota), Oliver Buxton-Dunn (European University Institute, Florence), Jonathan Coopersmith (Texas A&M University), Neil Fligstein (University of California, Berkeley), Corey Goettsch (Emory University), William J. Hausman (College of William & Mary), Matthew Hollow (Durham University), Gisela Hürlimann (GHI/ETH Zurich), Annika Klein (Goethe University Frankfurt), Michael Kwass (Johns Hopkins University), William A. Pettigrew (University of Kent), Mitt Regan (Georgetown University), Arjan Reurink (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Science, Cologne), Anna Rothfuss (Technical University of Darmstadt), Malcolm Salter (Harvard Business School), Llerena Searle (University of Rochester), Uwe Spiekermann (GHI), Mark Stoneman (GHI), James Taylor (Lancaster University), Thomas Welskopp (University of Bielefeld).

White-collar crime is different: it is nonviolent, financially motivated, and committed by professional elites. For a long time, executive and judicial officials treated it less rigidly than offenses against persons or the state. But this changed more than a decade ago, namely with the 2002 U.S. Sarbanes-Oxley Act. The first panel, “Toward a Theory of Economic Crime,” offered definitions and key terms for the conference and placed all contributions within the framework of current research. In his talk, “Organized Crime or Criminal Organizations? An Attempt at Systematic Differentiation,” Thomas Welskopp noted that there is no consensus on a definition of “economic crime.” Edwin Sutherland’s 1939 definition of white-collar crime as “a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation” is often quoted but does not really distinguish white-collar crime from other forms, namely from “organized crime.” The latter can be defined as “the organized illegal economic activities of a group or network of perpetrators” or as the “illegal economic activities of criminal organizations.” Welskopp argued in favor of a clear distinction between “economic crime,” “organized crime,” and “criminal organization”; without such a distinction, public discussion and legal responses become ineffective. Arjan Reurink’s contribution, “Financial Crime: A Literature Review,”
started with the changed public perception of the financial sector after the global financial crisis of 2007–2008. The rapidly expanding literature on financial crime has shifted from a criminological and sociological understanding of white-collar crime to an economic analysis of the distinctive role of financial markets in post-1970s capitalism, especially in the context of deregulation under Reagan and Thatcher and after the end of the Cold War. Reurink pleaded for the recognition of the inherently criminogenic nature of contemporary financial capitalism: financial crime is triggered by the rise of arbitrage finance, the increasingly complex nature of modern financial services, and the parallel, mostly successful, efforts of market participants to decriminalize their previously illegal conduct. The first day of the conference ended with a well-attended public panel discussion. Joel Kirsch (Siemens USA) and Don Langevoort (Georgetown University) spoke on “Fighting White-Collar Crime in the Twenty-First Century.” They discussed the fundamental changes in how corporate economic crime, predominantly in the United States, has been treated and gave detailed insights into the motives of the key actors: corporations, lawyers, and the nation-state. Moderated by Hartmut Berghoff and Christopher McKenna, the panel discussion examined the changes in prosecuting economic crime in the context of the more general trends of globalization, taxation, debt-creation, and the crisis of the modern nation-state.

The scholarly discussion continued with the second panel, on “Conceptualizing Business Fraud.” This conceptualization is crucial because public and academic discourse on white collar crime often present individual stories but lack any convincing macro-analysis. In their joint paper on “Dodgy Business within the Long Arc of Capitalism: A Historical Framework for Understanding Fraud and White-Collar Crime,” Edward Balleisen and Christopher McKenna shared their conceptual framework for writing books on the American and European histories of business fraud. Balleisen gave an overview of his forthcoming book entitled “Business Fraud: An American History,” which focuses on organizational fraud against consumers and investors. This nineteenth and twentieth-century history pays attention both to the legal framework and to the varieties of business self-regulation. In contrast, McKenna analyzed the different forms of post-WWII scandals: Consumer and investment fraud, Ponzi schemes, control and contractor fraud, gatekeeper and accounting scandals were presented as keys to understanding the changing world of white-collar crime. Scandals matter; they allow for the examination
of specific aspects of Anglo-Saxon business and governance and thus of varieties of capitalism. Fraud, however, is more than a crime. In his presentation on “Trailblazers and Troublemakers: Risk, Innovation and Fraud in the British Financial Sector, 1900-1980,” Matthew Hollow discussed the relationship between fraud and innovation, using examples from Great Britain. Farrow’s Bank (1904-1920), advertised as “the people’s bank,” developed different marketing strategies, addressed new target groups, including women, and offered new services. In this case, however, innovation was used as a mode of suggesting respectability and of hiding crime. Other examples presented were outside brokers, like Jacob Factor, or the London and County Securities Bank, also known as “the shopper’s bank,” which institutionalized Saturday banking. Hollow argued that fraudsters were often innovators who met market needs and acted similarly to innovative competitors. In addition, they had an important influence on internal standards and the definition of “legitimate” business. Similar problems were addressed by Jonathan Coopersmith in his talk, “Like Flies to Honey: Emerging Technologies and Fraud.” Fraud and froth closely accompanied the rise of new industries and technologies. Technology especially received much publicity, which stressed the revolutionary potential of innovation but failed to mention the uncertainty of further technological developments and the lack of deep knowledge by investors. Fraudulent and frothy firms took advantage of this situation and thus levied an invisible “scam tax” on legitimate businesses. Coppersmith discussed the historical responses to this challenge: self-regulation led to due diligence, the creation of private fraud prevention organizations, and, in 1988, the founding of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners. State regulation included anti-gambling laws, “blue sky” laws, and, in 1934, the creation of the federal Securities and Exchange Commission. These measures have reduced fraud and froth since the 1930s, but at the level of individual firms and investors, both can still be devastating today.

The third panel looked at “Shady Business and the State in Early Modern Societies.” Oliver Buxton Dunn explored “Corporate Fraud in Renaissance England: the ‘Eruption of Corruption’ in the Royal Custom Houses, London 1570-1603.” This paper focused on the introduction of British customs “taxation,” which triggered a myriad of fraud cases across Elizabethan England. The methods by which merchants and customs officers embezzled and concealed customs from the 1560s until roughly 1600 reveal highly organized networks
and schemes, which began to be described as forms of “corruption.” From 1588, governors ambitiously tried to supplement royal trade taxation using sophisticated methods. This was to be achieved by controlling strategic locations along rivers and in English towns, and most strikingly, by controlling the information to be submitted and collected by merchants and customs officials. Multiple volumes were to be kept independently by officers, to be later cross-checked. The most salient issue in contemporary sources was the “corrupting” of this new administration, particularly in terms of official fraud by customs officers. Thus fraud and corruption were an inextricable part of the development of modern tax administration, as the “white-collar crime” of Tudor professional elites drove the formation of a substantial part of the early British State. William A. Pettigrew’s paper, “Criminality and the First Century of English Multinational Trading Companies,” used the international histories of seventeenth-century English trading corporations to reflect on particular contexts for economic crime. As privileged legal franchises that operated across different jurisdictions, early modern trading corporations offer insights into the relationships between commercial expansion and lawlessness. The paper examined the first hundred years of these corporations’ activities to assess how merchants and politicians defined, contested, and located economic criminality. It explored how the agency problem in international trading corporations intersected with malfeasance as part of a developing discussion about corporate governance. Pettigrew stressed the need to understand the cultural meaning of fraud within mercantile and political debates and the ways it helped to inform the development of economic theory. Michael Kwass analyzed the “The Economic Crime of Contraband in Eighteenth-Century France,” which he also called a contribution towards “Historicizing the ‘War on Drugs’.” Smuggling was one of the most widespread economic crimes of the eighteenth century. As European rulers sought to stimulate, control, and fiscalize trade, they inadvertently created massive underground markets. The royal tobacco monopoly (1674–1791) and the prohibition of Indian cotton (1686–1759) generated particularly robust black markets, in effect globalizing an underground economy that had previously consisted primarily of local salt. The monopoly was policed by the General Farm (Ferme général), a private customs and excise agency that was empowered to collect duties and taxes on behalf of the French king. Legions of smugglers colluded with, overpowered, or simply circumvented Farm agents to introduce large quantities of contraband into France. The growth of this underground economy had profound
political and cultural ramifications. The French crown attempted to roll back the underground by revamping the criminal justice system. Newly-created extraordinary courts sought to stigmatize smuggling by subjecting traffickers to corporal punishment before large crowds. But because smugglers and the wider population saw nothing morally wrong with smuggling, police and judicial repression only encouraged more sophisticated and violent methods of trafficking, as large gangs, forerunners of today’s drug cartels, moved contraband into the kingdom. Unfolding in the age of Enlightenment, the vicious cycle of repression and rebellion drew increasing attention from public critics. Philosophers, legal scholars, and practitioners of the new “science” of economics published numerous tracts that defended the smugglers. Intense public debate exerted tremendous pressure on a state that could only be fully reformed through the act of revolution.

The conference’s chronological survey of white-collar crime continued with the fourth panel, dealing with “Business Fraud and Nineteenth Century Anglo-American Law.” Drawing on a large source base of newspaper articles, James Taylor spoke on “Criminalizing Corporate Fraud in Victorian Britain.” While the first half of the nineteenth century was characterized by a lack of criminal sanctions for corporate fraud, the second half saw an intensified interest in such countermeasures. This shift resulted from changing public perception of investors and companies, which were no longer perceived as greedy and gullible actors but as the movers of basic capital flows in business. Criminal law was also used as an alternative to business regulation; this was in the interest of free business, economic elites, and the rising middle classes. Examining the other side of the Atlantic, Corey Goettsch used indictment records for his presentation, “‘Woe to a Generation Fed upon the Bread of Fraud’: False Pretenses and Capitalism in Nineteenth Century New York City.” His statistical analysis demonstrated that false pretenses were ubiquitous between 1834 and 1842, and that merchants, clerks, and bankers made the most money with this kind of crime. Goettsch also argued that this was a quintessentially capitalist crime: information asymmetry and different understandings of the terms and definitions of business were crucial for this kind of crime — and for capitalism as an economic system. The accused merchants were not “outsiders,” but closer to the mainstream of business than prosecutors and the public were suggesting. This theme was pursued further in Susanna Blumenthal’s paper on “A Black Lie and a White Lie at the Same Time’: The Apprehension of Forgery in Nineteenth Century America,” which
focused on the 1857 forgery trial of Wall Street broker Charles B. Huntington. This scandal triggered a broad and intense public debate on white collar crime, the reputation of the nouveaux riches, and the integrity of Wall Street and the financial sector. Although the defense pleaded moral insanity, Huntington was sentenced to five years of imprisonment. The resulting public debate centered on whether he was an exception, whether his customers had been innocent victims of forgery, or whether the speculative financial sector was inherently frenzied and therefore in need of more state regulation.

