



Edited by
Astrid M. Eckert

Institutions of Public Memory

The Legacies of
German and American
Politicians

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American Politicians

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German Historical Institute
Washington, DC

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THE LEGACIES OF GERMAN AND AMERICAN POLITICIANS

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INTRODUCTION: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL LEGACIES IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

Astrid M. Eckert

On a rainy day in November 2004, William Jefferson Clinton, convalescing from heart surgery, assembled two former presidents, the current incumbent, and several foreign statesmen and celebrities to inaugurate the twelfth presidential library, *his* library in Little Rock, Arkansas. It is yet another library that aspires to superlatives, certainly in regard to the quantity of its holdings, as an architectural statement, and soon, perhaps, in terms of the number of visitors.¹ The opening of a new presidential library has become a showy event of major news value akin to presidential inaugurations and state funerals. It constitutes a display of power, prestige, and pride in the most visible of American political institutions but also another step in the former chief executive's battle to actively shape his presidential legacy. Yet the clamor surrounding new presidential libraries today (soon to be repeated with an edifice for George W. Bush in Texas)—the fund-raising efforts, the refusal of some universities to host a library on their campus, or, conversely, the competition among communities to become presidential library sites in the hope of development fees and tourist dollars spurring economic growth—has little to do with the comparatively modest origins of the presidential library idea.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the first president who considered his presidential papers part of the "national heritage" and decided to preserve them for posterity. Most of his predecessors had treated them as private property and simply took them home and dealt with them as they saw fit. Nobody took issue with this practice although, as one scholar put it, it amounted to "playing darts with a Rembrandt," since it often facilitated the papers' destruction or scattered them across the country.² Roosevelt consciously decided to depart from this previous practice. In December 1938, he resolved to set up a library at his private estate in Hyde Park, New York, and to donate his papers to the American public, marking the beginning of the presidential library system.³ Subsequent presidents have followed suit and expanded Roosevelt's innovation into a network of presidential libraries. With the Presidential Libraries Act of 1955, the system became part of the National Archives. Its Office of Presidential Libraries today administers twelve presidential libraries, as well as the Nixon Presidential Materials, and maintains a staff to deal with the materials of the current administration.⁴

By contrast, Germany—before and after unification—never developed a comparable system of “chancellor libraries.” There is no law that establishes a foundation for a former chancellor or federal president. Principally, the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) is in charge of preserving politicians’ papers, but collecting artifacts and setting up a museum to celebrate a particular politician’s life and times lies outside of its purview. Also, the Bundesarchiv must compete with party foundations, private institutions, and, to a lesser degree, the Memorial Foundations of German Politicians. Only a few such memorial foundations—clearly modeled on the presidential libraries—exist. They are publicly funded and were set up to honor a select group of German statesmen: Otto von Bismarck, Friedrich Ebert, Konrad Adenauer, Theodor Heuss, and Willy Brandt. These five German memorial foundations operate on a much smaller scale than the presidential libraries. The relationship between the two is not closer than that of third cousins. Indeed, trying to discuss them together smacks of comparing apples with oranges, as political scientist Dieter Dowe aptly put it at the conference documented in this volume. It is much easier to collect differences between the two systems than similarities. For instance, the presidential libraries are of different immediate political relevance than their German counterparts. It is inconceivable that the memorial foundations would ever foment public controversies as their American counterparts repeatedly do.⁵

Yet as different as the systems may be, both sides have identified a need for transatlantic communication. This was the driving idea behind the conference *Access—Presentation—Memory: The Presidential Libraries and the Memorial Foundations of German Politicians* held at the German Historical Institute (GHI) in Washington, DC, from September 8 to 11, 2004. The conference—a joint effort of the GHI, the Memorial Foundations of German Politicians, and the Office of Presidential Libraries at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)—brought together practitioners and scholars from the twelve presidential libraries, the five German memorial foundations, and the National Archives. They were joined by historians studying the American presidency and the German chancellorship, archive specialists, and representatives of public interest groups working for access to presidential records. The conference did not simply compare the two systems, nor did it merely present each institution. Instead, it was structured along topical lines, covering issues of mutual interest ranging from historiographical, academic, and practical concerns to archival history, issues of memory, and problems of archival access.⁶

This volume presents a selection of papers from that conference. It opens with a closer look at how the general public comes into contact with the presidential libraries and German memorial foundations. In the United States, it is the attached museums that get the most attention, with

more than 1.5 million annual visitors to the exhibitions. One idea of the conference was to subject the exhibitions to an unusual assessment: a representative of one of the German foundations traveled to various presidential libraries and examined how biographies were exhibited in the presidential museums, while a historian from the presidential libraries' side went to Germany to visit the memorial foundations. Each side thus offered a fresh perspective on the other's exhibition practices.

Thomas Hertfelder visited the exhibitions at the Roosevelt, Kennedy, Johnson, and Bush libraries and discovered "a whiff of royalism." The exhibitions show idealized biographies of white males who were sports buffs in their youth and lifelong patriots surrounded by their large, happy families. The potential tension between a critical analysis of the historical background of a presidency and the celebration of a president's legacy is usually avoided by overly emphasizing the latter. The locations of the museums themselves contribute significantly to this perception through their connection to the biographies exhibited inside. Roosevelt in Hyde Park, Kennedy in Boston, Johnson in Austin—the presidents are remembered far from the site of their political power in Washington and re-embedded into their local points of origin.

John Powers visited all the German foundations and thought that they substantially enriched political education. The exhibitions strive to combine the biographies of the statesmen with the political background of their life and times. The history of National Socialism features prominently in these exhibitions, but they also attempt to show the political transformation of Germany from the *Kaiserreich* to the Federal Republic. However, Powers finds that party politics receive too much attention to the detriment of a more private view of the exhibited statesmen. Also, some major historical occurrences have not yet been incorporated into the exhibitions, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the political change after 1990, and long-term processes like migration. He recommends including more interactive and audiovisual elements and moving away from printed text in order to make the exhibitions more vibrant.

Concerns about access to politicians' records, featured in the conference title itself, are represented in this volume by contributions from Martin Sabrow, Thomas S. Blanton, and Hartmut Weber. Sabrow delivers a case study of the history of access to the Stasi files. What started out as an unprecedented "success story"—public access to the files of a defunct regime's secret service—turned into a highly charged controversy that pitted historical scholarship and the right to know against individuals' right to privacy. The turning point came in 2000, when former Chancellor Helmut Kohl challenged the right of the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR to make public the information the Stasi had assembled about him. Sabrow blamed the

subsequently impaired access situation on two factors. First, the CDU Party finance scandal of the outgoing Kohl administration increased the interest in the Stasi tapes of Kohl's telephone conversations. Second, there was the uncompromising stance of the personalities involved, namely Kohl, Minister of the Interior Otto Schily, and Federal Commissioner Marianne Birthler. Historical scholarship is paying the price: the latest court ruling on the case further increased the web of restrictions already in place, thereby putting an end to the revolutionary and cathartic act of exposing the files of an oppressive secret service.

When it comes to leading politicians' papers, the German Bundesarchiv has a different set of legal problems. Its president Hartmut Weber regrets the unclear meaning of the Federal Archives Law. When leaving office, politicians often hand their papers over to the private archives of the party foundations, regardless of whether the material pertains to official or private matters. For official state papers, however, the Bundesarchiv is the legally designated depository. The federal government finally addressed the issue in a cabinet resolution in July 2001, which prohibited the heads of ministries from removing original papers and ordered them to distinguish between party business and official business. Whether this resolution will be adequately honored remains to be seen.

Thomas S. Blanton, director of the National Security Archive in Washington, DC, moves the focus to current issues of access to presidential papers. Founded in 1985, the archive simultaneously functions as a research institute for international affairs, a library, and an archive of specific declassified U.S. documents: those obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), through a public interest law firm that defends and expands public access to government information through FOIA, and through an indexer and publisher of the documents. By constantly applying the FOIA to pry loose government documents, the archive is the "natural enemy" of the government's attempts at secrecy. Blanton discusses one of the archive's most famous cases, the litigation over White House e-mails that referred to the Iran-Contra deal during the Reagan administration. Whereas the National Security establishment wanted to get rid of these high-level electronic exchanges, the e-mails survived, thanks to a six-year lawsuit brought by the National Security Archive. Henceforth, White House e-mails would be considered part of presidential records, covered by legal provisions for their preservation.

Another set of articles takes a comparative look at the history of the presidential library system and the memorial foundations of German politicians. Dieter Dowe gives an overview of the history of the German memorial foundations. As much as the presidential libraries were the model for the creation of the foundations, a quick look at the respective budgets, exhibition space, personnel, and visitor numbers quickly dis-

closes the modesty of the German undertaking and drives home the point that such a comparison involves the aforementioned apples and oranges. The first foundation, the Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus in Rhöndorf, was set up under the Grand Coalition in 1967 as a non-profit organization. In 1978, it was turned into a federal institution. The same procedure was applied in the late 1980s to the Stiftung Reichspräsident-Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte, first founded in Heidelberg in 1962. The Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung in Berlin, the Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung in Friedrichsruh, and the Stiftung Bundespräsident-Heuss-Haus in Stuttgart were additions of the 1990s. Of these five, only the Bismarck foundation sparked political controversy. Historians with a Social Democratic background questioned whether a democratic society should honor the “Iron Chancellor” with a foundation, which set off a heated debate in parliament. Party politics led to the affirmative resolution of the debate. Indeed, a major difference of the German system is the large role parties play in the German foundations. In Germany, parting chancellors or presidents do not automatically have foundations named after them. Dowe acknowledges that who decides whether a statesman is “worthy” enough and what accounts for “worthiness” or historical “greatness” in the first place remains sketchy at best.

Frank Burke, former Acting Archivist of the United States, presents the corresponding story for the development of the presidential libraries. His article, “Pride or Protest: Community Responses to Presidential Libraries,” focuses on the different reactions of local communities to the prospect of hosting a presidential library. Whereas the Truman Library in the president’s hometown of Independence, Missouri, was something of a grassroots project with widespread community support, the plan to locate the Kennedy Library on the campus of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, met with strong resistance. The Kennedy papers moved instead to Columbia Point, which overlooks Boston Harbor. Although cooperation between a university campus and a presidential library could potentially be fruitful, such an arrangement has not necessarily always been a good match: Stanford University refused to host the Reagan Library, and Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, turned down the Nixon Library. Over the years, the legal status and the mode of financing presidential libraries have evolved, too. Roosevelt considered his papers to be private property but donated them to the United States. The controversy over the ownership of the Nixon papers and his famous tapes led to the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974 and the Presidential Records Act (PRA) of 1978, which settled the ownership question in favor of the state. The NARA thereby became the designated custodian of presidential and vice-presidential papers.

In his contribution, sociologist Barry Schwartz challenges the very notion that past presidents are worth commemorating either with a library or by other means. By focusing on the interaction of cultures of memory and the political culture in the United States, Schwartz examines the history of the public holiday Presidents' Day. Observed on the third Monday of February, it replaced the celebration of Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays in February, which had been gradually marginalized by the popularity of Valentine's Day on February 14th. The decision in 1971 to make Presidents' Day a federal holiday stemmed less from a desire to show reverence to the presidents than an attempt to unify divergent practices of observing the various February holidays. Schwartz doubts whether any president deserves to be honored with a federal holiday and sees the merging of the former birthdays into this meaningless holiday as evidence of waning respect for the office of the president in general.

The volume closes with three case studies that examine the shifting image of a statesman over time. David Greenberg in "Richard Nixon in American Memory" looks back at the many speculations about who the "real" Nixon was, a controversial point even during his lifetime. Two recent interpretations try to reinvent Nixon: one as the experienced elder statesman in his conducting of international affairs, the other as a foreign policy advisor to Bill Clinton. Both try to paint him as a liberal in domestic policies. Greenberg rejects these interpretations as attempts to detract from the defining event of Nixon's presidency, the Watergate crisis, and replace the image of Nixon as a crook. In domestic policies, Nixon did not generate a progressive agenda but only reacted to the dominant, liberal political climate in the country. Greenberg predicts that the image of "tricky Dick" will prevail despite these recent attempts at revision. Nixon's negative, manipulative personality carries too much weight in the public memory.

Walter Mühlhausen portrays a very different politician in his analysis of perceptions of Reich President Friedrich Ebert. Even in his own party, Ebert became controversial due to his role in the revolution of 1918/19. The Weimar Republic never had much loyalty for its first president, nor did Ebert work to polish his image. His untimely death in 1925 dramatically changed the situation. The Social Democrats turned him into a political icon, named a foundation after him, and made his grave a site of pilgrimage. Once the National Socialists were in power, public remembrance of Ebert came to a halt: only Social Democrats in exile tried to keep the flame burning. After the war, the GDR viewed Ebert as a traitor of his class, whereas in the Federal Republic, the left wing of the SPD grew critical of him during the 1960s for having missed the "opportunity" of 1918–19. Only after unification in 1990 did Ebert join the ranks of those

considered leading German statesmen, and he was honored with a memorial foundation.

Andreas von Seggern concludes the case studies with the history of public remembrance of Otto von Bismarck. Even during his lifetime, Bismarck had become the object of popular adulation and even took on mythical dimensions after his death in 1898; numerous Bismarck memorials are scattered across Germany. A new assessment of the “Iron Chancellor” emerged after World War II, when nationalistic approaches to German history were finally delegitimized. It was not until the 1980s that Bismarck remembrance again entered public debate, when the West German minister of the interior suggested saving part of the decaying Bismarck estate near Friedrichsruh, now home to a museum and the Bismarck Foundation. The latter was founded only after unification with major backing from Chancellor Kohl. The foundation, Seggern emphasizes, relates to Bismarck only as an object of historical inquiry and steers clear of older strands of personal reverence.

I wish to express my gratitude to everyone who helped to bring about the conference and make it a success, in particular, Wolfgang Schmidt of the Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung in Berlin, Thomas Hertfelder of the Stiftung Bundespräsident-Theodor-Heuss-Haus in Stuttgart, and Sam McClure of the Office of Presidential Libraries at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland. They were my immediate contacts and co-organizers over many months preceding the conference. This volume would not have been possible without the editing experts at the GHI, namely Jonathan Skolnik, Patricia Casey Sutcliffe, and senior editor David Lazar. Our interns Anja Matthes, Eskea Wegner, Flemming Schock, and Ryan Handy helped prepare and run the conference and assisted with this publication in various ways. Without the decisive support of Christof Mauch, director of the GHI, this volume might have never seen the light of day. Finally, I would like to thank the authors of the articles assembled in these pages, who facilitated my job by their display of patience when it was needed most.

