

## Preface

This issue of the *Bulletin* begins with the Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute delivered last November by Michael Brenner (American University / Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich) on the subject “When Democracy Died in Darkness: German Jewish Responses to Hitler’s Rise in Early 1933.” Brenner shows that Jewish reactions to Hitler’s rise to power were anything but uniform by analyzing the wide spectrum of responses. Highly assimilated Jews, Zionists, and Orthodox Jews reacted quite differently; and even within these broad categories responses varied widely. Reacting against an all-too-common depiction of German Jews as having been blind to the danger facing them, Brenner reminds us that the place of Jews in Weimar Germany was more complex and the historical situation in January 1933 far more open than it might appear in hindsight. In his conclusion, Brenner connects the situation facing German Jews in the spring of 1933 with the present. “In many ways, it seems that the Jews felt just as at home, as safe, and as integrated in Germany in the early decades of the twentieth century as they feel in the United States a hundred years later.” And just as the fate of Jews in Germany was bound up with the fate of German democracy, he concludes, so the fate of Jews and other vulnerable groups is very much tied to the vitality of U.S. democracy today.

The next feature article takes readers back to the preceding caesura of modern German history, the First World War. Based on the GHI’s 13th Gerald D. Feldman Memorial Lecture, Celia Applegate’s (Vanderbilt University) article “Germans and Their Music in the Time of War, 1914-1918” argues that music provided comfort, distraction, and “cultural reassurance” during this terrible conflict. This cultural reassurance had a dark and a light side. While wartime music could take the form of nationalistic superiority and bombast, it could also provide creative pleasure that served to

assuage anxiety and dread. Applegate also shows that the war functioned as a kind of “stress test” of the musical infrastructure and traditions that had slowly grown over several centuries, a test that Germany’s musical environment survived. Its survival gave the supporters of the Weimar Republic the opportunity to try to attach the new democracy to the Austro-German musical tradition.

Originally delivered as a lecture at the GHI’s Pacific Regional Office in Berkeley, H. Glenn Penny’s (UCLA) article “Globalizing Landesgeschichte: Reflections on Narrating Germans’ Histories in the Modern Era” examines the connections between German regional and transnational history. In his work on Germans in Latin America Penny had begun to notice that many of the German coffee planters in Guatemala, for instance, did not come from Hamburg or Bremen, which played prominent roles in the coffee trade, but from southern Germany. In this article he shares his investigation of what he calls the “Southern German borderlands,” that is, the region stretching from Salzburg through Innsbruck and Bregenz to Freiburg and Basel. Urging us to “see less like a state and perhaps more like a region,” he examines the transnational and transcultural aspects of life in this region, arguing that historians can learn a lot from the ethnologists (*Volkskundler* or practitioners of *empirische Kulturwissenschaft*) who have studied this region.

Our final feature article, “Irrelevant Scapegoat: The Perils of Doing European History in Post-Trump America,” pursues the injunction made at the end of Michael Brenner’s Annual Lecture to reflect on our present historical moment. In this article Dominique Kirchner Reill (University of Miami) makes a compelling case that legislation passed by the Florida legislature in 2022 — including the so-called “Stop WOKE” Act (HB 7), the “Don’t Say Gay” Law (HB 1557), and the “Postsecondary Education” Act (SB 7044) — will profoundly affect the teaching not just of U.S. but also of European history from elementary school through college.

Reill shows that the right-wing political forces behind this legislation, which is being emulated by a number of other states, hope to use European history to cover the issues of authoritarianism, racism, and colonialism that they do not wish to discuss in the context of American history. "America is exceptional once again, and Europe provides the perfect counterpoint." The implications for teachers and scholars of European history are profound. If anyone thought that the field of European history would be immune to the effects of the U.S. culture wars focused on race, gender, and sexual orientation, Reill's article is an important wake-up call.

This issue reports on a series of conferences on the history of migration, the history of inequality, and German history in global perspective. Please turn to our news section for recent GHI news. For up-to-date information on upcoming events, publications, fellowships, and calls for papers, please consult the GHI website at <http://www.ghi-dc.org>, check our Twitter account at <https://twitter.com/GHIWashington> or sign up for our digital newsletter on our website. We look forward to welcoming you at upcoming events in both Washington and Berkeley.

**Simone Lässig (Director) and  
Richard F. Wetzell (Editor)**



The background features abstract geometric shapes. A dark blue triangle points downwards from the top left. A light blue triangle points upwards from the bottom left. A grey triangle points upwards from the bottom right. The word "Features" is centered in the white space between these shapes.

# Features