The fifth panel dealt with “Corruption and Fraud in the 20th century.” Annika Klein and Anna Rothfuss gave a joint paper entitled “Political ‘Opportunists’ Under Public Surveillance: Matthias Erzberger between Politics and Economy.” Erzberger, a prominent member of the Catholic Center Party and a deputy in the German Reichstag, accused Germany’s colonial administration of corruption. When it became known, in 1906, that Victor von Podbielski, the Minister of Agriculture, held stakes in one of the businesses that Erzberger had targeted, the ensuing debate developed into a scandal, resulting in the Minister’s resignation. When Erzberger was about to be appointed Minister of Finances in 1919, Karl Helfferich accused him of “political-parliamentary corruption,” arguing that Erzberger had systematically abused his political office and his connections to the Thyssen Corporation for personal gain. Erzberger sued Helfferich for libel and won. The court, however, also ruled that Erzberger was indeed guilty of “political-parliamentary corruption,” thus severely damaging Erzberger’s political career. Although the “corrupt” practices changed little between 1906 and 1919, their perception among contemporaries changed: close connections to the economic sphere were seen as increasingly problematic for political actors and ministers in particular. This process had already begun by the time of the Podbielski case and further intensified in the Weimar Republic. Corruption charges were often filed for political reasons and increasingly used to criticize democracy in the Weimar Republic. In his paper, “Cleaning San Francisco, Cleaning the United States: The Graft Prosecutions of 1906-1909 and Their Nationwide Consequences,” Uwe Spiekermann examined the constitutive period of American big business and the ensuing social conflicts. From the late 1880s, the “progressive” movement tried to cure modern society of some of its evils. One of the most pressing and ubiquitous grievances was corruption. While research has focused on the East Coast and the Mid-West, the first successful fight against corruption was fought
in the American West: a San Francisco graft prosecution from 1906 to 1909 not only removed San Francisco’s corrupt city government from office and lead to the imprisonment of the Republican political boss and the Labor Party mayor, but exposed the close interaction between political and business interests. The main supporter of the prosecution was a young multi-millionaire, Rudolph Spreckels, a prominent member of the business community and the Republican Party. Although supported by the federal government and his personal friend President Theodore Roosevelt, he was perceived as a “traitor to his own class” in San Francisco. This second-generation immigrant entrepreneur stood in the tradition of German social reform and American pragmatism. Although the battle in San Francisco did not achieve its goals, the leading prosecutors became national symbols of progressivism in the United States. William J. Hausman analyzed a corruption case from the 1920s and 1930s, a period of boom, financial contortion, and bust. His paper, “Howard Hopson’s Billion Dollar Fraud: The Rise and Fall of Associated Gas and Electric, 1921-1940,” showed that the rise of utility holding companies was an important factor in the overheating stock-market of the late 1920s. The stocks of utility holding companies rose much faster than industrial stocks, and they crashed much harder. The Associated Gas & Electric Company (AG&E) was one of the largest utility holding companies of the period. Controlled by a former New York state utility regulator by the name of Howard C. Hopson, AG&E epitomized both the opportunities and the excesses of the era. The assets of the company rose from $7 million in 1922 to nearly $1 billion in 1930 (current dollars). As is so often the case, few if any commentators saw the eventual crash and collapse of the holding company system coming. After the fact, however, recriminations were rampant. The industry was subjected to an extensive Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigation. In 1935 Congress passed legislation that banned non-contiguous utility holding companies and mandated the dissolution of most of the remaining companies. Hopson tried to save the company, using various financial manipulations. Asked in 1935 to testify before U.S. Senate and House committees investigating utility company lobbying, Hopson fled, eluding authorities for days. After being relentlessly pursued, he was finally indicted in 1940 on federal mail fraud and conspiracy charges.

examined one of the most prominent scandals of the early twenty-first century. In 2006, the headquarters of Siemens, Europe’s largest electrical-engineering company, were raided by police in the course of an investigation by the Munich public prosecutor into massive off-the-books cash deposits for bribing foreign officials. In the ensuing weeks, Siemens commissioned an independent investigation. A U.S. law firm collected over 100 million documents and analyzed ten million banking records. The results were shocking. The scale of the alleged crimes was beyond imagination. By the end of 2008, Siemens had settled with all of the German and U.S. authorities involved, agreeing to pay a record 1.6 billion dollars in fines and disgorgement. A German judge coined the phrase “organized irresponsibility,” which implied that management had conspired to prevent efficient controls and thus facilitated corruption. Challenging this as an oversimplification, Berghoff proposed a set of different, more differentiated explanations ranging from economic to cultural factors inside and outside of Siemens. In his paper, “Short-Termism at its Worst: How Short-Termism Invites Corruption … and What to Do About It,” Malcolm S. Salter criticized the excessive focus of executives of publicly traded companies and investors on short-term results as the driving force behind increasing institutional corruption. Short-termism brings about behavior that, while not necessarily unlawful, erodes public trust and undermines companies’ legitimacy, core values, and their capacity to succeed in the long run. Among the consequences are the use of misapplied performance metrics, perverse incentives, the decreasing tenure of institutional leaders, and ineffective board oversight. Institutional corruption in business typically entails gaming society’s laws and regulations, tolerating conflicts of interest, and persistently violating laws and accepted norms of fairness. Salter recommended: several drastic reforms to improve board oversight; the adoption of compensation principles and practices that mitigate the destructive effects of inappropriate incentives; the termination of quarterly earnings guidance; and the elimination of the short-term bias embedded in our current capital-gains tax regime.

The seventh and final panel, on “Finance and Fraud at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” followed up the themes of Salter’s paper and brought the conference close to the present. In his paper, “‘A Bunch of Con Men’ — Enron and the Structural Roots of Corporate Crime,” Gavin Benke discussed an iconic accounting scandal that had an enormous impact on regulation reform. Advocating that historians use business scandals to address larger questions of political economy,
Benke argued that Enron’s fraudulent practices reflected broader developments in business. The accounting structures at the root of the scandal, Special Purpose Entities (SPEs), were not last-minute attempts to defraud the public but had been used by Enron’s managers for years. In 1990, Jeff Skilling and the recently-hired investment banker Andy Fastow began using SPEs as part of a strategy to mitigate the price risk associated with the natural gas industry’s deregulation. Over the course of the 1990s, the firm’s fraudulent activities evolved out of these legitimate operations and other well-established business strategies. Such a trajectory reveals the connections between corporate fraud and larger historical trends. The Enron scandal highlights how the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, the deregulation of numerous industries, increased competitive pressure, the growing power of institutional investors, and a national shift away from production and towards financial services contributed to greater economic instability in the twentieth century’s final decades.

The joint paper by Neil Fligstein and Alexander Roehrkasse, titled “All the Incentives Were Wrong: Opportunism and the Financial Crisis,” tried to explain the causes of widespread fraudulent and collusive behavior in the mortgage securitization industry before and during the financial crisis of 2007-2009. It demonstrated that the crisis was not caused by a few criminals engaging in aggressive behavior but by a systemic, structural problem extending across the industry as a whole. Incentives for organizations and their employees encouraged illegal and unethical behavior that became embedded in the standard operating procedures of organizations. Many actors at each point in the mortgage securitization process consistently engaged in opportunistic behavior as a matter of everyday business. Fee-based revenue schemes, intense demand for mortgage debt, and minimal regulatory oversight combined to provide incentives for various actors to defraud transacting partners. This observation challenges standard economic models of market-based regulation based on reputation and transaction costs. Instead, a sociological argument about the conditions under which market structures can fail to prevent widespread opportunism shows that regulatory institutions may be necessary to stabilize markets. This sharply challenges the Chicago School-inspired theory of self-regulating markets. By the time regulators understood what had happened, they feared that acting against all of the banks would further weaken them and cause the entire banking system to collapse. The conference’s final paper shifted the perspective from the developed to the developing world. Llerena Searle spoke on “Governing Financial Expansion: The Satyam Scandal and Emblems
of Credibility in India’s New Economy.” In 2009, the founder and CEO of Satyam Computer Services, B. Ramalinga Raju, confessed that he had been over-reporting the firm’s earnings for years, accumulating $1 billion in fictitious assets and bank balances. The confession plunged Satyam, a prominent Indian IT consulting and outsourcing firm, into turmoil and caused a crisis of confidence among potential foreign investors. Analyzing discussions of the Satyam scandal in the Western business press, Searle examined the moral economies that shape India’s global integration and the expansion of global finance. Even as the global credit crisis revealed that European and American financiers had been systematically disguising liabilities and exaggerating assets, Western commentators expressed outrage at the Satyam scandal. By exploring the ironies, disjunctions, and moral double-standards at work in these discourses, Searle shed light on the unequal power relations between financiers of the global North and South and on the mechanisms through which financial networks are created. Searle argues that foreign commentators were not bothered by the differences between Satyam and American or international firms, but the similarities: not by a lack of transparency but rather by a false perception of transparency. In short, the scandal cast doubt on the images of credibility on which the global financial system is based and through which Indian firms are integrated into global networks of accumulation.

Hartmut Berghoff (GHI) and Uwe Spiekermann (GHI)
WHITE-COLLAR CRIME AND BUSINESS

Symposium at the Squaire office building, Frankfurt, October 16-17, 2014. Co-sponsored by the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte, the GHI Washington, and KPMG. Conveners: Hartmut Berghoff (GHI), Cornelia Rauh (University of Hannover) and Thomas Welskopp (University of Bielefeld). Participants: Tano Bojankin (Institut für Posttayloristische Studien, Wien), Steffen Dörre (University of Kiel), Christian Führer (University of Hamburg), Alexander Geschonneck (KPMG, Frankfurt), Rüdiger Hachtmann (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam), Thilo Jungkind (Gobler AG), Klaus Kocks (University of Applied Sciences, Osnabrück), Volker Köhler (Technical University Darmstadt), Holger Kneisel (KMPG, Frankfurt), Christoph Kreutzmüller (Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Berlin), Rolf Nonnenmacher (Chairman, Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte, Frankfurt), Mark Pieth (University of Basel), Werner Plumpe (University of Frankfurt/Main), Jessica Richter (Institut für Posttayloristische Studien, Wien), Uwe Spiekermann (GHI), Ursula Weidenfeld (Tagesspiegel, Berlin).