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Atlanta, Georgia
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Notes

¹ After the transfer of his files from the White House to Arkansas, Bill Clinton’s first question to David E. Alsobrook, the director of the Clinton Library, was: “How much stuff do I have? Is it more than LBJ’s?” In fact, it is: the Clinton administration left approximately

76.8 million pages of paper documents (of which 20 million are e-mails), 1.85 million photographs and over 75,000 museum artifacts, amounting to 35,686 cubic feet of records. This makes Clinton's library the biggest thus far. Alsbrook reported the quotation at the conference this volume documents. See note 6. The figures are taken from the library's web site at <http://www.clintonlibrary.gov/>, which also features pictures of the building, the exhibition, and a replica of the Oval Office.

² Joseph L. Sax, *Playing Darts with a Rembrandt: Public and Private Rights in Cultural Treasures* (Ann Arbor, 1999), 81–92.

³ Frank Freidel, "Roosevelt to Reagan: The Birth and Growth of the Presidential Libraries," *Prologue* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 103–13; Richard J. Cox, "America's Pyramids: Presidents and their Libraries," *Government Information Quarterly* 19 (2002): 49–50; Cynthia M. Koch and Lynn A. Bassanese, "Roosevelt and his Library," *Prologue* 33, no. 2 (2001): 75–84; Donald R. McCoy, "The Beginnings of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library," *Prologue* 7, no. 3 (Fall 1975): 136–50.

⁴ See the official NARA site at <http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/>. The recently opened Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, IL, a private, non-profit organization, is not part of the presidential library system.

⁵ Two recent examples: In November 2001, President Bush issued Executive Order 13233, which increased the incumbent president's power over the records of his predecessor(s), the vice-president(s), and his own administration. Open government advocates criticized E.O. 13233 as a violation of the spirit, even the letter, of the 1978 Presidential Records Act. The critics attacked it as a restrictive tool designed to deny the release of presidential and vice-presidential documents sought by scholars and journalists. The order was challenged in court by the American Historical Association, the National Coalition for History, the National Security Archive, and other organizations. For an introduction to the issues, see the coverage in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the monthly column by Bruce Craig for the National Coalition for History at <http://www.h-net.org/~nch/>, the web site of the National Security Archive at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/> (accessed May 2006), and the survey article by Timothy L. Ericson, "Building Our Own 'Iron Curtain': The Emergence of Secrecy in American Government," *American Archivist* 68 (Spring/Summer 2005): 18–52.

The other example is the public scrutiny accompanying the transformation of the private Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation in Yorba Linda, California, into the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum as part of the official presidential library system administered by the National Archives. Particular criticism has been directed at the fact that the foundation received congressional funding to prepare for the transition, whereas traditionally, outgoing presidents have raised private funds to cover 100 percent of the costs of their library. The funding in this case, some critics argue, constitutes a violation of the Presidential Recordings and Materials Act of 1974. The discussions around the transfer are being covered by Bruce Craig for the National Coalition for History (see above), here, in particular, Vol. 10, no. 35 (10 September 2004). The still private Nixon Library also made unfavorable headlines when it canceled a widely publicized conference on Nixon and the Vietnam War in March 2005. See Scott Shane, "Nixon Library Stirs Anger by Canceling Conference," *New York Times*, March 11, 2005. Shortly thereafter, a group of renowned historians protested the planned move of presidential files and tapes from the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, to Yorba Linda in an open letter posted on the web site of the National Security Archive. See <http://www.gwu.edu/~ensarchiv/news/20050310/index.htm> (accessed May 2006).

⁶ See my conference report, "Access—Presentation—Memory: The American Presidential Libraries and the Memorial Foundations of German Politicians," in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 36 (Spring 2005): 105–13.

WITH A WHIFF OF ROYALISM: EXHIBITING BIOGRAPHIES IN AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES

Thomas Hertfelder

"I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought there the image of democracy itself, with its inclinations, its character, its prejudices, and its passions, in order to learn what we have to fear or to hope from its progress."¹ With these words, Alexis de Tocqueville summarized his nine months of travel across America in 1831–2. It is by no means coincidental that this classic analysis of American democracy, long unsurpassed in discernment and clarity, was penned by a European nobleman. Tocqueville, endowed with the skeptical viewpoint of a post-revolutionary liberal, succeeded almost single-handedly in exposing the ingredients of American democracy against the backdrop of Europe's experience of the revolutionary age. What Tocqueville's American hosts considered ordinary and, hence, hardly worth mentioning, was analyzed by the probing gaze of this fascinated European, who questioned the familiar ideas and categories he had brought along from France. Tocqueville was able to see "more than America" in America because his European perspective led him to consider aspects of European life that he hadn't recognized at home, and to unearth much more than his American contemporaries assumed they knew about their country.²

In the vein of Tocqueville's reflections, I would like my observations to benefit from the heuristic productiveness of marveling. They deal with a genuinely American institution designed to explore and to transmit history: the presidential library. Presidential libraries present the biographies of American presidents to the public, but in which ways? Which historical topics and patterns of interpretation do they employ? How do they position themselves as agencies of collective memory within contemporary discourse? My analysis is primarily based on the biographical exhibitions of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library (Hyde Park, New York), the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Boston), the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin), and the George Bush Presidential Library (College Station, Texas).³

In the following, I first discuss the historical patterns of interpretation that shape the presidential libraries. Secondly, I examine the meanings suggested by a presidential library's chosen location, and then, I elucidate some common structural elements underlying presidential biographies. Sections four and five demonstrate how presidential libraries develop the

concept of leadership, and how they integrate and interpret historical disasters and biographical contingencies. The sixth section reflects upon the “musealization” of the Oval Office and other instances of simulated reality. I then situate the previously discussed exhibitions between the competing ideals of “history” and “legacy.” My concluding observations try to gauge the role of presidential libraries in the social memory of the United States.

“Presidential Synthesis” as Master Narrative

There is no place better suited than Washington, D.C.’s prestigious avenue, the Mall, to find a vivid contrast between European and American notions of history. The wide boulevard, lined with numerous museums and representative buildings, runs its unswerving westward course from the Capitol past the Washington Memorial and the rotunda of the World War II Memorial straight up to the Lincoln Memorial, whose neo-classical structure completes the imposing vista. Washington, Lincoln, and the victorious war: simple and effective, this urban topography constructs a linear story from the decisive reference points of American history in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. This line admits neither rupture nor disturbance: the memorials to the wars in Korea and Vietnam are slightly off the central axis. The view of this constitutive historical constellation—with the towering obelisk of the Washington Memorial as the symbolic point of origin—remains unobstructed. Continuity and linearity define the nation’s historical self-image and self-confidence.

The abstract symbolism of linearity and continuity acquires a concrete historical profile in the exhibit “The Presidency: A Glorious Burden,” which the National Museum of American History has presented at the Mall’s western end for several years. Here, visitors catch sight of a long gallery of portraits of all American presidents alongside a timeline. One after the other, like pearls on a string, the forty-two images—from George Washington to George W. Bush—represent over 200 years of national development. The unbroken succession of the holders of the country’s highest office highlights an aspect of American history which shows the fundamental difference between the European and the American historical experiences: no nation on the European continent, least of all Germany, can claim such a period of continuous statehood under the banner of liberty and democracy. Yet this personalized form of historical presentation is a common sight for the European beholder; European monarchies displayed their legitimacy through sprawling family trees and extensive galleries of sovereigns. The exhibition at the National Museum of American History adapts this simple principle of presentation, an example of the remarkable proclivity of revolutionary democracies to draw on pre-democratic forms to create their own self-image.⁴

The academic counterpart to this popular historical approach is the “presidential synthesis,” a type of political historiography according to which the history of the United States becomes most pertinently manifest in its presidents and their respective administrations.⁵ The presidential synthesis, given considerable acclaim in the 1950s and 1960s by eminent scholars such as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and William E. Leuchtenburg, was embedded in the liberal narrative of the “consensus school,” which conceived of American history since the colonial period as the continual unfolding of an all-pervasive liberal tradition, downplaying historical forces such as social conflict and populism.⁶ Bolstered by the U.S. victory in World War II and facing a possible confrontation with the Soviet Union, these historians interpreted the national past in terms of continuity, stability, homogeneity, and progress—without, however, losing sight of the flaws of this progress. Informed by these ideas, the presidential synthesis saw the chief executives as the driving force behind liberal reform and political progress in the U.S. The popularity of the presidential synthesis justifies its designation as a master narrative.⁷ Its influence derives from an array of factors. As mentioned above, the narrative stands for the unbroken continuity of the American political order; each administration becomes a constitutive moment which both establishes legitimacy and draws on tradition. Second, the presidential synthesis supplies a simple chronological structuring principle which renders over two centuries of American history both tellable and memorizable.⁸ Third, the narrative accommodates a disposition which Robert Dallek has called “the country’s obsession with personality”:⁹ in this pattern of interpretation, each president represents not only the state and executive power but also embodies American virtues, particularly the “virtues of leadership.”¹⁰ Fourth, the narrative ties in with familiar forms of political dramaturgy and makes for a presentation of U.S. history in which expert findings and cultural memory interlock. Meanwhile, the presidential synthesis, with its focus on the persona of the president, has become marginal in academic historiography. Eric Foner has pronounced it dead,¹¹ while aware of its tenacity. It lives on, in the National Museum of American History, and also in high school and college text books,¹² and in the museum shops of presidential libraries—on pencils, rulers, fans, playing cards.

In Germany, it is otherwise. Even though the Federal Republic of Germany has existed for fifty years, the German past is marked by national breakdowns, war, division, and totalitarian regimes. Breaks and discontinuities are the basic stock of the German historical experience. Against the backdrop of this “shattered past,”¹³ it is only logical that the Federal Republic has not adopted the narratives of continuity which inform American presidential libraries and memorials. Emblematic of the

nation's experience of discontinuity, Germany honors only a few select politicians with national memorials.

Places

Michael Beschloss once observed that one need only walk through a presidential library to learn a great deal about the respective president; one needn't read a single document.¹⁴ Beschloss's assumption is borne out by a visit to Roosevelt's family estate in Hyde Park [Figure 1]. The visitor gains more than merely an impressive sense of the wealth of the New York families who built their luxurious country estates in the Hudson Valley prior to World War I. Hyde Park also makes us think about the possible correlations between Roosevelt's unwavering self-confidence and the conditions of his privileged upbringing. The Dutch Colonial architecture of the library, whose blueprints were designed by Roosevelt himself, tells us quite a bit about how tradition shaped the "great innovator."

No visitor to the Kennedy Library in Boston could miss the dramatic panoramic view of the surrounding bay offered by the glass-enclosed



Figure 1. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. Dedicated on July 4, 1940. Photograph by Thomas Hertfelder.



Figure 2. View of Dorchester Bay from the John F. Kennedy Library, Boston. Dedicated on October 20, 1979. Photograph by Thomas Hertfelder.

pavilion [Figure 2]. Kennedy spent vacations on his sailboat, *Victura*, near here. The view from the pavilion encompasses Dorchester Bay and Boston Harbor, the area where the president's Irish ancestors arrived in the New World in the mid-1800s. As a result, visitors may also enjoy identifying the unmistakable Bostonian accent in Kennedy's ubiquitous voice.

On May 22, 1971, Lyndon B. Johnson opened his presidential library in Austin, Texas [Figure 3]. It does not take much imagination to read the massive design of the colossal building complex as an allusion to both the way Johnson saw himself and to the "flawed giant's" impressive physical stature.¹⁵ On the whole, "Texas" serves as a code for many of the features of the thirty-sixth president of the United States: his rough manner, his imposing physical presence, his rather loose choice of words, his body language, and his genial way with people. The exhibit inside the building does not fail to display the hallmarks of this Texan identity, including his cowboy hat and boots emblazoned with the state of Texas, and a photograph of him so adorned.

I encountered similar symbols at the George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, a town of 67,000 in the heart of Texas. Here, too, "Texas" is cast as a decisive factor in determining the course of the future



Figure 3. The Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin. Dedicated on May 22, 1971. Photograph by Thomas Hertfelder.

president's life: as a young Yale graduate in 1948, Bush began to work in the Texas oil business and made a fortune; his political career began in the 1960s with the Texas Republicans.

Roosevelt in Hyde Park, Kennedy in Boston, Johnson in Austin, Bush in College Station—in the decentralized system of presidential libraries, each occupies a particular place on the map of the United States. The one-dimensional, that is, chronological, succession of the presidents along a time axis thus becomes a two-dimensional web of geographical nodes—nodes that, as the examples of Boston and Austin demonstrate, have already become firmly encoded in the “mental maps” of contemporaries through manifold cultural associations.¹⁶ Remembered moments in time now become spatial and take on symbolic meaning. At the end of a president's tenure, the public persona leaves the symbolic realm of the nation's power, Washington, DC, and the White House, for a new home situated in one or another region of the national memory. The president connects himself once more, preferably forever, with the American people, thus proving to be a true representative of the nation.

In his classic study of sites of the Annunciation in the Holy Land, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs investigated places in Palestine

that are mentioned in the Gospels. He found that, beginning in the fourth century, these sites were increasingly associated with biblical events or persons. In this fashion, geographical sites evolved into pillars of the collective memory of Christian communities. For Halbwachs, “spatial footing” and “differentiation in space” play a crucial role in constituting communal memories, regardless of whether the stories that sprang up around these places are true.¹⁷ American presidents also make use of place as a cultural mnemonic.

