The year 2018 marked the bicentennial of Karl Marx’s birth, which gave rise to a great number of symposia and exhibitions reflecting a revived interest in Marx not only in Germany. Our opening feature article presents the keynote address delivered at the “Marx at 200” symposium that the German Historical Institute Washington organized this past spring in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. In “Karl Marx and the History of Capitalism,” Jürgen Kocka (WZB, Berlin), the author of *Capitalism: A Short History* (2016), reflects on — to borrow a famous phrase — “what is living and what is dead in the thought of Karl Marx,” that is, which elements of Marxian theory are still useful for scholars seeking to write the history of capitalism today. After a lucid overview of Marx’s understanding of capitalism, Kocka makes two arguments. First, he provides a trenchant analysis of those elements of Marx’s theory — such as his underestimation of the flexibility of capitalist relations — that led him to the false prediction that capitalism would decline and collapse. Second, while conceding that anyone writing a history of capitalism today has to go beyond Marx, he argues that several features of Marxian thought can be made fruitful for such a historical analysis. According to Kocka, these features include Marx’s focus on ambivalence as a central feature of capitalism; the aggressive dynamics and resulting instability of capitalism; the connection between capitalism and violence, especially in the early phases of capitalist development; and the constant threat of a “dynamic spillover” of capitalist principles into non-economic spheres of life.

Once again, our fall issue presents a special thematic section, this time on “Knowledge and Copyright in Historical Perspective.” It is co-edited and introduced by Sarah Beringer and Atiba Pertilla (both of the GHI), who organized the spring 2018 lecture series from which the articles presented here are drawn. As Beringer and Pertilla explain in their introduction, the central issue raised in this thematic Forum is the tension between the quest to protect knowledge production through copyright, patents, and other forms of intellectual property rights, on the one hand, and strong economic incentives to appropriate, replicate or remix someone else’s intellectual property, on the other. In the section’s first article, art historian Nancy Troy (Stanford University), the author of *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian* (2013), uses the case study of Yves Saint Laurent’s famous
1965 cocktail dresses that mimicked Piet Mondrian’s abstract paintings to illuminate the economic and cultural significance of “copying” in the triangular relationship between haute couture, art, and the ready-to-wear fashion industry. Next, Mario Daniels (Georgetown University) examines the Reagan administration’s aggressive efforts to reign in the international circulation of scientific technological knowledge, arguing that this effort was spurred by an increasingly inextricable mixture of concerns about American economic competitiveness and national security considerations.

The section’s final article, “Why Are Universities Open Access Laggards?”, combines a historical perspective on copyright with a powerful plea for open access publishing. Peter Baldwin (UCLA), the author of Copyright Wars: Three Centuries of Transatlantic Battle (2014), argues that the traditional copyright system has been undermined by two transformations: the advent of digital technology, which has reduced the cost of disseminating content to almost nothing, and the fact that nowadays most academic authors are salaried employees rather than independent writers. Since these developments have removed the two main reasons for the existing copyright regime, Baldwin calls on universities — both the professoriate and university libraries — to abandon traditional copyright in favor of open access publication, which would make academic publications available to everyone.

The “Conference Reports” section once again reflects the wide range of the Institute’s scholarly programs, reporting on recent conferences whose topics range from the post-World War I settlement of 1919 to transoceanic perspectives on American studies; from the history of American urbanism to black European history; and from the history of capitalism to the study of manuals and handbooks from a history of knowledge perspective. We also report on two recent seminars for junior scholars, in early modern and late modern German history. Finally, we include a report on the spring 2018 conference “In Global Transit: Jewish Migration from Hitler’s Europe to Asia, Africa and Beyond,” which is part of a conference series whose next meeting will take place at the GHI’s Pacific Regional Office in Berkeley next May.

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