This past fall, the German Historical Institute marked the twentieth anniversary of the peaceful revolutions of 1989 with a series of events devoted to the history of the German Democratic Republic, its legacy, and the process of unification. The Institute’s Annual Lecture, delivered by Professor Donna Harsch this past November, was devoted to the place of East Germany in history. Taking issue with Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s characterization of the GDR as a “footnote in world history,” Harsch argued that the GDR played an important role in three major stories of the twentieth century: the history of Germany, the history of Communism, and the history of women, employment, the family, and social policy. In his comment on the Annual Lecture, Professor Thomas Lindenberger advanced the argument that the GDR earned a place in world history though the circumstances under which it ended: Germany’s first successful democratic revolution. The complicated process that led from this revolution to the unification of the two German states less than a year later formed the subject of the Hertie Lecture delivered by Ambassador Frank Elbe, who participated in the diplomatic negotiations over German unification as Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher’s chief of staff. Elbe’s first-hand account of the West German effort to gain the assent of the four Allied powers not only to German unification but to NATO membership for the united Germany provides fascinating insights into West Germany’s diplomatic strategy, the key role of American support, and, last but not least, the reasons for the Soviet leadership’s agreement to united Germany’s NATO membership.

The following two articles present the research of the latest winners of the most prestigious prize for North American dissertations in German history, the Fritz Stern Prize, which is awarded annually by the Friends of the German Historical Institute. Michael Meng provides an enlightening comparative analysis of how the treatment of Jewish sites in Poland and the two postwar German states was gradually transformed from one that was primarily engaged in destruction to one of historical preservation. Moving from comparative to transnational history, Alison Clark Efford elucidates the role of German immigrants in the reshaping of American citizenship after the Civil War and Emancipation, especially concerning the key issue of whether African-Americans would be granted the vote. While
the Fritz Stern Prize honors junior scholars at the beginning of their careers, the GHI’s Helmut Schmidt Prize, awarded every two years, honors senior scholars who have made exceptional contributions to the study of German-American economic history. This past year’s winner was Professor Richard H. Tilly, whose lecture at last December’s award ceremony, printed here, provided a historical and comparative analysis of banking crises in Germany, Britain and the United States from 1800 to 1933.

As always, the “GHI Research” section of this Bulletin shares the research of GHI Research Fellows with a larger public. The two contributions in this issue show how work in economic history can provide new perspectives on transnational and global history. GHI Deputy Director Uwe Spiekermann’s examination of German-American quarrels over meat imports in the period 1870–1900 sheds new light on the role of nutritional cultures, changing scientific and medical discourses, and the emergence of modern consumerism. Also taking a transnational approach, GHI Research Fellow Ines Prodöhl analyzes the early twentieth-century spread of the soy bean from China to the West, both in the context of economic and nutritional change in the West and in the context of the transformation of Manchuria amidst the rising tensions between Russia and Japan.

The conference reports in this issue once again reflect the diversity of the Institute’s scholarly agenda. They range from medieval history to the history of the Cold War, from the history of early modern encyclopedias to the history of material objects in the postwar era, and from the history of the Nazi regime to the connections of the U.S. Civil Rights movement to Germany. We hope you enjoy this issue and invite you to keep abreast of upcoming GHI events and programs by checking the Institute’s website at www.ghi-dc.org.

Hartmut Berghoff, Director