Biographies

Each presidential exhibition holds a two-fold drama in store for the visitor: the drama of American history and the drama of a particular American biography. This construction of American biography is, more precisely, a sort of ideal biography of white males who, by virtue of birth or upward mobility, ultimately belong to a certain socioeconomic class. Three aspects illustrate these trajectories. The first is the prominence of family. Often, a given exhibit begins and ends with the presentation of a preferably large, vivacious model family. The family provides the meta-political framework for a biography, indicating the concept’s central social meaning.¹⁸

In Johnson’s case, the ancestral family on display allows us to examine the humble origins from which this Texan made it to the very top. The Johnsons, while not at all poor, appear as a guarantor of the “log cabin myth,” the popular legend according to which most presidents are of somehow humble origins.¹⁹ With Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Bush, however, it is obvious that they do not fit the myth; they were all scions of the well-to-do East Coast establishment. For this reason, the reinterpretations are all the more revealing. Roosevelt makes up for his lack of a requisite arduous social rise by managing to conquer the White House despite his severe disability. In Kennedy’s case, the interpretation gains validity from an intergenerational perspective: the history of Kennedy’s Irish immigrant family reads like a perfect success story, the American Dream.²⁰ Next to a picture showing his extended family in the 1930s [Figure 4], we hear John F. Kennedy declare, “My great-grandfather carried nothing with him except a strong religious faith and a desire for liberty.”²¹

Paul Watzlawik’s quip that, in America, “not giving a darn about sports” is considered “at the very least unmanly, if not outright unpatriotic” is often confirmed in the exhibitions.²² The introductory film of the Kennedy exhibit features JFK swimming and playing baseball and tennis; a youthful Roosevelt also swims and plays golf; and in College Station, we witness George Bush’s outstanding baseball talent. Even Lyndon B. Johnson, certainly anything but a sportsman, can be spotted in a catcher’s



Figure 4. The Kennedy family in the 1930s. John F. Kennedy Library. Photograph by Dorothy Wilding, courtesy of the John F. Kennedy Library.

uniform. Sports are a central part of the ideal American biography, embodying vigor, competitiveness, and a spirit of fair play. For George Bush, it is the adrenaline factor which connects sports with politics.²³ Perhaps it was this adrenaline factor that compelled him to parachute onto the grounds of his presidential library (albeit in tandem) on June 13, 2004, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday not once, but twice. The public stunt proved more than his physical prowess: by invoking his early years as a bomber pilot, he reaffirmed an association of athletic achievement and patriotism.

Hence, in addition to family and sports, there is a third characteristic of the American biography: patriotism that will stand the test of war. The exhibitions document at length how Kennedy and Bush emerged from World War II as war heroes [Figures 5 & 6]. Even the patriotic commitment of Lyndon B. Johnson, who was unable to point to any acts of bravery, is recalled in his exhibit: his diary is opened to a report of a night mission in New Guinea, and we see the Silver Star he was awarded by General MacArthur.

In addition to these *cultural* aspects, all four biographies are informed by interpretive patterns specific to American historiography. Let us take



Figure 5. Display on JFK in World War II. Photograph courtesy of the John F. Kennedy Library.

George Bush as an example. In College Station, we learn that, after graduating in 1948, he set out with his wife for Texas in a red Studebaker in order to start a life there by working hard. To drive the point home, the exhibit features a beautiful red 1947 Studebaker as the leading symbol [Figure 7], with the following explanation:



Figure 6. World War II display at the George Bush Library, College Station, Texas. Photograph by Thomas Hertfelder.

Remember how the covered wagons of the 19th century carried Americans westward to new frontiers? Some of these early wagons were made by the Studebaker brothers of South Bend, Indiana. Roughly a century later, a low-slung 147 two-door coupe made by the same enterprising company served a similar function for George Bush.

The classic interpretation of the settlement of the western frontier as a defining experience in shaping America's national character is transferred here onto a phase of George Bush's life. The president emerges as a kind of pioneer, and his life takes on the qualities of a paradigmatic American biography.²⁴

In fact, the exhibitions remind one of how thoroughly American presidents derive their self-image from the history of their high office. An anecdote from the Nixon era illustrates this point. On one of his last days in the White House, Richard Nixon was overheard as he engaged in loud discourse with some of his predecessors while restlessly pacing back and forth in front of the presidential portraits. Some observers determined that Nixon had finally lost his mind for good.²⁵ But in regard to the



Figure 7. Replica of George Bush's red Studebaker, George Bush Library. Photograph by Brian Blake, courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.

president's self-image, his behavior makes perfect sense. The fiction that a presidential incumbent dwells in a sort of imaginary community with his predecessors is part of the position's symbolic inventory. Lyndon B. Johnson, for instance, kept a series of volumes containing all the State of the Union addresses from George Washington to John F. Kennedy on his Oval Office bookshelf, in addition to an enormous edition of Washington's works. He was thus constantly reminded of the unbroken succession of his office.²⁶ The exhibit also informs us that Johnson called his domestic reform project, the Great Society, "an extension of the Bill of Rights," thereby establishing a direct link between his presidency and the Constitution of the United States.²⁷

We also find such reminders in the Kennedy Library. In the TV studio where Kennedy and Nixon squared off during their first campaign debate in September 1960, we witness how Kennedy starts off by emphatically invoking Abraham Lincoln, while just a few feet away in Kennedy's duplicated Oval Office replicas of the legendary lanterns of revolutionary Paul Revere recall the era of the Boston Tea Party. Towards the end of the exhibition a video shows sixteen-year-old Bill Clinton as a member of a delegation of the Boys Nation on July 24, 1963, shaking Kennedy's hand

in the White House Rose Garden. At the same time, an older Clinton retrospectively describes this experience as an initiation.²⁸ The exhibitions painstakingly chronicle such encounters between future and incumbent presidents: the youthful Clinton with Kennedy, a young Johnson with Franklin Roosevelt, a young Roosevelt with his distant relative Theodore Roosevelt. In the exhibitions, the presidents are consequently linked within an imaginary web created by early “initiatory” encounters or other symbolic references.²⁹

Leadership

One of the key catchphrases in the 2004 presidential campaign was a term we are reluctant to translate into German in a political context: leadership. If one follows George W. Bush’s arguments, leadership is the determining qualification for an American president. Bush made that clear during a campaign interview with *Time*: “It’s essential that the world and the country see a resolute nature. Leaders set a vision, they listen, they make decisions, and they lead. . . . If you say, ‘write your job description,’ I’d say, ‘decision maker.’”³⁰

As we know, though, great decisions are usually made behind closed doors. What goes on in the arcane realms of power often remains obscured from public view for decades. The interplay between society’s perception of a president and the “real” life behind the scenes can be enacted in manifold ways. The White House Map Room in the Roosevelt exhibition is one good example. On a wall consisting of a semi-transparent cloth panel, we see a closed door with a guard posted next to it. After a short time the panel disappears, giving way to a view of the brightly lit, authentically furnished Map Room. This was the center for military communications in the basement of the White House where Roosevelt regularly kept track of developments during World War II. An offstage voice explains that security regulations were extraordinarily strict and that everything that transpired in this room was “top secret.” Eventually the phone rings, the president is announced, and immediately one hears Roosevelt enter the room, greeting all cheerfully. From this point on the ticker rattles and phones ring while Roosevelt makes his decisions in a firm voice. A few minutes later the ghostlike scenario ends, the lights go off, and the visitor once again faces a closed door. What are we supposed to make of this elaborate illusion? Its appeal derives from the surreptitious, “keyhole” view we are offered into realms normally closed to us, the technical gimmick that Walter Benjamin termed a “shock.”³¹ An enhancing factor is the peculiarity of the exhibit: the old-fashioned clatter of the ticker, the curious encryption machine, the furniture. Above all, the fictitious scenario seeks to demonstrate Roosevelt’s

quiet determination, understood as the core virtue of the commander in chief.

There is one instance where the image of a president's strong leadership qualities is challenged, namely at the Johnson exhibition in Austin. The exhibit accomplishes this through perspectival refractions. The commander in chief's point of view on the Vietnam War is contrasted with the perspectives of others directly involved; next to a picture of Johnson as a confident leader there is another showing the confounded frenzy in the Oval Office during the 1967 Detroit Riot.

Contingencies, Disasters, and the Limits of the American Dream

These biographical success stories effortlessly manage to integrate failures and setbacks as steps on the road to triumph—Whiggism *par excellence*.³² Roosevelt's polio, a chance misfortune, is presented as part of a meta-personal narrative of overcoming obstacles. The exhibit in Hyde Park reveals how Roosevelt managed to surmount this condition with unflagging optimism and willpower; tour guides habitually point out the path that FDR used to struggle along laboriously on his crutches in order to battle his paralysis. A cabinet powerfully displays the heavy braces and positions Roosevelt's suffering in the domain of religious martyrdom by presenting crutch and walking cane arranged in the shape of a cross. During his presidency, the American media did not print a single picture of the disabled president in his wheelchair, supposing that the general sentiment of the age would see a president in a wheelchair as irreconcilable with the prevailing notions of leadership.³³ Indeed, the exhibition reproduces this culture by making no further mention of Roosevelt's disability.³⁴ When the wheelchair suddenly appears in Roosevelt's study, it is an almost subversive element in an otherwise coherent narration [Figure 8].

A display about the Vietnam War demands a different kind of approach. The American intervention was no unfortunate contingency, but rather the outcome of deliberate political decisions which did not achieve the desired results. The Johnson exhibit in Austin does not hesitate to present Vietnam as an American disaster. However, the emphasis is not on wrong decisions by Johnson and his aides. Instead, Johnson's situation is interpreted as "tragic": by seeking a middle course between the options of controlled withdrawal and all-out escalation, the exhibition suggests that Johnson forfeited support at home.³⁵ The exhibition shows a remarkable critical perspective by making the paralysis of Johnson's aides a topic and by providing a forum for individual Vietnam veterans and their experiences. However, because the exhibition insists on a "tragic" plot,



Figure 8. FDR's office with wheelchair. Photograph courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

questions hardly ever arise regarding Johnson's ideological and strategic misjudgments, his ploys to deceive the American public, and possible alternatives to his policies.³⁶

Aside from the Vietnam War, the assassination of John F. Kennedy was the other great American tragedy of the 1960s. In the Kennedy Library visitors are led into a dark corridor. On the left wall, five monitors document the events of November 22, 1963. In an endless loop, all five screens show the same well-known, unsettling images: an unsteady camera, people diving to the ground, wailing police sirens. Then there is an excerpt from the special newscast during which an emotional Walter Cronkite announced the death of the president. At the end there are scenes of the state funeral. The exhibit presents Kennedy's assassination as a media event whose nightmarish images reflect panic, terror, and the disintegration of order.³⁷ In doing so, the exhibit abstains from any attempt at an explanation: visitors receive not a single word of background information about the assassination and its bizarre aftermath. Because the subject matter is left entirely to the visual imagery of November 22, one experiences Kennedy's murder as the incomprehensible, shattering intrusion of evil itself into the American dream as historical contingency assumes its most radical form. Lee Harvey Oswald's name is never mentioned; the killer is committed to a *damnatio memoriae*. JFK's story does not end here. The exhibit continues underneath the caption of "legacy." De-

signed to attest to the enduring validity of Kennedy's ideas, we read his message, "A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on." We also see Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Civil Rights Bill which Kennedy had got underway, pictures of the 1969 moon landing, and a piece of the Berlin Wall. The tour ends in the great glass-enclosed pavilion which allows a view of the waves of the Atlantic, a panorama unobstructed save for a huge U.S. flag in front of the open sky. In the opening of the horizon, the contingent intrusion of evil gives way metahistorically to a visionary future for the American spirit [Figure 9].³⁸

The Oval Office and Other Multiplications of Reality

Those following in the footsteps of American presidents have the rare opportunity to indulge in a special sort of *déjà vu* at such diverse places as Atlanta, Independence, Grand Rapids, Boston, Austin, Little Rock, and Simi Valley. In each of these places, a presidential library has duplicated the Oval Office, right down to the original furnishings.³⁹ This has bewildered more than a few European visitors, for example, Umberto Eco, who pronounced such "furious hyperreality" as a feature of contemporary America. Instead of referring to the actual Oval Office symbolically, by means of pictures or individual objects, the whole room is copied, with the result that signifier and signified seem to merge [Figure 10]. Eco explains this as Americans' obsession with having something more real than real; yet in their perpetual quest for the "real McCoy," they create something altogether false.⁴⁰ Here the European sees his own standards fall short when applied to America and inevitably misses crucial aspects. The Oval Office is, after all, not simply an office space. It is a central element in the inventory of symbols and rituals in America's civil religion.⁴¹ It is in the Oval Office that a president makes important announcements or launches military attacks. It is impossible to represent a room charged with such high-caliber political symbolism with yet another set of symbols; the sole form of representation adequate for the room's significance is the real presence.

Eco's observation highlights the very different standards for public displays in Europe. There would, for instance, certainly be reservations in Germany about a robotic display of a talking and smoking Theodor Heuss or Willy Brandt. Not so in Austin: here, a chipper Lyndon Johnson, dressed as a rancher—a robot, complete with rolling eyeballs and slow-motion gestures—entertains his visitors with humorous anecdotes [Figure 11]. The robot is almost touching, nostalgic in our age of digital simulation; here, a hyperreal mode of presentation has quickly become conventional, even ironic. In the United States, the boundaries between the original and its replication, between reality and its musealization



Figure 9. The pavilion of the John F. Kennedy Library. Photograph by Thomas Hertfelder.

appear to be shifting even beyond the museum doors. Johnson, for example, had a habit of signing the most important laws of his Great Society program with about a dozen pens each, namely, by using a new pen for every stroke of his signature. Each time, at the end of the lengthy spec-



Figure 10. A recreation of the Oval Office at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library. Photograph by Thomas Hertfelder.

tacle, he would give the pens away as mementoes. Reality is not only changeable, it can also be multiplied; both possibilities seem to be equally legitimate.

Multiple Oval Offices, robots, and other hyperreal objects notwithstanding, presidential libraries mostly keep to the usual museum practice of displaying unique specimens that are both vivid and meaningful. Some exhibits are material relics of dramatic events: the coconut shell into which Kennedy had carved the message that brought his crew rescue when his torpedo boat was shipwrecked in the Pacific Ocean; the briefcase of the U.S. ambassador in Saigon bearing the traces of the Tet Offensive's inferno; or the target a U.S. soldier found in the office of the toppled Panamanian President Manuel Noriega in December 1989. The cardboard is riddled with bullet holes and carries the inscription, applied with a red felt-tip pen, "Bush."

History or Legacy?

It has often been said that, in American political culture, the element of the visionary plays an outstanding role, especially in the evaluation of



Figure 11. The robot LBJ speaks. Lyndon B. Johnson Library. Photograph by Thomas Hertfelder.

presidents.⁴² Visions that remain unrealized, however, become legacies. Those interested in legacies do not look to history to learn what has actually happened (Ranke). Instead, they want to highlight certain historical threads and use them as a model for today and tomorrow. What-

ever is incompatible with this model is written in lowercase or blotted out, and the distinction between past, present, and future is blurred. For many historians, thinking in legacies is, at best, a nuisance. Historians strive to approach something like the “truth”—no matter how subject to perspective this truth may ultimately turn out to be. As opposed to the “legacy” viewpoint, “history” insists upon some detachment from its subject in order to broaden perceptions of context and possibility, the norms and limitations of an era, and the structural tension between the given present and its various pasts. “History” insists on the alterity of the past, from which one can deduce neither generally applicable patterns nor timeless norms. The question, then, is one of “history” versus “legacy.”⁴³

On this scale, the Franklin D. Roosevelt exhibition in Hyde Park is the one that comes closest to “history.” Every single exhibit testifies to the distance separating the present from Roosevelt. Furthermore, the somewhat old-fashioned mode of presentation makes for a rather endearing quality: it leaves time for contemplation, and it forgoes emphatic messages. Roosevelt is a great president, but he remains a man of his time.