The 37th symposium of the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte was devoted to the topic “White-Collar Crime and Business.” Rolf Nonnenmacher, Chairman of the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte, and Holger Kneisel, Regional Chairman of KMPG, welcomed the participants. Nonnenmacher pointed out that the topic of white-collar crime was relevant not only to legal scholars, but also to economic historians for a broader understanding of criminal behavior in corporations. In his introductory remarks Werner Plumpe, who filled in for Thomas Welskopp, noted that white-collar crime occurs in the context of otherwise lawful business and markets. The term white-collar crime, which originated in the United States, is a modern phenomenon that presupposes a functioning economic system; it differs from organized crime mainly in that its victims are not subject to physical force. The offenders come from all levels of society. There are different forms of white-collar crime in Germany, Britain, and the United States, as well as different penalties.

The first section, “White-Collar Crime in the Postwar Period,” began with Karl Christian Führer’s presentation “Fraud without Punishment? Real Estate Speculators in the Federal Republic of the 1970s and ‘Credit Fraud’ as a Criminal Offense,” which focused on real estate mortgaging as a form of credit fraud. He stressed that this
significant kind of white-collar crime in the Federal Republic was not just an instance of individual fraud, but of criminal actions performed by banks in particular. Despite the great public attention attracted by this issue, it is noteworthy that it was not fully investigated and cleared up by Germany’s state’s attorney’s office. The perpetrator was not brought to trial, and although he could not continue his practices in Germany, he was able to do so in the United States without hindrance, using the same methods. Therefore, it can be concluded that public criticism alone does not deter banks from committing white-collar crime. Comparable cases, however, still remain to be studied. The panel continued with Cornelia Rauh’s presentation, “Conditions like in Columbia? The Siemens AG’s handling of the Munich Sewage Plant Scandal, 1991-2001.” After pointing out that she had to shorten her presentation at the request of Siemens AG, Rauh expressed the hope that all presentations at this conference be published in full length in the near future. Turning to her case study, she explained how the greatest case of white-collar crime in Germany to date harmed not only other companies but also municipalities. One of the most respected German corporations, Siemens AG, caused a scandal that drew great public attention and led to significant consequences for the company. According to Rauh, the key explanatory factors include a “culture of corruption” common in international business, the construction project’s prestige, and historically developed structures such as the cartel of electric manufacturers as well as the long-standing, traditional corporate culture at Siemens in particular. The ensuing discussion revealed that irrational behavior by employees, encouraged by a need for acceptance, had most contributed to the scandal. The legal protection of their employees was more important to Siemens than the awareness that their actions were illegal. This was described as a severe lack of institutional ethics within the company. The employees seemed to have difficulty distinguishing between right and wrong.

The second day of the symposium began with Thilo Jungkind’s presentation “On my mother’s honor ... I do not know where the barrels are!” — The perception of the Hoffmann-La Roche Corporation as a Criminal ‘Multi’ after the Seveso Disaster (1976),” which concluded the first section. Jungkind indicated that the firm was now supporting the efforts of historians to investigate the incident in order to determine whether Seveso was indeed the worst accident in the history of the chemical industry in the twentieth century, as well as the extent to which the firm had acted criminally. The presentation showed that
the chemical industry’s safety standards at the time were significantly lower than today and that the company’s crisis management was a complete failure, so there was no dialogue with the public. Jungkind concluded that Seveso was indeed a terrible accident, that the company’s actions were not illegal, but rather naïve, and that the history of the company had to be rewritten in light of these findings.

The conference’s second panel, “Politics and White-Collar Crime,” began with Uwe Spiekermann’s presentation “The Bought Kingdom: Claus Spreckels, the Hawaiian Commercial Company and the Limits of Economic Influence in the Kingdom of Hawaii, 1875-1898.” His analysis of white-collar crime in Hawaii showed that Hawaii was not characterized by the rule of law, but a kingdom in which investments could only be made with the assent of the king. The American investor Spreckels introduced a new silver-based currency in Hawaii and maneuvered the island state into economic dependency. The power politics of the United States were successful when the Islands eventually became a United States territory. In closing, Spiekermann noted that white-collar crime in Hawaii was a common tool in a corrupt environment.

In his paper, “White-Collar Crime in the Third Reich,” Rüdiger Hachtmann argued had this topic has been of marginal interest to scholars. Using the example of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF), he showed that cases of corruption were considered illegal by the National Socialists but were not prosecuted or made public. When scandals were discovered, some staff members lost their jobs but key figures of the Nazi political system were spared. The offenders were able to operate in an extralegal realm. Nonetheless, the core elements of the judicial system (tax and economic law) were retained for pragmatic political reasons. The case of the DAF exemplifies how the lines between politics and the economy had become increasingly blurred after 1933. Finally, Hachtmann argued that the cases he examined were not exceptions but are representative of white-collar crime in the Third Reich.

Christoph Kreutzmüller’s presentation, “Of Cyclical Hyenas and Party Comrades,” showed that the National Socialists acted as both critics and supporters of corruption. By examining the persecution and destruction of Jewish businesses in Berlin during the 1930s, Kreutzmüller demonstrated that everybody, including politicians, public officials, and business men, could get rich at the cost of Jewish citizens. This form of crime flourished because the offenses were
not prosecuted. He concluded that the National Socialists had in fact committed white-collar crime. Though the contracts for business take-overs were technically legal, the prices were illegal; thus assessment of value was an essential element of the crime. However, it is virtually impossible for present-day historians to reconstruct the proper value of a business in the 1930s.

The conference’s final panel dealt with “Discourses and Legal Developments.” Volker Köhler analyzed the “Verein gegen das Bestechungswesen 1911-1935.” This “Association against corruption” wanted to draw attention to itself and battle corruption as a “force for good” that was independent of the state. Köhler’s historical comparison showed that its goals were in part similar to those of Transparency International (TI), founded in 1993. He concluded both at the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century it was primarily non-state actors that pushed for an objective examination of corruption. Much research remains to be undertaken in this field. Next, Stefan Dörre examined the personality of the individual offender. In his presentation, “White-Collar Crime as Pathology: Professional Discourse and Public Debate on the Personality Structure of Entrepreneurs, Managers and ‘Bankers’, 1965-1985,” he examined patterns of how the motives of the perpetrators have been interpreted. He pointed out that since the 1960s the personality of the overwhelmingly male offenders has received more scholarly attention. Although desire for recognition is often a central motive, Dörre insisted that there are multiple personality types among white-collar criminals, which should make scholars rethink the dominant view of white-collar crime as an “upper-class crime.” Finally, Hartmut Berghoff’s presentation, “From Watergate to the Compliance Revolution: The History of the Fight against Corruption in the United States and the German Federal Republic 1972-2012,” focused on conditions in the United States. During the presidency of Richard Nixon, corruption was rampant and had very negative ramifications for Nixon personally, politics in general, the state, the financial industry, and the United States as a whole. After corruption had been considered a trivial offense in the United States for a long time, Watergate became the starting point for the fight against corruption. Today, the battle against corruption takes second place, right after the fight against terrorism, in the United States.

In sum, it can be concluded that white-collar crime generally had far-reaching negative consequences for the businesses involved, the political system, and the individual offenders. A desire for recognition
and personal enrichment appear as the primary motives of the predominantly male perpetrators. It is surprising how often irrational behavior is connected to white-collar crime in the otherwise supposedly rational world of the economy. Fighting corruption has become an important issue in contemporary politics. Some progress has been made since the year 2000; however, complete success has not been achieved. White-collar crime is a complex and a multilayered field of research for historians.

The concluding panel discussion, which featured Ursula Weidenfeld, Hartmut Berghoff, Cornelia Rauh, Alexander Geschonneck and Manuela Mackert as panelists, focused primarily on the question of whether preventive measures or sanctions were more effective in the fight against corruption. The “compliance revolution” that took place around the year 2000 increased overall awareness of criminal behavior in corporations. In Germany and in the United States new laws and changing company cultures helped to penalize white-collar crime. Mackert reported that in her experience the personal responsibility of employees and the priority given to the issue by the company most effectively facilitated the necessary change in business culture. By now, anti-corruption measures were, overall, regarded positively in the business world. Geschonneck and Rauh argued that the main causes of white-collar crime were a desire for recognition and personal enrichment, not a desire to prevent an insolvency of the company. Berghoff called for a stronger sense of responsibility among managers, who should support anti-corruption efforts by focusing on preventive actions instead of penalties; this could help avoid damage to the companies. Geschonneck concurred, noting that compliance was currently analyzed not only from a legal but also from business-management perspective. Plumpe pointed to the long-standing dilemma in international business that entrepreneurs have to adjust to cultures of corruption in order to be successful economically. Since it is not possible to prevent all white-collar crime, he stressed the importance of individual critical reflection as well as action against corruption by corporations. Rauh raised the question of what the history of emotions might contribute to the study of corruption, particularly regarding individual motives and circumstances. She concluded by stressing that the measures against white-collar crime remained insufficient and that prevention was more sensible than sanction.

