Grundbegriffe as a "contemporary classic," as he phrased it, and James V. H. Melton discussed the origins of the history of concepts in the work of Otto Brunner during the late 1930s. Donald R. Kelley, Gabriel Motzkin, and John G. A. Pocock offered comments. Koselleck then responded to the remarks of both speakers and commentators.

The ensuing discussion between Koselleck and the American historians emphasized the contributions as well as some of the problems of Begriffsgeschichte. On the one hand, all the publications that Begriffsgeschichte has engendered (like the major work Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe) are perhaps among the most original historiographical achievements of German historians since the 1960s. Thus, the influence within the German profession of such scholars as Conze and Koselleck can hardly be overemphasized. On the other hand, Begriffsgeschichte seems a typically German concept. It is difficult to relate this kind of work to recent historical scholarship in the United States and perhaps even more difficult to translate it and incorporate it productively into the American historical discourse. All participants agreed, however, that it was a most productive exercise to examine the work of those who analyze the meaning of the key terms of ideas and concepts throughout history.

The papers and comments, as well as Koselleck's concluding statements, will be published in the Institute's series of Occasional Papers.

Hartmut Lehmann


As a contribution to the ongoing debate on contemporary right-wing extremism and anti-foreigner violence in Germany, this colloquium was a very atypical event in the series of GHI conferences: Its topic could not be contemplated retrospectively but was, and still is, in constant flux. Therefore, before we could find our own approach to the problem, we thought it was important to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the current debate as well as on the question of what our genuine contribution to it as historians might be.

In observing the political and journalistic discourse on the topic, we realized that the common explanations for the frightening wave of
violence against foreigners and other forms of right-wing and neo-Nazi activism are inadequate. These theories link the problems exclusively to two causes: the increase in the number of migrants entering Germany, especially of Eastern European asylum seekers, and the effects of German unification. Explanations of this type, according to our hypothesis, are based mainly on a causal interpretation of temporal coincidence. It was the purpose of the conference to test this hypothesis and to develop more far-reaching insights.

Jürgen Fijalkowski, professor of political science at the Free University of Berlin, delivered the opening lecture on "Aggressive Nationalism, the Problem of Immigration Pressure, and Asylum Policy Disputes in Today's Germany." After giving an overview of the legal basis of the topic, he dealt with the current dispute over the German asylum and citizenship laws. He discussed in depth the causes of immigration pressures as well as possible solutions for combatting xenophobia and neo-Nazism in Germany and Europe.

The second half of the workshop introduced a cultural-historical perspective. Henry Friedlaender, professor of history in the Department of Judaic Studies at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, offered "Some Remarks on the History of Xenophobia in Germany." He approached the problem by comparing the pluralism of the United States to Germany's questionable ability to cope with the condition of heterogeneity. His talk was guided by two questions, namely, the fragility of Germany's democracy and the "Germanness" of the current wave of violence.

Jeffrey Peck, professor of German at the Center for German and European Studies of Georgetown University, presented his contribution as a series of theses. He analyzed various German terms, such as Ausländer, Heimat, and Deutscher, and traditions, such as citizenship laws, that may lend insight into the German mentality and the tendency toward nationalistic aggressiveness.

After a break for lunch, Michael Lerner, editor of the magazine Tikkun, commented on the talks given in the morning session. He approached the problem of hatred of ethnic minorities by root ing it in its individual psychological sources.

Lerner's thesis was one of the main points in the extensive discussion following his comments. Participants raised the question of whether the search for the positive side of German history necessarily led to a revisionist treatment of its dark side, particularly the Holocaust. Other questions and remarks referred to the topics of German citizenship,
asylum laws, and concept of nation. What was lacking, however, was an accurate reconstruction of the process of revising German and Nazi history, which started in the early 1980s and is closely associated with the so-called Historikerstreit. This aspect could have offered an understanding of the West German background of the current debate.

The papers of this conference will be published in the Institute’s Occasional Papers series.

Dietmar Schirmer