The Kennedy Library in Boston is at the other end of the scale; it is committed to the legacy of the thirty-fifth president of the United States.⁴⁴ The exhibition allows visitors to immerse themselves in Kennedy’s world. Twenty-one video monitors show JFK in action and innumerable audio presentations evoke the president’s ideas and visions. Here, Kennedy becomes an almost uncanny presence. The message is clear: this eminently charismatic man shaped an era and now, in Boston, we are welcome to fall under his spell once again.⁴⁵ The exhibition is an emotional experience, which comes at the price of a lack of distance. The visual evocations leave little space for contextualization, and critical reflection is not always stimulated. Kennedy himself is the interpreter of his times, as well as an ambassador to the future.

The Bush Library steers a middle course between the poles of “history” and “legacy.” Bush was no fan of “the vision thing,”⁴⁶ and “legacy” means just as little to him. Accordingly, there is hardly any mention of programs, visionary outlooks, obligations, or legacies. Instead, the exhibit offers a variety of historical information which reaches far beyond Bush’s biography. The broad contextualization of Bush’s biography does not produce an image of the president as a hero removed from history, but as a man of his time—a great man, to be sure. History is turned into a grand drama,⁴⁷ narrated with ample theatricality and a certain hypertrophy. At the center is George Bush, who without fail made right decisions. The exhibit takes on traits of a monument. If visitors do not come away with any notable visions, they take with them the certainty that the policies of the forty-first president were beyond reproach in every respect.

The most interesting exhibition in this context is the Johnson Library. It allows for diverse perspectives on the Vietnam War, on poverty, and on racial tensions. The exhibition offers a look “behind the scenes” and is less geared towards the normative project of a “legacy” than to the discourse of ideological criticism typical of the Johnson era: history is the product of our perspectives and interpretations. The exhibit’s reading of Johnson as “tragic,” however, shields the president from overly critical scrutiny.

At this point, allow me to suggest a “caveat.” It certainly would not diminish the accomplishments of the American presidents if one of them were to admit that they, too, are fallible. This acknowledgment has obviously not yet entered the presidential libraries’ politics of memory. Political blunders, personal failures, and disastrous decisions quite simply do not exist here. Would Roosevelt’s star be any less lustrous if the exhibition let us know that his New Deal hardly managed to overcome the Great Depression? Would Kennedy’s legacy be lessened if the Bay of Pigs invasion were to receive more than a passing mention in one caption? It was important to Johnson that visitors to his library also learn about sorrow and failure.⁴⁸ Why then does it omit the fact that he misled the American public during the escalation of the Vietnam War? And why shouldn’t visitors to College Station hear that George Bush stumbled over the issue of economic policy?

These blank spots cannot be attributed solely to the clout of the presidents’ families or other powerful groups. It is rather because the minute presidents are no longer in office, they undergo a remarkable transformation. They become something like “republican kings,” whose foremost duty is to represent the greatness of the nation, its history, and values. The exhibitions seem to follow the principle in English common law that “the king can do no wrong.”⁴⁹ More than a mere whiff of republican royalism hovers above presidential libraries.⁵⁰

Memory

Presidential libraries are at once national archives, academic research centers, platforms for public discussion, and popular museums. They thus operate at the intersection of three different forms of historical memory: the official U.S. politics of memory, popular historical images, and the scholarly exploration of the past. As museums, presidential libraries have become sites of pilgrimage: the Johnson Library recorded over 200,000 visitors in 2003, followed by the Kennedy Library with 165,000 guests, while the Clinton Library in Little Rock, which opened in November of 2004, envisions a record 300,000 annual visitors.⁵¹ This suggests that “master narratives” are far from dead.

Presidential libraries not only present the biographies of individuals. Rather, their intellectual and cultural frame of reference is the imagined

community of the entire nation, including all races, classes, genders, and other groupings. The libraries rely on a proven inventory of symbols and interpretative patterns, and these possess considerable integrating power. The ideal American biography offers a great potential for identification, as do the universalistic concepts of liberty and equality. The narrative of ultimate triumph in the face of adversity appeals to the spirit of the American Dream, along with the republican virtues in the name of the legacy of great men. It is also typical of the liberal narrative of progress that underprivileged groups do not appear on the national radar screen until they have become the objects of successful political action: farmers and industrial workers under the New Deal, African Americans with the introduction of the Civil Rights Legislation of the 1960s, the disabled as beneficiaries of the Americans with Disabilities Act of the first Bush administration.⁵² These observations support John Bodnar's thesis that the fabrication of collective memory has always coincided with an attempt to incorporate "vernacular cultures."⁵³ The Bush Library has shown that there are alternative approaches for a presidential library: in the spring of 2004 it presented a special exhibition entitled "We Grew Up in the Brazos Valley," which illustrated the lives of twenty-two elderly African Americans from the area. The exhibit, part of the library's African American Diversity Program, is evidence of how a group with a unique collective memory can partake of the presidential library's symbolic capital without necessarily being co-opted into national master narrative.

In the current debate over who has primacy in the interpretation of American history, the presidential libraries seem to be steering a course of containment against the idea of "multiple histories." If there is validity to Pierre Nora's view that "memory is attached to the tangible: space, gesture, image, and object,"⁵⁴ then presidential libraries offer a wealth of effective strategies for cultural mnemonics. Will these strategies succeed in countering the dissolution of a unified national history into a multitude of contending histories? From the perspective of a European outsider and historian, I would ask—with all due caution—whether there may be more room for the presidential libraries to open their biographical exhibitions to a more critical view, one that may embrace a variety of perspectives and give voice to the diverse needs for historical reassurance that co-exist within today's fragmented society. Perhaps the exclusiveness of republican royalism can become a sheltering roof under which conflicting collective memories can be articulated. The presidential libraries do function as agencies of a national "collective memory," and they seem to be doing well. And yet they may also be transforming into platforms for what David Glassberg calls "collected memory."⁵⁵ In this capacity, they could make another valuable contribution to the precarious cohesion of a culturally diverse society that is, after all, one nation.

Notes

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols., ed. Phillips Bradley (New York, 1945), 1:15.

² On Tocqueville's and other European social scientists' views of America, see the recent study by Claus Offe, *Selbstbetrachtung aus der Ferne. Tocqueville, Weber und Adorno in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Frankfurt/Main, 2004), 15–58.

³ For this study, I visited these institutions in May 2004. For their kind support, I thank Christof Mauch and Astrid M. Eckert (GHI); Sam McClure and John Powers (National Archives, College Park); Mark Hunt and Herman Eberhardt (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library); Deborah Leff and Frank Rigg (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library); Betty Sue Flowers and Sandor Cohen (Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library); Douglas Menarchik and Patricia Burchfield (George Bush Presidential Library); and David Whiddon (Washington, D.C.). Many thanks in particular to Andreas Daum (SUNY, Buffalo) for his friendly advice and encouragement.

⁴ See Hans Vorländer, ed., *Zur Ästhetik der Demokratie. Formen der politischen Selbstdarstellung* (Stuttgart, 2003).

⁵ See Julian E. Zelizer, "Beyond the Presidential Synthesis: Reordering Political Time," in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA, 2002), 345–70.

⁶ Seminal works include Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men who Made It* (New York, 1948) and Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York, 1955). See also Mark H. Leff, "Revisioning U.S. Political History," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 829–53; Jürgen Heideking and Vera Nünning, *Einführung in die amerikanische Geschichte* (Munich, 1998), 19–20; Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American History Writing," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 651–77; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 320–60; Sanford Lakoff, "Liberalism in America: Hartz and His Critics," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8.1 (March 2005): 5–30. I thank Sanford Lakoff for providing me with his manuscript before its publication.

⁷ See Zelizer, "Presidential Synthesis," 346–7. On the term "master narrative," see Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, "'Meistererzählung'—Zur Karriere eines Begriffs," in *Die historische Meistererzählung. Deutungslinien der deutschen Nationalgeschichte nach 1945*, ed. Jarausch and Sabrow (Göttingen, 2002), 9–32.

⁸ See Zelizer, "Presidential Synthesis," 345–52.

⁹ Robert Dallek, *Hail to the Chief: The Making and Unmaking of American Presidents* (New York, 1996), 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* On U.S. presidents as moral leaders, see Barbara Hinckley, *The Symbolic Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves* (New York, 1990), 82–6, 132–3.

¹¹ Eric Foner, ed., *The New American History* (Philadelphia, 1990), ix.

¹² See Leff, "Revisioning," 830; and Zelizer, "Presidential Synthesis," 351–2.

¹³ Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, 2003).

¹⁴ Michael Beschloss, "Keynote Address: An Overview of Presidential Libraries," in *The Future of Presidential Libraries*, ed. Ted Gittinger (Austin, 2003), 3–8.

¹⁵ See Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York, 1998).

¹⁶ See Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Munich, 2003).

¹⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *Stätten der Verkündigung im Heiligen Land. Eine Studie zum kollektiven Gedächtnis* (Konstanz, 2003), 193–4.

¹⁸ See Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, 1998), 124–7; David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, 2001), 208.

¹⁹ See Edward Pessen, *The Log Cabin Myth: The Social Backgrounds of the Presidents* (New Haven, 1984), 48; Kim Ezra Shienbaum and William C. Spragens, “Cycles in the Public Perception of Presidents,” in *Popular Images of American Presidents*, ed. William C. Spragens (New York, 1988), 587–606.

²⁰ Sanford Lakoff in “Liberalism in America” defines the American Dream as follows: “the ‘American Dream’ as it developed after the Civil War was increasingly not a reverie about establishing the New Jerusalem, despite occasional experiments with utopian communities, but a yearning for a better life in the here and now.”

²¹ Quoted from his farewell speech on his visit to Ireland in June 1963.

²² Paul Watzlawik, *Gebrauchsanweisung für Amerika* (Munich, 2003), 142.

²³ In the exhibit, Bush is quoted as follows: “The adrenaline factor in politics is identical to the adrenaline factor in sports. The extra last throw of a horseshoe where you need a ringer. The time at the plate where either you produce or don’t. And there is a similar feeling in politics, on election eve, say, or facing a debating situation, or a crisis in legislation.”

²⁴ See Patricia Nelson Limerick, “Turnerians All: The Dream of a Helpful History in an Intelligible World,” *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 697–716.

²⁵ Forrest McDonald, *The American Presidency: An Intellectual History* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1994), 467.

²⁶ On the symbolic meaning of the State of the Union addresses and their rhetorical patterns, see Hinckley, *Symbolic Presidency*, 19–25, 51–2.

²⁷ Quoted in the exhibit’s section on Johnson’s Great Society program. The commentary corroborates Johnson’s point of view: “It is a concept whose roots reach deep into the American past.”

²⁸ See Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York, 2004), 62, 480.

²⁹ McDonald uses the term “mystical fraternity,” *American Presidency*, 467.

³⁰ *Time*, September 6, 2004, 39.

³¹ Walter Benjamin, “Jahrmarkt des Essens,” *Gesammelte Schriften* IV/1 (Frankfurt, 1980), 528.

³² See Ross, “Grand Narrative,” 659.

³³ See McDonald, *American Presidency*, 441–2; Hugh Gregor Gallagher, *FDR’s Splendid Deception: The Moving Story of Roosevelt’s Massive Disability—and Intense Efforts to Conceal it from the Public* (Arlington, VA, 1999); Davis W. Houck and Amos Kiewe, *FDR’s Body Politics: The Rhetoric of Disability* (College Station, TX, 2003).

³⁴ An exception is Roosevelt’s Ford, which is on display. The visitor is told that the car was a special model for drivers unable to use their legs.

³⁵ As one text panel explains: “The beleaguered President, haunted by the accelerating cost of the war in suffering and national unity, but convinced that capitulation would lead to disaster, searches desperately for a viable way out. He can find none.”

³⁶ See Bruce J. Shulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism* (Boston, 1995), 133–49.

³⁷ On the role of the media in the aftermath of the assassination, see Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of the Collective Memory* (Chicago, 1992).

³⁸ This observation confirms John Bodnar’s assumption that tensions and fears caused by past events are constantly minimized in the official regime of American memory. See John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1992), 247.

³⁹ The Oval Office in the Johnson Library is presented on a slightly smaller scale. The Roosevelt Library only shows the president's desk in a reconstructed section of the Oval Office. Instead of reconstructing the Oval Office, the Bush Library has his offices at Camp David and on Air Force One.

⁴⁰ Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (London, 1987), 6–8. The sociologist Jean Baudrillard goes further: "America is neither dream nor reality. It is a hyper-reality," *America* (London, 1988), 28.

⁴¹ On civil religion, see Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 1–21; on the president's ritual and symbolic tasks, see James MacGregor Burns, *Presidential Government* (Boston, 1965), 327–8; Burns compares the ceremonial dimension of the presidency with the court of Versailles.

⁴² See, for example, Dallek, *Hail to the Chief*, Chapter 1: "The Vision Thing."

⁴³ See Jörn Rüsen, *Lebendige Geschichte. Formen und Funktionen historischen Wissens* (Göttingen, 1989), 39–56; Edward T. Linenthal, "Can Museums Achieve a Balance between Memory and History," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 10, 1995, B1–2.

⁴⁴ See also Caroline Kennedy, "The Legacy," in the information booklet edited by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (Boston, n.d.); Frank Rigg, "The John F. Kennedy Library," *Government Information Quarterly* 12.1: 71–81.

⁴⁵ Robert Dallek remarks on how hard it is even for a professional historian to resist this spell: "The images are so powerful, so compelling—it's hard even for me to be objective," quoted in Paula Span, "Monumental Ambition," *The Washington Post Magazine*, February 17, 2002, 29.

⁴⁶ See Dallek, *Hail to the Chief*, 1; Peter Lösche, "George Bush," in *Die amerikanischen Präsidenten*, ed. Jürgen Heideking (Munich, 2002), 408–11.