Julia Langenberg (University of Marburg)
GREEN CAPITALISM? EXPLORING THE CROSSROADS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND BUSINESS HISTORY

Conference at the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware. October 30–31, 2014. Co-sponsored by the Center for the History of Business, Technology and Society and the GHI Washington. Conveners: Adam Rome (University of Delaware), Yda Schreuder (University of Delaware), Hartmut Berghoff (GHI), Erik Rau (Hagley Museum and Library), and Roger Horowitz (Hagley Museum and Library). Participants: Brian Balogh (University of Virginia), Ann-Kristin Bergquist (Umeå University), Regina Lee Blaszczyk (University of Leeds), Brian C. Black (Penn State Altoona), Emily K. Brock (Max Planck Institute, Berlin), William D. Bryan (Emory University), Lynn Catanese (Hagley Museum), B. R. Cohen (Lafayette College), David B. Cohen (Brandeis University), Julie Cohn (University of Houston), Bart Elmore (University of Alabama), Leif Fredrickson (University of Virginia), Hugh Gorman (Michigan Technology University), Ann Greene (University of Pennsylvania), Rachel Gross (University of Wisconsin), Alice Hanes (Hagley Museum), Ai Hisano (University of Delaware), David Kinkela (State University of New York Fredonia), Astrid Mignon Kirchhof (Georgetown University), Roman Köster (Bundeswehr University Munich), Laurie Rizzo (Hagley Museum), Christine Meisner Rosen (Haas School of Business, University of California-Berkeley), Matthew Plishka (Lafayette College), Simone Müller-Pohl (University of Freiburg), Adam Rome (University of Delaware), Yda Schreuder (University of Delaware), Frank Uekötter (University of Birmingham), Laura Wahl (Hagley Museum).

Can capitalism be green, or at least greener? The fact that the Oxford Handbook of Business History does not spend a single word on the natural environment goes to show that business and environmental historians do not talk to each other much. This two-day conference strove to change this by opening up opportunities for environmental and business historians to communicate. An important goal of this dialogue was to provide historical perspectives on topics with pressing contemporary relevance by raising questions such as: How have businesses mitigated pollution and other harmful environmental impacts? What were their reasons and objectives, and what were the political, economic, and social circumstances? Why and in what context have businesses or business organizations advocated environmental regulations? When and why did businesses seek to encourage changes in consumer
behavior that have had environmental implications? How has the globalization of business affected environmental concerns? How have issues related to the environment and to natural resources influenced business initiatives in different local, regional, national or international contexts?

Sixteen presenters and five commentators shed light on these questions from different angles. The papers in the first session, “Firms as Conservationists?”, reflected on the relationship between business and conservation in twentieth-century America. William Bryan presented on the topic of “Corporate Conservation and Conflict: Determining the Ideal Forms of Development for the American South,” revealing how Southern businesses used environmentalism and sustainability as an opportunity to build a new economy based on natural resources. In her talk on “Utilities as Conservationists: The Conundrum of Electrification during the Progressive Era in North America,” Julie Cohn elucidated society’s perception of electric energy as clean and green. As she pointed out, power companies pursued conservationist practices only at certain times, while the history of electrification as a whole underscores the implications of industrial practices more broadly. In the next presentation, on “Capitalism and the Wilderness Idea: The Case of the Great Northern Paper Company,” David Cohen analyzed this firm’s success in promoting a set of ideas compatible with its business while cooperating with conservationists. The firm’s influence rose as it set the tone for the discourse about conservation efforts in Maine. In the panel’s final presentation, “How Green was Chemurgy? Biofuel between Chemical Utopias and Corporate Realities in New Deal America,” Frank Uekoetter introduced the audience to the Chemurgy movement, a movement organized by chemists in support of biofuel, who were motivated by a sense of responsibility for business and society alike. Instead of seeing Chemurgy as an environmental movement, Uekoetter viewed it as an expert movement, strong in its professional convictions, but weak in its awareness of social and moral issues, and lacking a business plan. The idea never took off.

The following session, entitled “Consumer’s Demands,” explored the extent and limits of green consumerism. In her talk “Making Natural: The Color Control of Florida Oranges, 1930s-1950s,” the first speaker, Ai Hisano, discussed the continuous manipulation of the appearance of oranges. Even before genetic engineering, it became normal to depict the fruits as unnaturally bright and colorful to attain
higher prices. In the next paper, “Energy Hinge? Green Consumerism and the American Energy Scene since 1973,” Brian Black focused on the changing perception of energy consumption after the Oil Crisis of 1973 and argued that, since that crisis, an awareness of supply scarcity seems to be having a long-term impact on energy markets, particularly in personal transportation. Finally, in her paper “Greening Outdoor Recreation in the Age of Plastics,” Rachel Gross analyzed the connection between the outdoor leisure industry and politically aware consumerism. She claimed that outdoor clothing companies have redefined green consumption by cultivating a green image, so that twenty-first-century consumers, especially those who identify as outdoor enthusiasts, regard these companies as leaders in green business practices.

The last panel of the first day was entitled “Globalization” and featured three presentations that concentrated on global trade. In his paper “Cottonseed, Oil, and the Environmental Entanglements of a Global Gilded Age Industry,” Benjamin Cohen argued that early food manufacturing industries were shaped by environmental conditions and deliberately sought to configure environmental networks as systems of commercial interaction and identity. Emily Brock’s paper, “Naming Commodities: Colonial Power, American Business and the Rebranding of a Tropical Forest Tree in the Philippines,” analyzed the commodification of tropical forests within the context of imperial economic interests, relating this process to the combined product of government agendas, market realities, and forest management. The panel’s last paper, “Why American Cities Go Wasting Abroad: Local Political Economy and International Trade in Hazardous Waste,” presented by Simone Müller-Pohl, examined the short-sightedness of U.S. environmental legislation, with which cities are not always able to comply because they are incapable of providing alternative means of disposing of dangerous waste. In her case study of Philadelphia, this led to a ship carrying toxic waste having to spend more than two years at sea in search of a legal dumping ground, which was never found.

The first panel on the following day focused on different approaches and challenges of “Firms Going Green” and began with David Kinkela’s paper “Hi-Cone Plastic Six-Pack Rings, Ocean Pollution, and the Challenge of a Global Environmental Problem.” Kinkela told the story of how plastic six-pack packages, a cheap and easy way to sell soda and beer all over the world, are causing huge problems
because of their lethal effect of entangling and killing marine animals when discarded products enter the ocean. Next, Bart Elmore’s paper, “Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism,” presented the unique corporate structure of the Coca Cola business empire that helped distribute Coke all over the world. Elmore pointed out that the company displayed ecological responsibility and stewardship by reducing waste and recycling water. In the following paper, “The Rise and Fall of an Ecostar: Environmental Technology Innovation and Marketing as Policy Obstruction,” Leif Frederickson argued that the car maker Ford’s green marketing philosophy was primarily public manipulation, since the firm was more interested in selling the idea of an advanced “green” technology than the actual technology. The last paper on this panel, Ann-Kristin Bergquist’s “Dilemmas of Going Green: Company Strategies in Boliden of 1960-2000,” introduced a case study of a Swedish company dealing with pollution. Bergquist argued that companies were often in ambiguous situations: whereas addressing environmental pollution often requires prompt action, developing appropriate technologies and dealing with economic realities takes time.

The fifth and final conference panel, entitled “Governance”, illustrated the importance of environmental politics and governance for many societies and states. In his talk “Private Companies and the Recycling of Household Waste in West Germany 1965-1990,” Roman Köster pointed out that since the 1970s, German cities have contracted with private companies to collect and recycle secondary raw materials. Thus, in the West German case, the state created a market in which private firms, which initially had little concern for green practices, could successfully compete and contribute to environmental protection. The panel concluded with Hugh Gorman’s talk on “The Role of Businesses in Constructing Systems of Environmental Governance,” which examined adaptive governance, an iterative process directed towards achieving environmental aims. Gorman hypothesized that regulation can be more influential than producer and consumer decisions, and that maintaining a focus on long-term goals rather than governing in disaster-response cycles can counteract the economic interests of businesses that conflict with sustainability objectives.

Commentators and participants alike concluded that most papers highlighted a power relationship between economy and ecology, politics and society, as well as within the norms and cultures that influence these connections. The discussions were fruitful but also
illustrated that environmental and business historians do not always speak the same language. In the words of one participant: historians of these two disciplines need “couples counseling” in order to communicate more effectively. Therefore the suggestion that both disciplines should improve their communication at future joint conferences was widely appreciated and supported. As frequently noted at the gathering, questions of class and gender as well as certain historical actors, especially voters and consumers, were underrepresented and future workshops should follow up on these aspects. The conference took place in Wilmington, Delaware, on the beautiful premises of the gunpowder works founded by E. I. du Pont in 1802 along the banks of the Brandywine. The site of the ancestral home and gardens of the du Pont family, with its restored mills and workers’ community, exemplifies early American industry. As a special treat during the sunny October weekend when the conference took place, there was a spontaneous tour of the du Pont mansion as well as walks through the park during the lunchtime breaks.

Astrid Mignon Kirchhof (GHI/Georgetown University)
DISPOSSESSION: THE PLUNDERING OF GERMAN JEWRY, 1933-1945 AND BEYOND

Conference at Boston University, November 9-11, 2014. Co-sponsored by Boston University and the GHI Washington. Conveners: Christoph Kreutzmüller (Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Berlin) and Jonathan Zatlin (Boston University). Participants: Eva Balz (University of Bochum), Johannes Beermann (University of Bremen), Hartmut Berghoff (GHI), Michael Berkowitz (University of London), Tal Bruttman (City of Grenoble/Memorial de la Shoah, Paris), David Crowe (Elon University), Charles Dellheim (Boston University), Jeffrey Diefendorf (University of New Hampshire), Laura Meier-Ewert (La Commission d’indemnisation des victimes de spoliations intervenues du fait des législations antisémites en vigueur pendant l'Occupation, French Embassy, Berlin), Abigail Gilman (Boston University), Dorothea Hauser (Warburg-Archiv, Hamburg), Susannah Heschel (Dartmouth), Stefan Hördler (GHI), Ingo Loose (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich-Berlin), Stefanie Mahrer (Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center, Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Alfred C. Mierzejewski (University of North Texas), Benno Nietzel (University of Bielefeld), Jonathan Petropoulos (Claremont McKenna College), Albrecht Ritschl (London School of Economics), Anna Rubin (Department of Financial Services, New York State), Christine Schoenmakers (University of Oldenburg), Eugene Sheppard (Brandeis University), Lisa Silverman (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), Pamela Swett (McMaster University), Jonathan Wiesen (Southern Illinois University).

