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PREFACE

The thematic diversity of the feature articles in the *Bulletin's* last issue reflected the great diversity of historical research conducted by the German Historical Institute. The same is true of the conference reports in this issue, which range from the history of demographics to the history of poverty, from German-Jewish history to the black diaspora, and from the Nazi occupation of Europe to the history of Northeast China. By contrast, this issue's feature articles have a thematic focus on economic and business history, which is one of the areas of research concentration during my directorship of the GHI. The first feature article presents my inaugural lecture at the GHI, which traces the beginnings and early history of credit rating in the United States and Germany - a topic that has been given remarkable contemporary relevance by the role that faulty credit and bond ratings have played in the current financial crisis.

The next two articles present a controversial debate in the economic history of the Nazi regime that has received considerable attention in recent years. The first presents Peter Hayes's lecture in the GHI's very successful Fall 2008 lecture series on "New Perspectives on the Economic History of National Socialism." Examining the issue of "corporate freedom of action in Nazi Germany," Hayes takes issue with the interpretation that has recently been advanced by Christoph Buchheim and Jonas Scherner. Whereas Buchheim and Scherner have contended that Nazi intervention in the economy left private firms considerable freedom of action, Hayes argues that the Nazi regime's regulation, intimidation, and, when necessary, coercion of business severely circumscribed firms' autonomy. As it happened, Jonas Scherner was the GHI Fellow in Economic and Social History during 2008-2009, and Christoph Buchheim delivered a lecture later in the same series. We therefore took the opportunity to invite Scherner and Buchheim to write a response to Peter Hayes's critique, which we are publishing in this issue. All three authors have done a remarkable job of making the sometimes rather technical and arcane arguments of economic historians accessible to non-specialists and explaining the key issues of this debate, which has important implications for our understanding of the Nazi regime. We hope that readers will enjoy the direct argumentative style that such a debate forum affords.

This issue's "GHI Research" article deals with the history of consumption, a second thematic focus of my directorship. Jan Logemann, currently History of Consumption Fellow at the GHI, presents his comparative research on the "geography of consumption" in postwar West Germany and the United States. Examining the divergent development of suburban shopping malls and downtown pedestrian areas in these two countries, Logemann also analyzes these developments' social and economic ramifications, many of which are of contemporary relevance, as Americans have recently begun to think seriously about reducing energy consumption and improving mass transit in response to global warming and the current economic crisis. In this sense, then, we hope that this issue does what the German Historical Institute sees as one of its missions: making history relevant to contemporary debates.

Hartmut Berghoff, Director