⁴⁷ See Frank H. Mackaman, "Human Drama: Presidential Museums Tell the Story," *Prologue* 21:2 (1989): 135–45. Mackaman endorses this approach: "Once in office, presidents assume a role in a much larger drama, that of governing a nation . . . [H]uman drama stimulates learning" (140, 144).

⁴⁸ See Johnson's speech at the dedication of his presidential library: University of Texas Press Release, May 22, 1971, Statement file, Box 300, LBJ Library.

⁴⁹ This principle was mentioned in the discussion of the executive authority as it was proposed by the Federalist Papers in order to distinguish the American president from the English king. See McDonald, *American Presidency*, 199.

⁵⁰ See Robert Schulzinger's statement in Gittinger, *Future of Presidential Libraries*, 31.

⁵¹ See George Bush Presidential Library, Advisory Council Update, February 14, 2004 (unpublished), and for the Clinton Library Jordan Medijas, "Zutritt für Freund und Feind von Bill," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nov. 22, 2004.

⁵² See Joyce Oldham Appleby, Lynn Avery Hunt, and Margaret C. Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1995), 296.

⁵³ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 17.

⁵⁴ Pierre Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (Berlin, 1990), 13.

⁵⁵ Glassberg, *Sense of History*, 13.

VISITING PRESIDENTIAL AND CHANCELLOR MUSEUMS: AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

John C. Powers

There are a number of differences between the American and German presidential museums. In Germany, three historical forms of government are represented: Imperial Germany, Weimar Germany, and post-World War II democracy in West Germany. A second difference is the distinction between the German chancellor and the German president—both are memorialized. The chancellor heads the government, is responsible for its operations, and is also often the leader of his or her political party. The president functions as chief of state and has primarily ceremonial responsibilities. The German president has an additional, unique responsibility to provide moral leadership and to serve as a national role model. A third difference is the educational component of the museums. Despite their relatively small size, at least by U.S. standards, German museums have a strong educational focus and are designed to ensure that visitors learn important lessons about German history.

The Germans also have selective criteria for establishing museums. Unlike in the U.S., not all German leading politicians have a museum dedicated to their memory. Political parties play a role in determining who is honored with a museum. Also, there is a discussion of whether a given leader is worthy of being memorialized. Did he fundamentally improve German society or make lasting contributions? Another difference lies in the concept of national memory. American museums tend to celebrate democracy and American achievements while honoring the individual who held office. Germans approach their history very differently. A fundamental purpose of the German museums is to describe and explain the disaster of National Socialism.

In the following, I will analyze five German presidential and chancellor museums, focusing on three main areas. First, I examine their intellectual goals, scope, and common features. Next, I discuss the biographies of the five politicians as reflected in the exhibits. Finally, I consider the design and concept of the permanent exhibits. More than their American counterparts, these five German museums seek to share important lessons with their visitors. The exhibits are not meant to be nostalgic. They share three main objectives: to provide an understanding of “the past,” particularly the Nazi regime; to explain what led to National Socialism; and to justify why each of these five politicians proved themselves “worthy” of a memorial. Given their country’s unique history, it is

essential for Germans to be critical of their past and to know about National Socialism to ensure that this horrific movement never reappears. The exhibits thus provide instruction on the political, social, and economic conditions that led to the Nazi takeover.

Each of the five memorialized German politicians played a pivotal role in the evolution of modern Germany. In his own way, each initiated “new” ideas that advanced Germany along the path to democracy. Otto von Bismarck unified Germany, laid the foundation for the social welfare system, and created a system of government that was marginally responsive to its citizens. Friedrich Ebert, who rose from a working-class background to become a longtime leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), was Germany’s first democratic president. He assumed office after Germany’s defeat in World War I and helped establish its first democratic government, the Weimar Republic. Konrad Adenauer was the visionary leader who integrated West Germany into the Western alliances as a democracy. He adopted policies that led to economic recovery following the devastation of World War II. Theodor Heuss played an essential role in devising the new German constitution in 1949 and served as a “moral” standard for West Germans at a critical time. Willy Brandt was the first SPD chancellor of the Federal Republic. While hoping for reunification between East and West Germany, he devised policies—Ostpolitik—that formed the basis for exchanges, dialogue, and coexistence.

Adenauer, Heuss, and Brandt were selected for another reason: each opposed the Nazi regime. Adenauer lost his position as mayor of Cologne, went into hiding, and spent some time in a Gestapo prison in 1944. Heuss had a similar tale; he lost his seat in the German Parliament and his teaching position at the German School for Political Science in Berlin. He, too, went into hiding. Willy Brandt was a leader in the resistance and fled to Sweden. In fact, “Brandt” was not his birth name but his *nom de guerre*.

American exhibits are more narrowly focused on the president and his family. Visitors learn about the history of an era through the prism of the president and his administration. Little emphasis is placed on political parties. Election campaigns are described, but the focus is on the man and his campaign, not his political party. The five German museums have a different focus. They have smaller exhibits and use a biographical approach to provide a broad view of German history. Although Bismarck died in 1898, the exhibit is titled, “Otto von Bismarck and His Times, 1815–1917.” The exhibit looks at the class-based society of Imperial Germany, the rise of industrialization (including the founding of the German Stock Exchange, the growth of industrial companies like Krupp and Siemens, and the use of railways), the political developments leading to unification, and the impact of unification on Germany’s social framework.

The exhibit “Friedrich Ebert: His Life, His Work, His Times” also focuses on industrialization, but from the point of view of the working class, providing a different perspective from both the Bismarck and Adenauer exhibits. The “Roaring ‘20s” are also on display, with exhibit items showing the “hedonistic” culture that was the rage in Germany as well as across Europe and America. The exhibit emphasizes the history of the Weimar Republic to address the question of what led to the creation and failure of Germany’s first democracy. It also goes beyond a simple biography of Ebert, who died in 1925. The exhibit covers up to 1933, the year the Weimar Republic collapsed and Nazi rule began.

The Theodor Heuss exhibit often uses a literary perspective to narrate German history. After all, Heuss was a renowned writer and commentator. This exhibit provides the best perspective on National Socialism, focusing on its origins. Like the Ebert exhibit, it goes far beyond Heuss’s biography, focusing broadly on the creation of a new constitution and parliamentary form of government after 1945.

The Konrad Adenauer and Willy Brandt exhibits focus more narrowly on the biographies of the individual leaders. The former describes industrialization in the context of Adenauer’s position as mayor of Cologne. The latter provides a deeply personal perspective on National Socialism and those who actively opposed it. Visitors also learn about the SPD and Brandt’s rise through the political hierarchy.

Because German political parties are central in determining who is remembered by a museum, party history is naturally displayed prominently in the exhibits. Ebert rose through the SPD party ranks and eventually became the first president from the working class. Brandt became the first SPD chancellor; the exhibit celebrates this, tracing the rise and popularity of the party in postwar Germany. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) is on display at the Adenauer museum. Each Adenauer policy success is accompanied by exhibit items on the electoral successes of the CDU, including an entire wall of campaign posters. At the Heuss museum, the visitor learns about the founding of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Heuss’s role in establishing the party after World War II.

In Germany, unlike the U.S., people vote for a political party based on its policies rather than for an individual. A German politician rises to a leadership position if he or she successfully navigates the party hierarchy. German museums thus give a lot of room to the history of the various parties, whereas American museums all but ignore their role and focus instead on individuals.

The five German museums all aim to present their history dispassionately and objectively. They do not seek to put their leaders on a pedestal but to present a balanced view. They aim to provide a compre-

hensive spectrum of German history, explaining past accomplishments and failures. How well do they accomplish these goals and objectives?

First, do the five museums adequately answer the central question, "How did National Socialism happen?" The museums do emphasize the factors that led to the Nazi takeover in 1933, but they tend to personalize and limit this presentation by focusing on how National Socialism affected the politician featured in the museum. While these politicians opposed the Nazis, they were not typical Germans. By concentrating almost solely on them, the museums only partially succeed in one of their primary goals: the personalized focus comes at the expense of a more thorough discussion of World War II and the Holocaust.

Most of the museums strive not to show the leader as "hero." The exhibits are designed to present a realistic, dispassionate, and broad view of German history. Do they succeed? Bismarck, the "Iron Chancellor," evokes strong feelings even today. The controversial leader remains a "cult" figure for segments of German society. The exhibit details both positive and negative aspects of Bismarck's policies and legacy. He was indeed anti-democratic and responsible for laws that severely limited the SPD; he initiated an anti-Catholic campaign, and he appeared to have racist ideas. While his policies did foster a sense of German identity and nationalism, they also created a culture predisposed to what would later occur in National Socialism. Many trace the origins of German anti-Semitism to this era. Yet he was also responsible for unifying Germany, leading it through the tumultuous era of industrialization, and designing and instituting social welfare and health programs for all Germans.

The Ebert museum exhibit details the importance of his rise from poverty. The powerful symbolism of a person rising from the working class to the state's highest position is one that Americans can strongly relate to; it is equally important to Germans. The exhibit is balanced and does detail criticism of Ebert and his policies. Addressing his role in the aftermath of World War I, the exhibit discusses the controversy over whether Ebert compromised his democratic ideals by negotiating with the nobility and the military to establish the Weimar Republic. The polarization and political instability that characterized Weimar is effectively presented, as is Ebert's turn to autocratic methods to suppress rebellions and strikes. However, there is one weakness in the exhibit. While it details the effect of nationalism in bringing down the Weimar government and its role in the rise of National Socialism, the exhibit should have explicitly described the increase of anti-Semitism and its disastrous effect on the German Jewish community.

Konrad Adenauer is revered as a "hero" in his museum. He was affectionately known as "der Alte" (the old, wise one) for his policies and his grandfatherly stature. While Adenauer was largely responsible for

developing the Federal Republic into a prosperous democracy, the exhibit offers very little critical analysis of his policies. It could, for instance, reflect upon his rigorous pursuit of Western alliances and how this affected the issue of unification. Because Germany remained divided, East Germans had to endure forty years of autocratic rule and separation. After reunification in 1990, the issue flared up again in scholarly debate.¹ There are other important omissions. The Marshall Plan, which played an important role in rebuilding Germany, is not discussed at all, and the Berlin Airlift is only mentioned briefly. Nor is Adenauer's age discussed—the CDU won two parliamentary elections while Adenauer was in his eighties before he resigned as chancellor at the age of eighty-seven. Lastly, there is the role of Adenauer's Catholicism. One photograph in the exhibit shows Adenauer playing *boccia* with the Bishop of Cologne, but the question of whether Adenauer's religious beliefs impacted his policies is not considered. By contrast, religious issues are common in U.S. politics.

The Theodor Heuss museum contains the most detailed exhibit on the rise of National Socialism. Visitors come away from the exhibit with a sense of Nazism's true evil. Yet they do not learn why Heuss, as a member of parliament, voted for the *Ermächtigungsgesetz* in 1933; this vote to allow Hitler and his party to establish control remained a black spot on Heuss's biography. The exhibit does detail his regret and includes audio of a powerful speech that Heuss gave as president, stating that he and all Germans of his generation share in the guilt for the Nazi period.

Like Adenauer, Willy Brandt became an icon of modern German history. Indeed, Andy Warhol made a lithograph portrait of him, which is included in the exhibit. But while the exhibit details how Brandt's groundbreaking Ostpolitik improved relations between East and West Germany, there is no mention of its American counterpart, *détente*, without which Ostpolitik would have been impossible.² There is also scant mention of the spy scandal that ended his chancellorship: the Guillaume affair is reduced to one item, Brandt's resignation letter, and is not further explained. The exhibit places heavy emphasis on his political beliefs and career in the SPD. At times, the exhibit focuses more on the history of the party than on Brandt and his role in German history.

In my view, the political parties dominate the exhibits in an unbeneficial way. While there were substantial differences between the parties in the past, as I watched visitors skip these sections I had the sense that Germans today perceive political parties as "more of the same." By over-emphasizing their role, the museums may detract from their main mission, to impress upon Germans the importance of understanding their past.

Lastly, the five exhibits show very little of the leaders' personal lives. Perhaps this is a cultural difference between Germany and the U.S., where issues of "family," "personality," and "private life" play central roles in exhibits in presidential libraries. Americans want to learn who the president is as a person. If visitors to German museums learn anything about the private lives of their leaders, it is because a particular item on display had a direct effect on the leader's policies or political philosophy. Theodor Heuss was an accomplished sketch artist and painter, and numerous drawings and paintings are included throughout his exhibit. However, the exhibit describes his hobby as part of his public persona as a statesman, reinforcing his image as "Papa Heuss," as he was affectionately known. The Adenauer museum and the Brandt museum have added small sections at the end of their exhibits to display a more personal side of their politicians: we learn that both shared a love of gardening. But these quick glimpses into the private lives of German leaders pale in comparison to the exhibits of their American counterparts.

Thus, while the exhibits focus on the various politicians, they strive to place each within the context of his era. The aim is not to put together hagiographic displays to memorialize "heroes" but to learn from their history, particularly the conditions that led to National Socialism. The exhibits succeed in effectively describing Germany's evolution from a collection of separate autocratic states to a unified nation and then overcoming National Socialism to become a strong democracy. Using a biographical approach, they present a broad view of this history, tracing political, as well as moral, social, economic, and cultural developments.

For instance, German social history is emphasized both in the display on the class-based society in Bismarck's empire and in the stress on working-class society at the Ebert museum. In describing the cultural history of these eras, the exhibits show the development of mass media such as newspapers, political magazines, radio, and television. The Ebert exhibit includes a section on the birth of the German film industry. The Ebert museum provides visitors with a vivid impression of German life around 1900, including audio of traditional folk and labor songs and a replica of a bar where working-class Germans socialized.

The five museums effectively concentrate on presenting economic and labor history. At the Bismarck museum, one room in the exhibit is dedicated to the industrial revolution; it shows the rapid growth of the iron and steel industries as shipping and railways flourished. Bismarck was also responsible for creating workplace protections that still serve as the foundation for the German social welfare system, including disability and unemployment insurance. The Ebert museum details additional reforms, such as the eight-hour workday. The Ebert and Adenauer exhibits address the economic depression and hyperinflation in the aftermath of

World War I, while the Heuss and Adenauer exhibits describe West Germany's "economic miracle" in the 1950s.