With the assistance of several organizations at Boston University and the German Historical Institute in Washington DC, Jonathan Zatlin and Christoph Kreutzmüller organized an international conference at Boston University devoted to analyzing the expropriation of Jews in Nazi Germany. A variety of panels examined the different means of dispossession employed by the perpetrators and the experiences of the victims of that dispossession. As part of a larger project on “Economic Racism in Perspective,” organized by Zatlin, the conference sought to uncover new ways of understanding the financial significance and cultural importance of the dispossession and murder of Germany’s Jews.

In his keynote address, which coincided with the 76th anniversary of the November 1938 pogrom, Kreutzmüller argued that many players at the local and national levels shaped the process of destruction of
Jewish business, but it was not a linear process following a set plan. In small towns, ongoing boycotts and periodic violence had taken a devastating toll by the mid-1930s. Nonetheless, the number of companies run or owned by Jews had only somewhat declined in the big cities, especially in Berlin. However, the savage violence and extended plunder that occurred during November 1938 dramatically reduced the quantity of Jewish-owned businesses. Remarkably, some Jewish businessmen were able to maintain their businesses — in a few cases up to the moment of their deportation. Destruction of the Jews’ economic existence was an integral part of the process of their persecution and, ultimately, their murder.

The first panel sought to provide a larger macroeconomic context. Albrecht Ritschl examined the instruments used to destroy the Jewish population financially. He estimated assets belonging to Germany’s Jewish population in 1936 to have a value in real capital stock in Germany of some 850 billion Reichsmarks (RM). He calculated the Jewish population’s share of capital in 1933 at about 0.75 percent the national total. On that assumption, he concluded that the value of all assets owned by German Jews to be around 6.375 billion RM in 1936. Jonathan Wiesen analyzed National Socialist ideological antipathy to Jewish property ownership. The theft of property owned by Jews, Wiesen argued, was not an “incidental by-product of the Holocaust,” but rather a key component of National Socialism. The aim was to “racially sanitize the marketplace” by eliminating the commercial activities of Jews. This effort was supported by new legal measures and encouraged by propaganda. Aryanization, spoliation, and other forms of expropriation of assets belonging to Jews were seen as “the right thing[s] to do” and allowed many actors to hide behind new laws and regulations, when it was really greed, avarice, and the possibility of personal enrichment that incited them to steal or buy at discounted prices property formerly owned by Jews.

The second panel focused on German-Jewish commercial presence. Dorothea Hauser discussed the persistence of the large Jewish private bank, M. M. Warburg & Co. She refuted the notion that the bank continued to be profitable until its Aryanization in 1938 because of special protection by Hjalmar Schacht. On the contrary, Hauser demonstrated, the bank lost more assets than any other private bank in Germany after 1933. Ironically, however, the bank managed to offset some of its losses as it became increasingly involved in assisting Jewish efforts to emigrate. Stefanie Mahrer discussed Salman Schocken
and the strategies he invented to prevent the “Aryanization” of his department stores and the theft of his personal property, and especially his library. Pamela Swett used the archives of the Salamander shoe company and its salesmen’s journals to build a case study on the influence of travelling salesmen as important local participants in the process of excluding Jews from the economy. Swett convincingly showed that some businessmen defended Jewish colleagues, but most were frustrated by the state’s continued tolerance of Jewish participation in the commercial sector and sought ways to accelerate the processes by which Jews were dispossessed.

In the following two panels, which addressed bureaucracy and dispossessions, speakers turned to the perpetrators. Concentrating on the role of the Reich Economics Ministry, Ingo Loose sought to periodize the ministry’s antisemitic policies. The 1930s, Loose argued, were a period of “legitimization of injustice” in which the Ministry introduced several decrees organizing the expropriation of Jews. After 1939, however, the Ministry was less involved in the robbery of the Jewish population throughout Europe. Johannes Beermann analysed the active role German freight shippers played in dispossessing German Jews. In a particularly telling set of stories, Beermann demonstrated the readiness of freight shippers to exploit the upsurge in Jewish clients seeking to emigrate. Christine Schoenmakers explored the Deutsche Golddiskontbank (Dego), a Reichsbank subsidiary that played a significant role in dispossessing Jews. In cases of emigration and Aryanization, Dego served as the hub for cash, foreign exchange, stocks and illiquid property, arranging its registration, transfer and utilization for the Nazi economy. Jonathan Zatlin focused on a ruse employed by the Gestapo to conceal the dispossession and murder of elderly German Jews. The Gestapo employed the so-called Heimeinkaufsverträge, or retirement home contracts, to obscure the regime’s genocidal intentions toward German Jews by pretending to behave more “humanely” toward the elderly. In reality, however, the Gestapo not only murdered the elderly, but also seized funds on a scale that the security apparatus believed would ensure its autonomy from budgetary supervision and political oversight. Stefan Hördler presented the systematic and regulated confiscation of the personal belongings of concentration camp inmates as well as the redistribution and sale of their assets for the benefit of the state treasury. Alfred Mierzejewski discussed how the German public pension system was used by the Nazi regime to deprive Jews of both pension benefits and equity.
The next panel turned towards other European countries with an eye to understanding the adoption of similar procedures in the context of the War. Tal Bruttman pointed out that the French authorities passed laws and decrees aimed at registering the Jewish population of France and excluding them from public life and commerce. For Bruttman, these were home-grown initiatives, inspired by but not emulating the “German model.” David Crowe dealt with dispossession by the General Government in German-occupied Poland. Crowe also touched on the difficulty that Jewish survivors and their families face, particularly since 1989, of gaining the restitution of property in Poland.

The following panel was dedicated to art and visual representation. Michael Berkowitz portrayed photography as a diverse field that was populated in large measure by Jews in both Central and Eastern Europe, a world that has not only been destroyed but has also largely been forgotten today. Charles Dellheim broadened the context by telling the stories of several Jewish art dealers in Western Europe who began as autodidacts but soon became pivotal figures in the art world. Dellheim sought to restore their dignity and cast them not simply as victims of persecution and plunder by underscoring their importance to the development of European aesthetic taste. Jonathan Petropoulos discussed the networks of art dealers that developed during the “Third Reich” and that were active in the acquisition and sale of artworks looted from European Jews. After 1945, a core group of former Nazi dealers, many based in Munich, trafficked looted art, working with non-Nazi dealers in Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Austria, but also Western Europe and the United States. The failure of denazification ensured that these art dealers continued to profit from such stolen goods during the post-war period, right up until today. Understanding these networks, Petropoulos maintained, is key to tracking Nazi looted art that has yet to be properly restored to its owners.

The last panel focused on restitution and compensation. Eva Balz discussed property politics in East and West Berlin after 1945. She suggested that the Cold War and mutual provocation between Soviet Union and Western Allies had a significant but unexplored impact on restitution policies. Benno Nietzel examined the dispossession of German Jews and the Aryanization of Jewish-owned businesses in a longer-term historical perspective. Exploring the fate of Jewish entrepreneurs after the loss of their firms, he analysed the development of Aryanized businesses during the war and into the post-1945
period. Nietzel read the restitution proceedings of the 1950s as a renegotiation of property values, which implied not simply financial conflict but also social struggles for memory and recognition. A case study of the restitution process for Aryanized property in Austria was provided by Lisa Silverman using the experience of photographer Madame d’Ora (Dora Kallmus). Silverman contended that the return of stolen property, like the loss that had preceded it, was entwined with the fate of families and traumatically inflected. Anna Rubin presented on the mission of the Holocaust Claims Processing Office (HCPO) of the New York State Department of Financial Services and the HCPO’s methods for addressing restitution claims. She gave several instructive examples that laid out the terms of legal success.

By combining research on the different means used by the Nazis to dispossess the Jews with stories detailing the experiences of the victims, the conference revealed the complexity of the process by which the Jews were expropriated. The many papers also hinted at the different dimensions of the loss, providing everyone with a sense of what was destroyed in human, cultural, and financial terms. The conference also offered scholars new impetus for further research on the legal, financial, and cultural techniques deployed by state actors, business people, and the local civilian population in seizing Jewish property. It also made clear the need for more work on the different ideological motives and justifications for theft on this scale. Finally, the conference demonstrated in new ways and with new material that the so-called “restitution process” after the war has hardly restored the former property rights of the victims.

Jonathan Zatlin (Boston University)
TAXATION FOR AND AGAINST REDISTRIBUTION SINCE 1945: HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES AND COMPARATIVE OUTCOMES

Workshop at the GHI, December 5-6, 2014. Sponsored by the GHI. Conveners: Gisela Hürlimann (GHI / University of Zurich / ETH Zurich) and W. Elliot Brownlee (University of California, Santa Barbara). Participants: Francesco Boldizzoni (University of Turin), Marc Buggeln (Humboldt University Berlin), Christophe Farquet (University of Geneva), Carl-Henry Geschwind (Washington DC), Alexander Hertel-Fernandez (Harvard University), Tim Holst Celik (Copenhagen Business School), Stefan Hördler (GHI), Gunnar Lantz (Umeå University), Cathie Jo Martin (Boston University), Ajay K. Mehrotra (Indiana University), Patrick Neveling (University of Utrecht and University of Hamburg), Uwe Spiekermann (GHI), Joseph L. Thorndike (Tax Analysts and the University of Virginia), Sara Torregrosa Hetland (University of Barcelona); Guest: George K. Yin (University of Virginia). Public Keynote Lecture by Leonard E. Burman, (Urban Institute and Syracuse University).

