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. Wetzell (Editor)