Most importantly, Germany's moral history is thoroughly presented. The five museums specifically focus on the roots of National Socialism. The objective is to explore how a progressive, civilized society allowed National Socialism to develop. Visitors learn about the effect of nationalistic policies on Jews and minorities in Imperial Germany, as well as the concurrent effect of colonialism on national identity. The Ebert, Adenauer, and Heuss exhibits detail the origins of the Nazi Party as German society became polarized during the Weimar Republic. The importance of German acceptance of responsibility for "the past" is emphasized, specifically responsibility for World War II and the Holocaust. Two items in the exhibits vividly stand out. At the Brandt exhibit, visitors can see the famous photograph of the chancellor in Poland kneeling at a memorial for victims of the Warsaw Jewish ghetto uprising. At the Heuss museum, the exhibit is purposefully designed: a podium with headphones is placed so that visitors must listen to the audio to proceed. There, the commanding voice of President Heuss tells listeners, "*Ich bin schuld*" ("I am guilty"). His speech, like Brandt's *Kniefall* in Poland, was aimed at Germans—past, present, and future—and has a deep intellectual and emotional impact.

Americans have very defined views of the qualities that demonstrate leadership; they want to celebrate the individual who becomes president. In telling the presidential story, American museums show presidents as successful individuals who, with strong personal values and convictions (and often overcoming personal hardships), led the nation through various challenges and crises. German museum exhibits treat their politicians quite differently. Because of the fanaticism that characterized the disaster of National Socialism, the image of a strong leader is forever tarnished—the word *Führer* (leader) now evokes images of dictatorship, despotism, and evil. To ensure that this type of "leader" never resurfaces, these exhibits seek to root their politicians in the larger context of German history, including what led to Hitler. The Ebert, Bismarck, and Heuss exhibits thus have broad titles and present the wider history of an era.

Yet the Adenauer and Brandt exhibits are focused somewhat differently and do have a more reverent tone. The exhibit "Adenauer: Documents from Four Ages of German History" focuses more on Adenauer than the "four ages" of German history. Adenauer is revered as a hero for rebuilding Germany. His image is used throughout the exhibit as a symbol of strong moral character. Although Adenauer's important role is certainly beyond question, the exhibit marginalizes the efforts of others while he was chancellor. For instance, Ludwig Erhard—the architect of the German "economic miracle"—is curiously sidelined.

The Brandt exhibit has a narrower focus than the others. “Willy Brandt: The Struggle for Freedom” details his resistance to National Socialism. In this regard, he, too, presents a strong moral character. More than at the other museums, the history of the political party is paramount. Using Brandt as the biographical focus, the exhibit highlights the history of the SPD, tracing the rise of the party as a major political force, including the 1969 election that swept the SPD into power. While parts of the exhibit do feature Brandt’s policies as mayor of Berlin and his Ostpolitik as chancellor, they are small compared with the large sections on SPD history. There is even a section on Socialist International under Brandt’s presidency.

All five museums demonstrate the importance of maintaining German democracy while also providing the visitor with the history of the era and the leader’s specific role. To accomplish this, the exhibits are designed to create a *Gefühl* (feeling). Like presidential libraries in the U.S., the setting and location of the museum are important. The Bismarck museum is located in Friedrichsruh, where he lived and worked. The exhibit is housed in a restored railway station, which symbolizes the industrialization that developed during his tenure as chancellor. The Ebert museum showcases his humble beginnings. Visitors stroll through the tenement house where he was born and can see what it was like to be poor in Imperial Germany. Located in the small town of Rhöndorf, the Adenauer museum includes his private residence and a separate exhibit hall. Following his dismissal as mayor, Adenauer built the house himself and lived there until his death in 1967. The main exhibit building, with floor-to-ceiling glass windows, is in an idyllic setting; visitors can view the surrounding countryside and the Rhine. The Heuss exhibit is located in the suburban Stuttgart house Heuss retired to after leaving the presidency. The neighborhood had been reduced to rubble by Allied bombs; the house and subdivision are symbols of Germany’s recovery following the war. The Brandt museum is located in the city hall in Berlin-Schöneberg where he served as mayor during the coldest moment of the Cold War—the Berlin Crisis.

The notion of *Gefühl* is important to the exhibit designs. For example, the evil of National Socialism is displayed strongly at the Heuss museum. Symbolically, this section is completely removed from the other parts of the museum. There, visitors walk down a narrow path to the section on National Socialism. As visitors descend, a loudspeaker is activated and they hear the voice of Joseph Goebbels as they arrive at a solitary charred log with book covers attached to it. Behind the log, there is a wall-sized photograph of a burning pyre of books. This part of the exhibit is emotionally wrenching for visitors, and it is also deeply personal in its relation to Heuss: two of his own books were banned and burned. Visitors

then enter a darkened room and learn about Germans who did not espouse National Socialism and how they survived—if they survived. These displays leave a lasting and powerful impression.

The exhibits also celebrate Germany's postwar transition to democracy. At the Heuss museum, visitors exit from the darkened room and enter a large open area sectioned off by steel girders that documents the creation of Germany's new constitution, the development of a democratic system of government, and the country's rapid economic growth. Finally, the Heuss exhibit includes an *Erinnerungsraum* ("Room of Memory"). Painted white, the room is separate from the other exhibit areas. There is a bookshelf with Heuss's books against one wall. Visitors can read some of Heuss's speeches from a podium. The room is symbolic of Germany's future but also allows the visitor to reflect back on the entire exhibit.

The exhibit designs also reinforce the individual museums' secondary aims. At the Ebert museum, many photographs detail working conditions. Placards, labor songs, and newspapers show the efforts of the working class to organize and strive for greater economic and political freedom. At the Bismarck museum, the room documenting industrialization is designed with steel. A waist-high cement wall divides the post-World War II exhibit room at the Adenauer exhibit, providing visitors with a tangible reminder of the division of Germany, so central in the Cold War. The walls of the Brandt museum and the exhibit cases are painted red and gold, the colors of the SPD. Abundant SPD memorabilia give visitors an appreciation of the party's importance in Brandt's life. At the Heuss museum, design enhances the message: as visitors leave the small, dark room on the Nazi era for the bright, open room symbolizing Germany's rebirth, steel girders and extensive audio provide visitors with subtle reminders of Germany's postwar economic miracle. At the very end of the exhibit, a skylight beams sunlight onto a statue of Heuss. Like the glass cupola in the Reichstag, it symbolizes Germany's successful transition to democracy and freedom, and its bright future.

Lastly, I would like to discuss how the exhibits are organized. The curators have included, to varying degrees, many different types of media, from traditional documents to the latest video technology and computerized interactive exhibits. At the Bismarck museum, painted murals dramatically illustrate the neo-feudal period before German unification. All of the museums use documents, but they cause some problems. Old German handwriting is impossible for most visitors to read; they must rely on explanations to understand what they are seeing. But modern German handwriting can be just as bad. In the Ebert museum, there were few existing documents to include; most of his papers were destroyed in the war. Nonetheless, documents can be very effective displays, like Hermann Goering's letter dismissing Adenauer as mayor of Cologne.

The curators also personalize the exhibits through photographs. The Heuss museum includes portrait silhouettes of many of his friends and associates. Visitors open the framed silhouette image to reveal a photograph and an accompanying text on the person's fate during the Nazi era.

The exhibits also make excellent use of audio. At the Ebert museum, visitors can hear labor songs from Ebert's organizing days. At the Heuss museum, recordings are central to the exhibit. Heuss was a powerful speaker, and the curators believed it was essential for visitors to listen to him speak to truly understand him. But fifty-seven different opportunities to hear Heuss is simply too many. Visitors are overwhelmed and might miss much of the audio as they walk through. However, the curators did place the most important clip where visitors must stop. As a result, they do listen to the "*Ich bin schuld*" speech. The powerful feelings it evokes stay with them long after the tour is complete.

Video and film also help the narration. The Ebert museum includes an innovative introductory film: an actor plays Ebert as he walks through his own museum. Meanwhile, a narrator provides background information on Ebert's poor childhood, life in Imperial Germany, labor unrest, industrialization, and the Weimar Republic. The film is an excellent educational tool for Germans who may have little knowledge of Ebert and why he was an important figure in the period that preceded the Nazi takeover.

All five museums use objects to reinforce their lessons. The "golden pen" used by Bismarck to sign the peace treaty with France is on display to demonstrate the "balance of power" strategy that characterized his political thought. At the Ebert museum, visitors tour the three room tenement where he was born, see a recreation of his office as SPD secretary, and observe how he used "new technologies" like the telephone and the typewriter to help organize workers. In the Adenauer exhibit, eggs and their prices dramatize the economic chaos and hyperinflation after World War I. The Heuss museum includes a microphone in the exhibit to emphasize his great speaking ability. The Brandt exhibit features a contribution cup from a SPD campaign rally, which further stresses the party.

Lastly, the museums all include interactive displays. Visitors can flip through a replica of a thin Berlin telephone directory from Bismarck's era. They can move dials to see all the political parties that made up the complicated German parliament. An interactive map tracks Bismarck's balance of power strategy through his tenure as chancellor. In the Ebert museum, an interactive map follows his travels through Germany before he settled in Bremen. Visitors can pick up copies of Heuss's editorials and news articles as they walk through the exhibit and take them home for further reflection. At the end of the Heuss exhibit, a visitor can play

journalist and compose a virtual news article that can then be sent electronically to any e-mail account.

The five museums tell an important, interconnected story. Collectively, they demonstrate the historic evolution of the democratic process in Germany. Each of the men profiled marks a "milestone" in German history. Their policies, political philosophy, and moral character made significant contributions to the development of the modern German state. But the exhibits are not simply biographical or designed solely to commemorate and celebrate their lives. They are designed with the lofty goal of teaching Germans about the importance and fragility of their democracy. As they explain and document the successes of each leader and each era, they also examine them critically. This critical analysis is essential. Given Germany's unique past, it is imperative that Germans know their history to gain an understanding of what led to National Socialism. These five museums are determined to impart that lesson. Each of these politicians provides a high moral example for future generations. The museums show that Germans must take active roles for their democracy to survive and to continue to flourish.

Given these objectives, what can the museums do to remain relevant, and how can they broaden their appeal? In terms of design, some museums are further along than others in making their exhibits more interactive. They try to include fewer documents and less commentary, which detract from an exhibit's overall "power." Again, the Ebert museum's introductory film is a thoughtful example; after viewing "Ebert" walking through his own museum, visitors can gain more from their own tour.

The five German museums could make more use of the Internet. The Heuss museum is the only one where visitors can use a computer to create a record of their trip. The Bismarck museum has the most advanced web site; visitors can read additional texts and view photographs and maps. The Adenauer museum has no web presence yet, but the museum would gain a great deal from a "virtual" exhibit because visitors to the private residence are limited to only a few rooms. Unlike the Ebert house, where visitors can walk throughout the tenement, visitors to the Adenauer house must stand behind ropes and often view objects from a distance. Because of fire and security regulations, visitors are not allowed upstairs or in his study and cannot see the true treasures. A virtual exhibit could include paintings by Winston Churchill and Dwight Eisenhower as well as the Torah given to Adenauer by Nahum Goldmann. Creating interesting virtual exhibits and interactive learning would allow the five museums to reach new, larger audiences.

This brings me to my second observation. The German museums need to develop a vision of the future that will ensure their continued

relevance. Germany today is very different from the Germany of fifty, twenty-five, or even five years ago. While there are still divisions and differences, Germany is now united and Berlin is once again the capital of the Federal Republic. Faces in Germany have also changed; immigrants from Turkey and other countries have lived in Germany for a generation and are an integral part of German life. During my visits to the museums, I heard several other languages spoken. These new immigrants are also a part of Germany's future. The notion of "nation-state" is also changing in Europe. Europe has adopted a single currency and the European Union has gained political power. The EU will continue to expand in the future, eventually obliterating the old divisions of East and West. But Germany is not only integrating into Europe, it is also taking its place on the world stage, as demonstrated by its participation in peacekeeping missions and its bid to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

The political parties and their role in German life are also changing. Today, the SPD, CDU, and FDP are no longer the only parties in parliament. The Green Party now sits solidly in the German Bundestag and the Left Party is also a presence. Germans have fairly cynical views of the political parties. They are all viewed with disdain—and few see true policy differences between them. The exhibits spend considerable wall space detailing and explaining the history of the political parties, and these sections may quickly become outdated and irrelevant.

The Weimar Republic failed over seventy years ago when the Nazis took control and established the Third Reich. Allied troops landed in Normandy sixty-one years ago. The Auschwitz death camp was liberated sixty years ago. The generation that lived through World War II is dying. The few who survived the Holocaust are also now departing. This generation witnessed the evils of tyranny, war, and the Holocaust; they are the world's memory and serve as a constant reminder that we must remain vigilant and outspoken. As this generation passes, there is a danger that the next generation will forget. The issue of memory is thus all the more important.

The museums must take all of these factors into consideration when designing and changing their exhibits. These factors provide both a challenge and an opportunity. In explaining what led to National Socialism, the exhibits focus on the fragility of democracy. Whereas American democracy has been a continuous success story (at least in American eyes) to be envied by the world, the German path to democracy was not so fortunate. The museums have the chance to play a part, not only in retelling history but also in showing its relevance to issues of today: poverty that engenders hatred, intolerance that results in violence, and

repression that stifles freedom. The museums will be more meaningful to the extent that they can relate the past to these present concerns.

Collectively, these museums demonstrate the historic evolution of the democratic process in Germany and its recognition of the need to confront intolerance, hatred, and despotism. These issues did not end in 1945 and still persist around the world. Germany has the special responsibility to ensure that its citizens and the world never forget the horror of Nazism and the Holocaust. The museums have a unique opportunity to translate the lessons of the past and apply them to the present to make “never again” a reality rather than just a slogan.

Notes

¹ See Wilfried Loth, “Das Ende der Legende. Hermann Graml und die Stalin-Note. Eine Entgegnung,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 50 (2002): 653–64, 653; Jürgen Zarusky, ed., *Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952: Neue Quellen und Analysen* (Munich, 2002).

² See David C. Geyer and Bernd Schäfer, eds., “American Détente and German Ostpolitik, 1969–1972” *GHI Bulletin Supplement 1*, 2004.

THE QUARREL OVER THE STASI FILES

Martin Sabrow

The struggle for access to the Stasi files dates back to the peaceful revolution in East Germany in the autumn of 1989. In November 1989, the Ministry of State Security (MfS) was transformed into the Office of National Security (Amt für Nationale Sicherheit, ANS), with the hidden purpose of securing secret police structures and documents for the post-dictatorial era. This attempt failed, and the people responded with the “storming of the Normannenstraße,” Mielke’s stronghold in Berlin, in order to stop Stasi agents from destroying evidence. The storming was successful; it represented a victory for the people and for civil rights.