In March 2004 the GHI hosted an international conference on the history of taxation, convened by Alexander Nützenadel and Christoph Strupp, which was followed by their 2007 publication Taxation, State, and Civil Society in Germany and the United States from the 18th to the 20th Century. Ten years later, the GHI conference being reported on here offered international scholars another opportunity to reflect on the importance of fiscal history — this time with a time frame after 1945 and with a focus on income and wealth inequalities, fiscal redistribution, and its connection to the welfare state. The conveners’ starting point was the observation that although welfare policies differed substantially among the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Germany, Scandinavian and other Western countries since 1945, all these countries shared a common belief in the social and economic benefits of some redistribution of income and wealth through progressive taxation. With an international call for papers, the conveners invited scholars to explore how fiscal theories and tax laws concerning social redistribution developed in the second half of the twentieth century. The fundamental question was: How have the two trends of growing inequality and globalization in the second half of the twentieth century interacted to shape tax ideas and tax policies?
The first panel aimed at drawing a “broad picture” of taxation and redistribution after 1945. Accordingly, most of the five papers either tried to present a macro-view of the varieties of capitalism, relying heavily on theoretical literature, or combined income equality data with institutionalist approaches. Francesco Boldizzoni’s paper “State Capacity and the Crisis of Democratic Capitalism since the 1970s” presented different theoretical perspectives to evaluate the states’ welfare and redistributive capacities since the 1970s, among them the evolutionary view, institutionalist approaches, and the Frankfurt Krisentheorie (notably Wolfgang Streeck). In order to compensate for the weaknesses of each of these perspectives, Boldizzoni pleaded for combining them with a cultural approach that considered path dependencies and explained differences — for example the startling concurrence between Thatcher’s welfare austerity politics in Great Britain and the social-democratic “Mitterand experiment” in France — in a longue durée analysis. Tim Holst Celik’s paper on the “fiscal sociology of the post-1970s public household” placed James O’Connor’s 1973 book The Fiscal Crisis of the State at the center of his analysis, against the mainstream “varieties of capitalism” literature. Departing from the concept of “accumulation expenditure” and its linkage to welfare spending, Holst Celik observed a turn towards a generalized regime of “self-legitimating accumulation,” featuring stagnating levels of taxation, decreasing top income tax and corporate tax rates, and increasing inequality. This led governments to facilitate a model of self-legitimating economic growth through the promotion of household indebtedness.

The empirical foundations, which were absent in these first two, theoretically oriented papers, were supplied in the panel’s other papers. Gisela Hürlimann’s paper, “Justice for Whom? Notions of Tax Fairness and Redistribution since the 1950s,” showed how notions of tax fairness and redistribution developed in Switzerland since the 1950s. She set the Swiss policy of temporary tax reductions in the context of a postwar settlement of the federal government’s legitimacy to raise income taxes at all. By the 1970s, unresolved conflicts over tax evasion and the growing tax competition between the Swiss cantons inspired claims for tax justice and harmonization. The 1980s saw a strong middle-class and family orientation through deductions and indexation to prevent bracket creep. In the 1990s, the regressive value added tax (VAT) helped to extend the welfare state. Data on Swiss income inequality indicates considerable variation among the cantons with a tendency towards increased inequality since the
1990s/2000s, to which intense tax competition, as the paradoxical result of formal tax harmonization, seems to have contributed. In their paper, “Progressively Worse: Social Coalitions and the Limits of Redistributive Taxation,” Alexander Hertel-Fernandez and Cathie Jo Martin took a critical stance on Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the 21st Century* in order to challenge the notion of tax progressivity as a vehicle for redistribution. Based on data from the Luxembourg Income Studies (LIS) and the existing empirical literature, they showed that countries where regressive consumption taxes make up a high share of tax revenue actually feature more redistributive welfare regimes than the archetypes of liberal welfare capitalism, such as the United States, which have a high share of progressive taxation. Differing political processes in the United States, where federal tax and welfare reforms were partisan projects in times of wars and crisis, and the Scandinavian case, where employer organizations were integrated in bipartisan solutions, proved crucial for the scope and sustainability of welfare spending.

The second panel, on consumption taxes and redistribution, was opened by Gunnar Lantz who presented his Ph.D. project on the value added tax (VAT) and the Swedish welfare state. While the works of numerous political scientists have popularized the notion of the “social progressivity” of the Swedish fiscal system, Lantz offered the first in-depth historical investigation of Sweden’s turn to the VAT in 1969, which was preceded by a general sales tax in 1960, in order to explain “why tax systems change.” Lantz emphasized the role of political coalitions for the “only tax possible” and the importance of examining the role that experts played in shaping the Swedish tax state. In his paper, “On the Propensity to Tax Consumption: The Gasoline Tax in Transatlantic Comparison,” Carl-Henry Geschwind explained that his studies on the gasoline tax had given rise to the question why there was no VAT in the United States. Whereas Ajay K. Mehrotra and Hiroyasu Nomura have compared the United States and Japan as the two “VAT Laggards,” Geschwind compared the United States to Great Britain. In Britain, a heavy reliance on excise taxes and the existence of a national sales tax proved decisive for the introduction of the VAT in 1973. In the United States, by contrast, the conversion of the federal income tax from a class tax to a mass tax by 1942 paved the way to relying on direct taxation for revenue as well as for economic policy. In conclusion, Geschwind suggested that the resistance to raise the gas tax translated into a reluctance to nationalize the sales tax.
The second panel was followed by a public keynote on the evening of December 5, 2014. Welcomed by GHI Director Hartmut Berghoff and introduced by Gisela Hürlimann and Joseph Thorndike, the nationally recognized tax expert and economist Leonard E. Burman, Director and co-founder of the Washington-based Tax Policy Center, a joint venture of the Urban Institute and the Brookings Institution, appealed to historians and non-historians alike with his lively analysis of how dramatically socio-economic inequality in the United States had risen and what taxation had to do with it. With this event, the GHI once more created a public space for important social debate and illustrated how contemporary history can relate to current concerns.

The third panel, on Saturday morning, was dedicated to national tax systems and inequality and featured three papers on the United States and two papers on continental European cases. Against the background that, with the exception of the years 1986-1993, capital gains have enjoyed a more beneficial tax treatment in the United States since the 1920s, Ajay Mehrotra sought to relativize the apparent “naturalness” of the capital gains preference by uncovering the “forgotten origins” of tax preferences for “earned income.” Stressing historical contingency, Mehrotra reminded the audience of early-twentieth-century tax scholars and politicians who introduced the morally charged differentiation between earned and unearned income and who argued that income from labor should be taxed at a lesser rate, before the “red scare”, the popularization of capital investments, and an ever more influential economic discipline transformed American beliefs and attitudes towards risk and wealth. In the next paper, Joseph Thorndike placed the former Clinton advisor and Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin in the center of his study on how tax policy corresponded and responded to the changing world of the 1990s. Against the foil of recent public disappointment with Rubin, once praised as the main architect of the 1990s economic boom, Thorndike showed that “Rubinomics” had always been a “creative” effort to reconcile modern economic reality with traditional Democratic ideology, which combined deficit reductions with a resistance to tax cuts. In 1993, Rubin helped shape a tax act that featured higher tax rates for upper incomes although he resisted any “soak the rich” rhetoric. Rubin also took a more “fiscalist” and pragmatic stance against the successful Republican project to reduce the capital gains tax in 1997. In the final paper on the United States, W. Elliot Brownlee, a long-standing scholar of fiscal history and a
participant in the 2004 GHI conference, reflected on the usefulness of the concept of “neo-liberalism” for explaining developments in tax policy and inequality. Focusing his observations on turning points in U.S. tax policy, Brownlee showed that the first generation of neo-liberals, including Walter Lippmann and Henry C. Simons, advocated tax progression and capital gains taxes in order to avoid market distortion and to counteract interventionist New Deal politics. The disregard for inequality began with the next generation, including Milton Freedman, whom Brownlee labeled as “retro-liberals” for their belief in laissez-faire capitalism, coming to full bloom in the era of George W. Bush. Brownlee complemented his paper with some comparative observations on Japanese fiscal policy.

The European contributions to the question of income taxation and inequality included the papers by Marc Buggeln on West Germany and by Sara Torregrosa Hetland on Spain. Marc Buggeln’s paper, “Taxation and Inequality in (West) Germany since the Oil Crisis,” supported the analysis that fiscal and welfare regimes that did not exclusively rely on progressive income taxation were more resistant to radical reforms and to the increase of income inequality. Putting the German case at the center, Buggeln presented quantitative data on tax, public spending and debt ratios as well as income inequality to show that even after the climax of redistributive tax policy in 1974, the conservative-liberal coalition of the 1980s resisted major changes. Only from 1986 onwards were taxes reduced. This trend was interrupted by the costly German reunification, which the Kohl government financed mainly by raising public debt and social security contributions. After the mid-1990s, the old plans for tax cuts were revived and — ironically — implemented under a coalition of Social Democrats and the Greens. Sara Torregrosa Hetland’s paper on her Ph.D. thesis discussed Spanish fiscal policy from 1960 to 1990 by drawing on quantitative data and progressivity measurement. While Franco’s state had mainly relied on excise taxes and social security contributions, the transition government introduced a personal and a wealth tax with the declared goal of improving equity. This process was initially blocked during the political turmoil of the early 1980s. By the time of the socialist governments, support for progressive taxation had cooled down, easing the introduction of the VAT in 1986. As a result, the overall regressivity of Spain’s tax and duties system did not decrease. Instead, an inverse redistribution of incomes kept Spain far away from the continental pattern of welfare and equality, placing it closer to Latin America.
The final panel shifted the focus to the highly politicized, but hardly historicized phenomenon of legal and illegal international practices for privileging corporations and business interests. Christophe Farquet presented the first results from a common study with Matthieu Leimgruber on the cycles of offshore finance and transnational tax evasion and the OEEC/OECD’s initiatives for regulation. Farquet and Leimgruber argued that the attempts to end banking secrecy in Switzerland and other countries as a source of tax evasion were watered down after the OECD model convention of 1963. Only since the end of the 1970s did multilateral attacks against tax havens intensify again, parallel to the growth of offshore finance following the end of the Bretton Woods’ system and the fiscal crisis of major Western states. While their focus was on tax evasion, Patrick Neveling’s paper on international Export Processing Zones (EPZ) revealed the impact of formally legal, but equally harmful practices of tax avoidance. An analysis of the global manufacturing sector suggested that the 1970s should be understood as a decade of consolidation of neoliberal patterns of accumulation, rather than as a turn towards them. Starting with Puerto Rico in the late 1940s, EPZ’s were promoted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the World Bank, so that by the late 2000’s EPZ’s accounted for 3500 sites in 130 countries with over 60 million workers. According to Neveling, the mobility of such production sites in the search for tax exemption, customs holidays, and cheap labor has contributed to ever-lower corporation taxes in general.

Each paper was followed by a comment (Cathie Jo Martin, Franco Boldizzoni, Ajay K. Mehrotra, Joe Thorndike, Elliot Brownlee, Uwe Spiekermann), which introduced often lively and occasionally controversial plenary discussions. In the final discussion, the following issues were mentioned as central, and in many cases, worthy of further research: the “progressive” history of regressive taxation (and vice versa) in the late twentieth century; the connection between contemporary economic wisdom and tax reform; the reliability of tax/income data and the question of how historians should work with them; the entanglements of different fields of taxation and economic policy (individual and corporate tax; monetary and investment policies, economic policies of the Cold War, etc.); the importance of fiscal federalism. Of particular importance was the suggestion that “tax historians” and fiscal sociologists should try to reach out to a new audience and show how important taxation is for social, political, economic and cultural history.
The increase in conferences and scholarship in this interdisciplinary field since the early 2000s, and the growing interest in transnational, comparative, and entangled approaches even led to the suggestion to found an international organization for fiscal history. This project and the outcomes of the workshop shall be further elaborated in a conference-panel at the World Economic History Conference 2015 in Kyoto, convened by Gisela Hürlimann, W. Elliot Brownlee and Eisaku Ide (Keio University), and will also result in a publication — plans which were met with much enthusiasm by the workshop participants who once more proved how inspiring the field of fiscal history as a “key” for understanding state, society and economy can be.

Gisela Hürlimann (GHI)
2014 FRITZ STERN DISSERTATION PRIZE

The 2014 Fritz Stern Dissertation Prizes were awarded to Chase Richards (Free University of Berlin) and Ned Richardson-Little (University of Exeter). The award ceremony took place at the 23rd Annual Symposium of the Friends of the German Historical Institute on November 14, 2014. The selection committee was composed of: Jesse Spohnholz (chair; Washington State University), Susan Crane (University of Arizona), and Timothy Brown (Northeastern University). Both prize winners have contributed articles presenting their dissertation research to this issue of the Bulletin (see “Features”).

The committee’s prize citation for Chase Richards’s dissertation “Pages of Progress: German Liberalism and the Popular Press after 1848” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2013) read: “Chase Richard’s dissertation … offers a cultural, intellectual, and political history of a critical printing genre at the birth of modern mass media. Familienblätter, or family papers, were general-interest magazines produced for reading at home whose low cost and engaging content attracted millions of readers in the 1850s and 1860s, making them far more popular than any other German media form. Richards uses this genre to investigate German political culture between the failed revolutions of 1848 and unification in 1871. These magazines, he argues, helped shift the minds of those readers whose lack of support was often credited with the failures of 1848. Liberal ideas were able to survive because the audience of the Familienblätter was in the private home. These writings helped marshal a new reading public on unprecedented scales. Yet Richards also shows how the emergent public sphere was subject to a variety of constraints: the limits of their own material textuality, contemporary reading styles, and state censorship. Their publishers and authors operated as cultural middlemen between liberal intellectuals and the bourgeoisie. By examining the publishers (Karl Biedermann, Karl Gutzkow, and Ernst Keil) and authors in these ‘middle brow’ writings, Richards shows that German liberals were not passive after 1848, as often portrayed, but instead found a new audience for bourgeois education. The end result was always beyond publishers’ control, however, given the limits of the superficiality of the genre, the markets for popular readership, and the confines of censorship. The period between 1848 and 1871 has often been treated as an epilogue to revolution or a prelude to unification. But Richards treats it as a critical time of change in German public culture on its own terms. He draws on an impressive and intelligently used range of sources from German libraries and archives, including publishers’ correspondence, augmented by their diaries, lectures and published writings, as well as
qualitative and quantitative analysis of Familienblätter’s texts and images. He also uses censorship records to understand the dynamic between the emergent bourgeois public sphere and Prussian attempts to control it. His conclusions are guided by a sensitive and well-informed source criticism, including sensitivity to the gendered interests of domestic readers and the financial realities of businesses struggling to expand their market share. Richards’s ‘Pages of Progress’ is a pleasure to read, thoughtfully conceptualized, well organized, superbly researched, and written with flair.”

The prize citation for Ned Richardson-Little’s dissertation “Between Dictatorship and Dissent: Ideology, Legitimacy and Human Rights in East Germany, 1945-1990” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013) read: “Edward Richardson-Little’s dissertation ... is an intellectually challenging and beautifully written study of human rights politics in the German Democratic Republic. Upon learning that leaders and supporters of the ruling Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) often invoked human rights, one might be tempted to imagine this practice as a cynical use of rhetoric by a dictatorial government to combat a rival Western vision of democracy and capitalism. However, Richardson-Little persuasively demonstrates that the SED and its supporters convinced many religious leaders, intellectuals, and working class supporters that socialism supported an indigenous brand of human rights superior to the individualistic, liberal version offered by the West. Richardson-Little makes excellent use of a wide range of sources from fourteen German archives to argue that, not only was there a thriving debate about human rights in East Germany, but also that citizens used that discourse to express dissent. Quite early, the SED developed its own Marxist conception of human rights to criticize the West, including the dangers of Western imperialism. The East German regime encouraged its citizens to believe that there could be “no human rights without Socialism.” The SED established a Committee for Human Rights, argued for human rights solidarity in the Third World, and used human rights as a basis for international agreements with the West. By the mid-1980s the discourse of human rights fostered by the SED provided peace activists, environmentalists, and advocates of democracy a powerful tool to oppose East German policies as well. The strength of their arguments helps explain the speed of revolutionary impulses by 1989. The SED’s use of human rights discourse, Richardson-Little demonstrates, played a critical role in legitimizing its own downfall. The topic of human rights has received a great deal of scholarly attention from recent historians, largely as part of narratives of the spread of Western values. However,
as Richardson-Little points out, contradictions between a rhetoric of human rights and political policies that violate those rights characterized Western powers as well. Historians should be no less willing to accept that contemporaries in East Germany could value human rights, even if their envisioned path to achieving those rights varied significantly from their Western counterparts. In the face of continued debates about the limits of the West’s commitment to human rights, Richardson-Little’s ‘Between Dictatorship and Dissent’ thus makes a significant and timely contribution, both to the historiography on modern Germany and to the emerging scholarship on human rights.”

GHI Publication Awarded Hans Rosenberg Book Prize

*German Merchants in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic* by Lars Maischak, a volume in the GHI’s book series with Cambridge University Press, was awarded the Hans Rosenberg Prize for the best book in Central European history in 2014 by the Central European History Society. The prize was presented to Maischak at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in January 2015. *German Merchants in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic* is based upon a dissertation that was awarded the Fritz Stern Dissertation Prize by the Friends of the German Historical Institute in 2006. Maischak earned his doctorate at the Johns Hopkins University and teaches history at the California State University, Fresno.

NEW STAFF PUBLICATIONS

Monographs and Edited Volumes


**Articles and Chapters**


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**STAFF CHANGES**

**Elisabeth Engel** joined the GHI as a Research Fellow in October 2014. She specializes in North American history with research interests in colonial and transnational entanglements in the Atlantic world. She received her Ph.D. in January 2014 from the Graduate School of North American Studies at the John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität Berlin, and worked at the departments of North American history of the Universität zu Köln, Kassel, and Freie Universität Berlin. Her dissertation on African American missionary work in colonial Africa (1900-1939) was awarded the Franz Steiner Prize for outstanding manuscripts in the history of transatlantic relations. In her new project, Elisabeth Engel aims to explore how notions of “risk” were constructed and inscribed into the everyday routines of revolutionary Americans as the British imperial power retreated.

**Stefan Hördler**, GHI Research Fellow since 2012, left the Institute in January 2015 to become the director of the KZ-Gedenkstätte Mittelbau-Dora.

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**GHI FELLOWSHIPS AND INTERNSHIPS**

**GHI Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships**

The GHI awards short-term fellowships to German and American doctoral students as well as postdoctoral scholars in the fields of German history, the history of German-American relations, and the history of the roles of Germany and the United States in international relations. The fellowships are also available to German doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars in the field of American history. The fellowships are usually granted for periods of one to six months but, depending on the funds available, can be extended by one or more months. The research projects must draw upon primary sources located in the United States. The GHI also offers a
number of other doctoral and postdoctoral fellowships with more specific profiles. For further information and current application deadlines, please check our web site at www.ghi-dc.org/fellowships.

**GHI Internships**

The GHI Internship Program gives German and American students of history, political science, and library studies an opportunity to gain experience at a scholarly research institute. Interns assist individual research projects, work for the library, take part in the preparation and hosting of conferences, and help with our publications. They receive a small stipend. The program is very flexible in the sense that the GHI tries to accommodate the interns’ interests, abilities, and goals. A two-month minimum stay is required; a three-month stay is preferred. There is a rolling review of applications. For further information, please check our web site at www.ghi-dc.org/internships.

**RECIPIENTS OF GHI FELLOWSHIPS**

**Postdoctoral**

James Boyd, Cardiff University  
Connecting Colony and Republic: German-American Migration Across the Revolutionary Divide: The Inaugural Immigration of Germans into Baltimore

Sabine Horlitz, Technische Universität Berlin  
Die Labor Housing Conference: Zum Verhältnis von Gewerkschaftsbewegung und modernem, sozial orientierten Wohnungsbau in den USA der 1930er Jahre

David Jünger, Freie Universität Berlin  

Stefan Manz, Aston University  
German Brewers in Britain and the United States before and during World War I: Comparing Glasgow and Washington, DC

Hanno Scheerer, Universität Trier  
Capitalism and Land: The Global Land Reform Movement at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century
Doctoral

Helena Barop, Universität Freiburg
Mohnblumenkriege: Interventionistische Drogenpolitik und die Grenzen staatlicher Macht 1960-1980

Sonja Dolinsek, Universität Erfurt
Von der Devianz zur Sexarbeit: Transnationale Debatten über Prostitution in international Organisationen und NGSs nach 1945

Ann-Katrin Liepold, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Corn: An Environmental History

Jan Mittenzwei, Universität Greifswald
National Sozialismus in Pommern, 1922-1945

Nathalie Oelert, Universität Kassel

Jean-Michel Turcotte, Université Laval
How to treat Hitler’s soldiers? German prisoners of war in Canada, the United States and Great-Britain during the Second World War.