In the end, the “Round Table” decided to destroy the files of Markus Wolf’s intelligence branch, but the majority of the documents concerning the internal activities of the MfS could be saved. In May 1990, the East German People’s Chamber appointed a special committee under the chairmanship of Joachim Gauck to control the dissolution of the MfS/ANS. Then in September 1990, the German Unification Treaty obliged the Bundestag to entrust MfS records to a Special Commissioner of the Federal Government (later Federal Commissioner) for the files of the former State Security Service, the so-called Gauck Agency, which began operations with fifty-two employees. In December 1991, according to the same provision of the Unification Treaty, the Bundestag approved the “Stasi Records Law,” which granted the access to the records. The law was passed by a broad coalition of CDU, FDP, and SPD deputies, with abstentions from the PDS and the Green Party. Its famous Paragraph 32 regulates the unlimited access to “documents without personal information” and to “copies of documents with personal information rendered anonymous.” The other personal information that the Gauck Agency was allowed and obliged to release can be divided into three categories: documents with written consent of the person concerned, documents with personal information about employees and beneficiaries of the MfS, and “information about persons of contemporary history or holders of political office, as far as they are not directly or indirectly affected persons.” This curious, obscure definition distinguishes between guilty parties, who were not supposed to benefit from the law, and three categories of victims: “persons directly affected,” i.e., those deliberately targeted by the MfS, “indirectly affected persons,” i.e., those mentioned secondarily in a Stasi investigation, and finally a group with little claim to secrecy because of their prominent public role—the people of contemporary history. In

1996, the law was amended to insure that “the secrecy of mail, correspondence, and telecommunications [would] be limited due to this act.”

In the ten years that followed, millions of applicants gained access to the Stasi files through this law. The Gauck (now, Birthler) Agency today has thousands of employees organizing the access to the Stasi files, which are located in the central archives of the former MfS in Berlin and in various regional archives. A special department (“Research and Education”) pursues scholarly research, organizes conferences, and publishes monographs; Mielke’s state security apparatus has thus become one of the best investigated parts of the former dictatorship. The Stasi records, encompassing more than 500,000 feet of documents, are in principle open to all interested researchers. The public became used to the flood of revelations that emerged from the reading of the Stasi files by former victims and journalists; thousands of the Stasi’s “unofficial employees” were exposed. The law proved to be one of the rare legacies of the East German grassroots citizens movement that survived reunification—it turned out to be a tremendous success.

But at the end of ten years, the very same law was widely criticized. This unexpected situation arose when, through a series of legal moves, former chancellor Helmut Kohl forced the Federal Commissioner to seal all Stasi documents relating to him and his political role. The law underwent a series of transformations that restricted the access to the Stasi documents, thereby undermining the basis for public information about the GDR. Henceforth, scholarship on the MfS and other facets of the “second German dictatorship” could not reach the standard of former investigations for lack of source material. How can this unexpected turn be explained, especially since it occurred at the same time a general interest in coming to terms with the past—from the Herero massacre to the Holocaust—stood out as a phenomenon in Germany and elsewhere?

The first explanation is the political background to the quarrel. It began at the end of 1999, just when the donation scandal of the CDU rattled the political sphere like an earthquake. For weeks it threatened to split the conservative party. The coincidence was no accident. In the slow process of sifting unknown material in the files of the MfS, the Federal Commissioner had come across protocols of “bug activity” and recordings of telephone calls emanating from the inner circles of the West German government in the 1970s and 1980s. This material seemed to contain some evidence of the attitude of CDU leaders in the party donation case and therefore drew unusual attention. Once it was made public, it led to critical questions from journalists and from the Ministry of the Interior under Otto Schily. These critics were concerned that the effort to come to terms with the GDR legacy interfered with politics in the Federal Republic. Gauck retreated a bit and made his position on the law and files more

precise: the agency would no longer make public any original protocols of the “illegally” bugged conversations but would still make the Stasi summaries accessible. In April 2000, Kohl applied to inspect his personal files. In November, he demanded that the agency withhold any material that concerned him until he had personally reviewed it.

Personal factors also must have played an important role. No one involved in the matter appeared open to compromise, and all acted with remarkable stubbornness. For Gauck’s successor Marianne Birthler, the situation was extremely difficult. As a newcomer, she had to prove she was capable of replacing the hero Gauck and managing the crisis. The quarrel enabled Kohl, who had lost political power and now risked tarnishing his personal reputation, to distract public attention from the central issues of the donation scandal. For his part, Otto Schily had the opportunity to return to his roots as a state defense lawyer.

Birthler remained firm. She stated that the agency was obliged to release requested material according to the law and that she could not grant individuals the privilege of personally vetting these materials as this would affect the access rights of historians and the media. As expected, Kohl appealed to the Administrative Court on November 27 to prevent any release of documents concerning him. Birthler, in return, decreed that those concerned would be informed before “their” documents were made accessible to allow them to object. But this half-hearted move did not help. In July 2001, Kohl was handed a full victory in court; his files had to be kept secret. The court ruled that “persons of contemporary history” are also protected.

Days later, Otto Schily came forward with an unusual measure, the “high noon ultimatum”: He would take legal action against the Federal Commissioner if she continued to release documents to the public. When an appeals court, the Federal Administrative Court, upheld the earlier ruling that restricted personal information about Kohl and, consequently, every concerned individual who had not been a Stasi member, Birthler changed her tactics. She closed all exhibitions, all information and documentation centers about the Stasi, shut down the agency’s web site, and denied nearly all applications for historical research. Her actions elicited a protest from the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, which accused the authorities of blocking access to Nazi-related documents in the MfS archive. The scholarly community also reacted with dismay when Birthler stated in April 2002 that most of the 2,000 current requests for research had to be postponed or refused in the wake of the Kohl decision. In an article, Birthler explained that henceforth “historical research using Stasi documents is possible only within narrow limits.”¹ Experts criticized the drastic and far-reaching restrictions on scholarly work, which prompted the Bundestag to amend the law. In July 2002, the Bundestag

approved the amendment with the SPD, Greens, and FDP voting against the CDU.

In September 2003, the Berlin Administrative Court approved a petition by the Birthler Agency to make the Kohl documents public, in principle, without violating his constitutional rights. But even this seemingly clear ruling was not the last word. Kohl lodged an appeal and, in June 2004, the Federal Administrative Court reached a final compromise on Stasi material relating to individuals of contemporary history. The court ruled that no information concerning the private lives of these persons could be made public. The court extended this limitation to all tapes and verbatim protocols of illegal listening in private or official rooms and—this was new—to all internal Stasi reports, analyses, and interpretations based on such protocols; all information collected through spying was restricted. Moreover, the court tightened limits on who could apply to see the information: only scholars working on the history of the Stasi could request information, and they had to insure that this information would neither be published nor communicated to others. Personal information could no longer be released for educational purposes or to the media without the written consent of the person concerned.

It is difficult to decide who finally won the quarrel over the Stasi files, Kohl or Birthler. Both declared victory. The court assigned one third of the costs to Kohl and two thirds to Birthler. Newspaper editorials and the German Journalists Union deplored the consequences for historians of the GDR. Birthler declared that the ruling would undermine many scholarly projects but would still allow for the release of most of the Kohl papers. In order to decide the question of victory, we have to dig a little bit deeper. The *dynamics* of the quarrel may be explained by the transformation of an administrative conflict into a highly personal struggle between Kohl and Birthler, but this obscures the broader cultural implications of the conflict as an indicator of the state of affairs since reunification.

Taking a closer look, the original statute opened “access to the records of the Ministry of State Security of the former GDR to the public and to individuals in order to clarify and illuminate the practices of State Security,”² in other words, to delegitimize the SED dictatorship and to educate the population. Here, the basic tension between a presumed public interest and the sphere of individual rights, a conflict between the demands of historical appraisal and the protection of personal data as required by law, is already apparent. The customary declassification waiting period of thirty years was not implemented for East German archives, with the interesting exception of the documents of the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Stasi files were not considered part of the “ordinary” political heritage which should belong to the public after the

end of the ordinary time limit. Therefore, the use guidelines always followed political rather than legal or archival considerations.

General restrictions had always existed regarding access to the documents of supranational organizations, foreign countries, and files relating to intelligence gathering, counter-intelligence, and terrorism. Additionally, the original law for the Stasi files included the rights of affected persons to demand the redaction of information that concerned them. For the same reason, users were never granted access to any index or file card. All along, it was only the Gauck/Birthler Agency that could retrieve, classify, and present material—often in a revised version with names and sequences blacked out due to the privacy exemption. The employees of the Gauck/Birthler Agency enjoy unrestricted access. Although they are pledged to secrecy and subject to the directives of the authorities, they can nevertheless use their privileged knowledge of names and code names for more precise research, even in non-classified documents. They have a lead on sources and interpretations which cannot be entirely controlled by the scholarly community.

All of these unique customs and guidelines point to the same basic problem. In the case of Stasi files, two different cultural norms and value systems meet. On the one hand, the broadly acknowledged principle of historicization—a social consensus that “the truth will heal”—urges us to uncover the Stasi files without distinction to help shed light on the past: “*Quod est in actis, est in mundo!*” By contrast, our democratic and legal culture recognizes the individual’s right to control the use of personal data. In that respect, it is of decisive importance how any information to be released was obtained. It goes without saying that the Stasi’s operations would have been considered illegal in the West. Scarcely any Stasi report could ever be admitted in a Western court of law because it does not conform to the legal order of a constitutional state. Here, historicization cannot be reconciled with the rule of law. To release documents would, in a sense, prolong the dictatorship and revictimize those injured by Stasi espionage, but to withhold the documents might be seen as minimizing or protecting the dictatorship.³ That is why the former agency chief Joachim Gauck angrily commented on the first ruling in the Kohl case that the court had disregarded the rights of a formerly oppressed people.⁴ Even after the final court decision, these issues persist; it is still possible that an endless series of questionable compromises will cause the Administrative Court to revisit them on a regular basis.

The Stasi documents law and the establishment of the Gauck Agency bore a Janus face. The totalitarian heritage of a state based upon surveillance was incorporated into the political culture of a liberal constitutional state that functions according to the rule of law. The Stasi documents law created an exceptional situation in the service of a moral purge and the

education of the public. The millions of requests for access are proof that the strategy succeeded and met with the approval of the vast majority of East and West Germans after 1990.

Why, then, did this conflict emerge so late? Marianne Birthler was quite right when she reminded the court that her “practice of releasing documents was never objected to by the Bundestag, which receives the annual report of the agency, nor by the federal government, which is legally in charge of the agency.”⁵ During the transition period from spring to autumn 1990, there was no awareness of the incompatibility of a moral/psychological purge and the prevailing privacy laws; the Bundestag nearly unanimously adopted the Stasi files law passed by the GDR Volkskammer in 1990. As the unification process got underway, the difference between formal and material justice quickly became visible. Bärbel Bohley, one of the most famous voices of the civil rights movement in East Germany, declared, “We hoped for justice, and what we got was the law.” Some employees of the Gauck Agency tried to use their privileged knowledge politically, attempting, for instance, to shoot down the last GDR prime minister Lothar de Maizière by denouncing him as Stasi informer “IM Cerny.” But such attempts remained exceptions, and it took years for this conflict to embroil the entire Stasi file complex.

There are at least three reasons for the lag. First, the documents mostly concerned East Germans, who were not primarily concerned with the problem of protecting their personal rights but with uncovering their treatment by the Stasi. Secondly, the groups of readers who were not personally involved—scholars, journalists, employers—were interested in open access to the files, whereas those groups with a great interest in restricting access—Stasi employees and collaborators—had lost their legitimacy in the public sphere and had little opportunity to articulate their views. Thirdly, access to the Stasi files was perhaps the only truly revolutionary act during the collapse of the SED regime. In contrast to the peaceful demonstrations and demands for legal travel to other countries, the storming of the Stasi offices and the seizure of the files was an act of open revolt, justified only by the power of the people as a natural social force which itself establishes the law. Thus, the files became a revolutionary symbol, an historical act of civil courage that became a point of pride for East Germans and a legacy for a new, unified Germany—that is, until the files went from marking Eastern assimilation to Western values to challenging Western integrity.

From this point of view, the ongoing debate over the Stasi files is a late product of the “crisis of unification” which emerged in the mid-1990s. It reflects an ongoing battle between historicization and individualization as leading social values. The conflict refutes any naïve belief in a fast and harmonious reunification of Germany and demonstrates that a

democracy cannot easily absorb the legacy of a dictatorship. In my opinion, however, when this diagnosis is compared with the scandalous way postwar Germany treated the National Socialist past in the 1950s—either with silence or a facile coming to terms—it offers more light than shadow, even for historians, who suffer most from the new legal status of the partly sealed Stasi files.

Notes

¹ Marianne Birthler, "Stasi-Unterlagen für Forschung und Medien—zum Rechtsstreit um den Aktenzugang und zur Novellierung des Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetzes," *Der Archivar* 55, no. 4 (2002): 298.

² Marianne Birthler, "Der Zugang zu den Unterlagen des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der DDR für Forschung und Medien," *Deutschland Archiv* 36 (2003): 376.

³ See Birthler's arguments in Birthler, "Stasi-Unterlagen für Forschung und Medien," 299.

⁴ See Constanze von Bullion, "'Dieses Urteil ist ein Schritt zurück'. Der frühere Behördenchef Joachim Gauck zeigt sich enttäuscht, die meisten Politiker in Berlin aber sehen ihre Auffassung bestätigt," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 9, 2002.

⁵ *Ibid.*

ACCESS TO PAPERS OF GERMAN POLITICIANS AT THE BUNDESARCHIV

Hartmut Weber

Researchers interested in the history of the Johnson administration go to the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas. Scholars interested in the history of Kurt Georg Kiesinger's chancellorship have to go to several archives: the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives), the Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik in St. Augustin, and finally the Hauptstaatsarchiv in Stuttgart. Gathering source material on leading German politicians is no straightforward affair. In this article, I try to explain how this situation came about, where the papers of Germany's most influential politicians are held, and how access to them is regulated.