Katharine White, George Washington University
The “Red Woodstock” Generation: A Study of East Germans between the West and the Global South (1970s-1990s)

Melanie Woitas, Universität Erfurt
“We become what we do!”— Eine Geschichte des Aerobics

John Woitkowitz, University of Calgary
Making Sense of the Arctic: A Cultural History of U.S.-Canadian Defense Cooperation in the Arctic, 1940-1957

GHI RESEARCH SEMINAR, FALL 2014

September 10 Claudia Haake (La Trobe University, Melbourne)
Land, Rights, and Writing: Iroquois Political Representations in the Age of Removal, 1830-1887

November 5 Jens Gründler (Institut für Geschichte der Medizin der Robert Bosch Stiftung)
“Wir sind Gott sei Dank noch alle Gesund!” Resources of Health of German Immigrants to the US, 1830-1930
November 19  Juliane Czierpka (Universität Göttingen)
The Commercialization of Professional Football in Historical Perspective

December 10  Nathan Delaney (Case Western Reserve University)
Non-Ferrous Metal Traders and their North American Networks: The Case of the American Metal Company

GHI DOCTORAL SEMINAR, FALL 2014

September 11  Andrew Zonderman (Emory University)
Embracing Empire: Eighteenth-Century German Migrants and the Development of the British Imperial System

Gregg French (University of Western Ontario)
An “Instinctive Mutual Attraction”: American Perceptions of Spain and the Spanish Empire in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1776-1914

Ulrike Breitsprecher (Universität Leipzig)
The Socialist Academic Teacher: Effects of Higher Education Policies on the Faculty of the Humboldt University Berlin in the GDR (1946-1990)

October 9  Sina Keesser (Technische Universität Darmstadt)
Raum im Bild: Darstellungstechniken der Planungspraxis

Franziskus von Boeselager (Ruhr-Universität Bochum)
Die Bedeutung der Regelung der deutschen Auslandsschulden für die Finanzierung von Unternehmen in Westdeutschland (1948-60)

Christoph Ellßel (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

November 20  Julia Heunemann (Universität Weimar)
Untiefen mariner Zeitlichkeit: Formationen des Wissens über das Meer, ca. 1770-1870

Patrick Gaul (Universität Frankfurt)
“Der folgeschwerste Principienkampf des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts”: Rezeption und Folgen des amerikanischen Bürgerkriegs in Deutschland, 1861-1871
GHI LECTURE SERIES, SPRING 2015

INTELLIGENCE SERVICES AND CIVIL LIBERTIES: SECURITY AND PRIVACY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Organized by Ines Prodöhl and Patricia Sutcliffe

To strengthen national security in the climate of fear after the September 11, 2001, the U.S. Congress rushed to pass the U.S. Patriot Act, which George W. Bush signed into law on October 26, 2001. This law gave law enforcement agencies unprecedented powers to gain access to the telephone, e-mail and other records of U.S. citizens and to secretly search homes and offices through “national security letters” rather than regular court warrants. In December 2005, the New York Times revealed that President Bush had also secretly authorized the National Security Agency to monitor the international telephone and electronic communications of Americans without the court-approved warrants required for domestic spying under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Most recently, Edward Snowden’s 2013 revelations about the National Security Agency’s global mass surveillance have sparked controversy and demonstrated that totalitarian regimes are not the only ones that regularly invade citizens’ privacy both at home and abroad.

The German Historical Institute’s Spring Lecture Series 2015, “Intelligence Services and Civil Liberties: Security and Privacy in Historical Perspective,” organized in cooperation with the National History Center, seeks to explore these issues in a comparative and historical perspective. Our speakers will examine how democratic governments in Germany, the United States, and Switzerland have grappled with balancing the need for security and citizens’ rights.

Organized in cooperation with the National History Center

April 2  Parliamentary Oversight of Intelligence: The German Experience
Wolfgang Krieger (University of Marburg)

April 23  The History of the Fourth Amendment
Laura K. Donahue (Georgetown University)

May 14  Freedom against Freedom: Swiss State Security in the Cold War Era—and Beyond
Georg Kreis (University of Basel)

June 4  Security, Privacy, and the German-American Relationship
Loch K. Johnson (University of Georgia)
GHI CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2015

For a regularly updated calendar of events, please check our web site at www.ghi-dc.org.

January 2
The Changing World of Immigrant Entrepreneurship: Three Centuries of German-American Experience
Panel at the 129th annual meeting of the American Historical Association in New York City

March 5 - 7
Germans in the Pacific World from the late 17th to 20th Century
Conference at the University of California in San Diego
Conveners: Hartmut Berghoff (GHI), Frank Biess (University of California San Diego), Ulrike Strasser (University of California San Diego)

March 26 - 28
“Consumer Engineering”: Mid-Century Mass Consumption between Planning Euphoria and the Limits of Growth, 1930s-1970s
Conference at the Universität Göttingen
Conveners: Gary Cross (Pennsylvania State University), Ingo Köhler (Universität Göttingen), and Jan Logemann (GHI)

May 7 - 9
Jewish Consumer Cultures in 19th and 20th Century Europe and America
Conference at the GHI
Conveners: Paul Lerner (University of Southern California / Max Kade Institute for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies), Anne C. Schenderlein (GHI), Uwe Spiekermann (GHI)

May 8
Twelfth Workshop on Early Modern German History
Conference at the GHI London
Conveners: Bridget Heal (University of St. Andrews), David Lederer (National University of Ireland, Maynooth), Angela Schattner (GHI London), and Jenny Spinks (University of Manchester)

May 21
History Lived and History Written: Germany and the United States, 1945/55-2015
Gerald D. Feldman Memorial Lecture at the GHI
Speaker: Charles Maier (Harvard University)
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Title</th>
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<th>Convener(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 21 – 22</td>
<td><strong>A Great Divide? America between Exceptionalism and Transnationalism</strong></td>
<td>Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich</td>
<td>Michael Kimmage (Catholic University of America), Uwe Lübken (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität), Andrew Preston, (University of Cambridge), Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson (GHI)</td>
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<td>May 27 – 30</td>
<td><strong>21st Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar: Twentieth-Century German History</strong></td>
<td>Humboldt-Universität, Berlin</td>
<td>Anna von der Goltz (Georgetown University), Richard F. Wetzell (GHI), Michael Wildt (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)</td>
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<td>May 28 – 29</td>
<td><strong>The Practices of Structural Policy in Western Market Economies since the 1960s</strong></td>
<td>Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam</td>
<td>Ralf Ahrens (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam), Astrid M. Eckert (Emory University), Stefan Hördler (GHI)</td>
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<td>May 29 – June 2</td>
<td><strong>Gender, War and Culture: History and Historiography since the Seventeenth Century</strong></td>
<td>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</td>
<td>Karen Hagemann (UNC Chapel Hill) and Mischa Honeck (GHI)</td>
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<td>May 29 – 30</td>
<td><strong>Nature Protection, Environmental Policy and Social Movements in Communist and Capitalist Countries during the Cold War</strong></td>
<td>GHI</td>
<td>Astrid Mignon Kirchhof (Georgetown University / GHI) and John McNeill (Georgetown University)</td>
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<td>June 4–6</td>
<td><strong>The U.S. South in the Black Atlantic: Transnational Histories of the Jim Crow South since 1865</strong></td>
<td>GHI</td>
<td>Elisabeth Engel (GHI), Nicholas Grant (University of East Anglia), Mischa Honeck (GHI)</td>
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<td>June 12–13</td>
<td><strong>Financialization: A New Chapter in the History of Capitalism?</strong></td>
<td>GHI</td>
<td>Hartmut Berghoff (GHI), Kenneth Lipartito (Florida International University), Moritz Schularick (Universität Bonn), Laura Rischbieter (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)</td>
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July 3-4  Fourth Junior Scholars Conference in German-Jewish History: “Heritage” in the Study of Jewish and Other (Diaspora) Cultures — The Search for Roots as a Recurring Theme of 19th and 20th Century History
Conference at the Institute for the History of the German Jews, Hamburg
Conveners: Miriam Rürup (Institute for the History of the German Jews, Hamburg), Anne Schenderlein (GHI), Mirjam Zadooff (Indiana University)

Conference in Gauting/Munich
Conveners: Sebastian Frenzel (Technische Universität Dresden), Alexandra Ortmann (Berlin), Désirée Schauz (Technische Universität München), Richard F. Wetzel (GHI)

October 15-17  Medieval History Seminar 2015
Seminar at the GHI
Conveners: Stuart Airlie (University of Glasgow), Paul Freedman (Yale University), Jan Jansen (GHI Washington), Bernhard Jussen (Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main), Ruth Mazo Karras (University of Minnesota), Cornelia Linde (GHI London), Frank Rexroth (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen), and Miri Rubin (Queen Mary University of London)

October 21-23  Nineteenth-Century Anti-Semitism in International Perspective
Conference at the GHI Paris
Co-organized by the Max Weber Foundation and its institutes

December 4-5  Atlantic Brotherhoods: Fraternalism in Transcontinental Perspective (18th-early 20th century)
Conference at the GHI
Conveners: Jessica Harland-Jacobs (University of Florida), Jan C. Jansen (GHI)
German Historical Institute Washington DC
Fellows and Staff

For further information, please consult our web site: www.ghi-dc.org

Prof. Dr. Hartmut Berghoff, Director
  Modern social and economic history; history of consumerism and consumption
PD Dr. Uwe Spiemann, Deputy Director
  Modern German economic history; history of consumption; history of science and knowledge
Prof. Dr. Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson, Deputy Director
  African American Studies, transatlantic relations, gender history, American religious history
Andreas Fischer, Administrative Director

Dr. Elisabeth Engel, Research Fellow
  North American history; race and empire; modern colonialism; Atlantic and transnational history; postcolonial studies; history of capitalism
Dr. Mischa Honeck, Research Fellow
  19th and 20th-century American history; transnational history; history of ethnicity and race relations; gender history; history of youth and youth movements
Dr. Jan Jansen, Research Fellow
  Modern European, North African, and Atlantic History; colonialism and decolonization; memory studies; migration studies; global history of freemasonry
Dr. Ines Prodöhl, Research Fellow
  Global history, cultural and economic history, civil society
Dr. Richard F. Wetzel, Research Fellow and Editor
  Modern European and German history; intellectual and cultural history; legal history; history of science and medicine; history of sexuality

Dr. Thomas L. Hughes, Senior Visiting Research Fellow
Dr. Robert Gerald Livingston, Senior Visiting Research Fellow

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