"Parliamentary democracy is based on the trust of the people Trust cannot be established without transparency, which allows us to follow or to retrace what happens in the political sphere." This principle, articulated in 1975 by the Federal Republic's Constitutional Court, was a milestone on the path from a formerly authoritarian state with administrative secrecy to the modern rule of law with freely accessible information from the public sector. Freedom of information in the Federal Republic began with archival legislation in the mid-1980s. The preservation of papers no longer needed by public agencies became a legally defined task for archival repositories. At the same time, citizens gained the right to access those public records. Access is limited by a thirty-year rule, which may be reduced in exceptional cases, i.e., for a given academic research project. The federal and state archival laws promoted a transparency in administrative work that was not restricted to parliamentary investigations, financial oversight agencies, or the courts; every citizen was now entitled to review government activity.

Access to information from the public sector requires that the records be managed adequately by the agencies then duly transferred to the archives. The 1996 federal procedural code therefore stipulates that any governmental transaction has to be clear and traceable in the files. Memos containing notes about meetings, telephone calls, or the relevant content of related files must be used to capture what is not evident in the files. Guidelines for records management ensure that government activities are able to be reconstructed before the records are finally transferred to the Bundesarchiv.

In theory, everything is well-organized and regulated. In reality, however, the rules are not always applied in a consistent manner. Some files arising from the center of political decision making remain personal and do not find their way into the records management systems. Furthermore, files that are thus kept out of the central registries are rarely transferred to the Bundesarchiv.

The files of top politicians generally contain a mixture of public records and political papers. Government ministers often have several functions: they are members of the cabinet and may also hold leadership positions in their political party. Both functions are coordinated by their personal offices. However, that does not mean that the public records managed by the registry office therefore contain the political papers. Instead, in most cases, the official documents remain in the files of the official's personal office. Thus, diverse collections of documents come into being, containing public records, personal notes about administrative affairs, papers about the same affairs in political contexts, constituency papers, and agendas and minutes from board meetings. In general, these files do not go to the registry office, where they would be attached to the relevant agency records. Therefore, some public records are not transferred to the Bundesarchiv as they should be according to the law.

Obviously, all politicians tend to consider their official records their private property and feel entitled to take them away when they leave office. They do not think of this as unlawful. The practice is not new, nor is criticism of it. In the summer of 1932, the German government tried to find a solution to the problem of the personal records of leading politicians. Following a suggestion from the Foreign Office, the chancellery planned to oblige all members of the government to separate all documents concerning official duties from their private correspondence and to transfer the former to the official records of their agency or to hand them over to the Reichsarchiv, as the Bundesarchiv was then called.

This laudable initiative never materialized. The bad habit persisted. The first chancellor of the Federal Republic, Konrad Adenauer, was not so particular about the separation of official and political records. The Konrad Adenauer Collection in Rhöndorf contains some public records. To this day, the transfer of material from ministerial offices to the archives of the party foundations, or—worse—to the unbreakable secrecy of a political retiree's private apartment, is still a rather normal occurrence.

The Bundesarchiv has urged the government to pass clear regulations on the handling of records in order to prevent the splitting up of archives and to ensure that files are actually transferred to it. On July 11, 2001, the

cabinet did decide on guidelines which uphold well-established principles of records management and also clearly articulate what should be self-evident but is all too often not respected: documents may not be removed from files. For the first time, cabinet guidelines included a special section on the records of higher officials. They described in detail which papers may be kept in personal files and which must be given to the registry. For instance, leaders may not take for their personal files any records produced in the course of their duties for the federal government, irrespective of the form of the record. Leaders' personal papers may only contain copies of official documents, no originals. It is stated very clearly that party records do not belong with the public records and vice versa.

In the past, however, the Bundesarchiv benefited from the tendency of leading politicians to create their own collections of personal papers. Along with these papers, the Bundesarchiv sometimes also received official documents which had not been passed along with the normal transfers. But that is not the only reason the Bundesarchiv tries to obtain collections of politicians' papers. Personal papers provide interesting supplements to the information in official records, such as the true motivations of various participants or behind-the-scenes struggles about alternatives.

The Bundesarchiv holds the personal papers of several presidents: Theodor Heuss, Heinrich Lübke, Walter Scheel, and Carl Carstens. It also has the papers of twenty government ministers, including the large collections of Rainer Barzel, Franz Blücher, Heinrich von Brentano, Josef Ertl, Lauritz Lauritzen, Alex Möller, and Karl Schiller. In addition, the Bundesarchiv contains the personal papers of several state secretaries and ministry department heads, which supplement the public records.

Many collections of papers from high officials in the former East German government and its ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) came into the Bundesarchiv as part of the Foundation for the Archives of Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR (SAPMO). These include the personal papers of the first leader of the SED and the first president of the GDR, Wilhelm Pieck; the general secretary of the SED, Walter Ulbricht, and his successor Erich Honecker; and the minister president Otto Grotewohl. In addition, there are the personal papers of many government ministers and influential members of the Politburo like Hager, Mittag, Norden, and Tisch. This enormous collection has grown larger still since reunification.

The Bundesarchiv prefers to obtain personal papers as donations from politicians. In some cases, property is also transferred in this manner. If, for whatever reason, the papers cannot be donated, the Bundesarchiv is sometimes in a position to negotiate a purchase. However, this often does not meet the expectations of the donors or their heirs. The

biggest obstacle is usually that politicians and heirs have difficulty relinquishing control of the papers. This problem can often be solved by transferring the papers to the Bundesarchiv for secure conservation and description with property rights reserved. In such cases, the Bundesarchiv tries to obtain a written agreement stipulating how property rights might be transferred to the Bundesarchiv at a later date—even thirty or forty years after the actual transfer. In certain cases, the Bundesarchiv has acquired sealed bundles of papers on the condition that they not be opened before the death of their author.

The ideal that an archive's preservation efforts are only justified if the materials are then accessible is not always adhered to when the personal papers of politicians are concerned. The safe preservation of the material has priority over immediate access. The Bundesarchiv desires first and foremost to prevent the destruction or dispersion of papers. It accepts that the papers may only be accessible after years or even decades. The variety of individual options for donors helps the Bundesarchiv in its mission to preserve material.

The special regulations for access are thus rather diverse. In most cases, the owners and their heirs allow access only with their consent. In other cases, access is unrestricted, but consent is necessary to publish any documents from the collection. Access to any German president's papers within the thirty-year period requires the consent of the president of the Bundesarchiv.

The Bundesarchiv thus participates in the competitive hunt for collections of personal papers. Competition between the Bundesarchiv, party archives, various state archives, and research institutes sometimes results in a collection being divided between two or more repositories. This is, of course, inconvenient for researchers. The Bundesarchiv has therefore created a register of all German-language collections of private papers as a service to the scholarly community. Together with 1,083 other institutions, the Bundesarchiv has built up a database which currently contains 25,575 descriptions of collections of private papers. It has been accessible via the Internet since 2002. With 10,000 visits per month, it is the most heavily used resource on our web server.

Regrettably, the Bundesarchiv does not have a coordinating or regulating function comparable to the control that the National Archives and Records Service has over presidential libraries in the United States. In my view, such an oversight function would be very desirable in order to guarantee the preservation and accessibility of papers of high-ranking politicians. The Bundesarchiv should be entrusted with this sort of control function, at least whenever new institutions are founded that receive governmental funding. The next best solution would be a structure anala-

gous to the American model of presidential libraries. From the professional point of view of an archivist, the best thing would be the appraisal, description, and preservation of politicians' papers in the context of the respective public records in the Bundesarchiv. This solution would ensure that both categories of papers—governmental and administrative files together with personal papers—could illuminate each other. Clearly, scholars would be the beneficiaries if all documents were in one place and transparently organized.

CONSTRUCTING MEMORY AND RESTRAINING POWER: THE CASE OF THE WHITE HOUSE E-MAIL

Thomas S. Blanton

Jeremy Belknap, the founder of the first historical society in the United States in Massachusetts in 1791, once said, "There is nothing like having a good repository, and keeping a good lookout, not waiting at home for things to fall into the lap, but prowling about like a wolf for the prey."¹ That is our motto at the National Security Archive. We have to prowl because the documents we focus on—contemporary national security and international relations documents from inside the US government—are by definition usually classified. It takes real effort to break them loose, sometimes even lawsuits.

What do we do at the National Security Archive? Over the course of eighteen years, we have filed 27,000 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and mandatory review requests. This has allowed us to pry loose six million pages, half of which are already accessioned. We have published over 500,000 of these on the web, fiche, CDs, and in books. We register one million visitors per month to our open web site; collectively, they download 25,000 pages per day from our site. Their "consumer behavior" indicates some change with the times. Until recently, the single most downloaded item was the file of documents on Elvis Presley and Richard Nixon's famous meeting, which produced the well-known photograph of "the King" shaking hands with the president.² But the popularity of Elvis and Nixon was superseded in 2003 by the videotape of Donald Rumsfeld's handshake with Saddam Hussein.³ We have published more than thirty-five books, and have a two million-dollar budget which is raised mainly from foundations but also from university library subscriptions. We have partners in some thirty-five countries who are trying to initiate or widen the same openness in their countries. We filed thirty-three lawsuits, of which about twenty-seven (depending on how you count) resulted in a favorable outcome for our institution; "favorable" in the sense that, even if we lost the suit, we nonetheless forced some documents to be released. The longest of those lawsuits was the White House e-mail case; it took seven years.

Before I turn to the White House e-mail case, however, I must confess that the National Security Archive is actually not an archive. We violate every known archival norm. We rip documents loose from their moorings in record groups, we sunder the integrity of the file by going after individual items, and we create artificial collections that reflect no single

agency in reality. Ours is probably the worst possible way to document contemporary history except, paraphrasing Churchill, for all the others. But there are many good reasons for this. We face enormous overclassification, or, as the 9/11 Commission called it, “knee-jerk secrecy.”⁴ A majority of the material they saw during their investigation should not have been classified. Classification impairs communication between the agencies that try to prevent terrorist attacks. Instead of allowing them to piece together a puzzle, it only produces huge costs. Resistance to declassification is more often than not simply irrational. The CIA fought for years in court to prevent the release of its internal history of the 1953 coup in Iran only to see it on the front page of the *New York Times*, leaked by a CIA staffer. Even the spies don’t respect their own secrecy system.⁵

We try to draw attention to the ongoing destruction of records. Archivists have known about this problem for a long time and rightly say that they save only one or two percent of what governments create. Put more dramatically, we lose 98 percent! Just think of the more ephemeral type of records that came about with the computer age, for example, the PowerPoint briefings used to run operations in Iraq. Even if we get these, we are not getting any of the context and very few of the slides. If we do not intervene now, we risk losing even more. FOIA might be a crude tool to intervene in preservation decisions, but as long as there is no better way, we will continue to use it.

We fight delays. Our archive issued an audit on the implementation of FOIA—by using FOIA. We set out to find the oldest Freedom of Information Act requests still gathering dust in the government bureaucracy. One of the major agencies we queried was still sitting on a request from 1987. The first-year graduate student who filed it is now a tenured professor of law. On two occasions, the FOIA request has outlived the requester.⁶

Documents lie. We cannot rely on one sole agency’s files to reconstruct a story. We need to track the interagency process, to compare memos, to consult the recollections of those who wrote them, used them, or covered their rear ends with them—and then compare memories with the documents again, in order to reveal what policymakers knew.

Timothy Garton Ash gave an excellent critique of the “thirty-year rule” in a conference speech in Budapest for the fortieth anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian uprising.⁷ Remarking that “Eastern Europe has always produced more history than it could consume,” Garton Ash theorized a kind of supply-and-demand dynamic, in which the archival supply increases gradually while, at the same time, the eyewitness supply decreases. Eventually, an historian can say anything without fear of contradiction from a living witness. Garton Ash proposed that the best time

to write history is the intersection of the two lines, before the eyewitnesses are gone, because only they can provide context.

There is a tangible quality to confronting an artifact, a real document. I remember visiting the first exhibition of former Soviet documents in Moscow in 1992; there, one veteran of the “Great Patriotic War” leaned over the glass case for a closer look then fainted to the floor. As he was carried away on a stretcher, he said that although he knew about the Molotov-von Ribbentrop pact, actually seeing it was too much for him.

Of course, there is also the danger that an artifact can reshape memory. Everybody knows that the Fourth of July marks the Continental Congress’s declaration of independence from Great Britain. But in fact, the Congress made that declaration on July 2. John Adams wrote to Abigail on July 3 that “the Second of July, 1776, will be the most memorable [day] in the History of America I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary festival.” A nineteenth-century scholar quietly “corrected” this letter for publication, which should serve as a warning to us about our sources.

This is a case in which the document announcing the event—the independence of the United States—has come to overshadow the event itself. The Congress did adopt the Declaration document on July 4, but most delegates did not sign until a clean copy was produced by a clerk on August 2; several did not sign until later; and the names were not released publicly until January 1777. Congress itself celebrated independence in Philadelphia on July 8; George Washington’s army heard about it and celebrated on July 9; folks in Georgia heard and celebrated August 10; and the British, the target of the declaration, only heard about it on August 30. And what of the famous painting of all the delegates signing? David McCullough, in his biography of Adams, assures us that no such scene ever occurred.

Memory is a construct, not a revelation. Recent advances in brain science tell us that memories do not exist like computer files, to be recalled more or less intact. Rather, they are like narratives that are constructed at the moment of recall, including feelings, context, clues, shortcuts, symbols, and ideology.⁸ Vision itself is a construct, scientists tell us; it is not a motion picture reel of frames rolling forward but the brain’s constant readjustment of the eyes’ input. Scientists say that if we saw reality as it actually came in—quick cuts and blurs—we’d become nauseous. This is a wonderful metaphor for writing contemporary history. We must constantly revisit and reconstruct our recent history in order to keep from becoming dizzy (alas, nothing to prevent our becoming nauseous).

We have a new flood of sources to aid in this reconstruction, notably from international archives, but most of all from the digital age. In 1971,

an engineer named Ray Tomlinson invented a program that could send a computer message across a network. By 1972, another engineer had added the delete function and, by 1975, a third engineer had created the cc and bcc functions, right about the time some folks in Palo Alto were inventing the personal computer. This, of course, meant the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union. I'm only partly kidding. Looking at the Stasi files, one might conclude that totalitarianism foundered on its own surveillance system, choked on its own files. More broadly, the personal computer replaced the possibility that the future would be dominated by centralized computer banks administered by an elite—which would have fit more closely with the Soviet organizational model.

A famous 1981 study by the General Accounting Office predicted that e-mail would completely replace “snail mail.” By 2001, however, regular mail had doubled in volume as the total number of e-mails climbed and climbed. This also happened at the White House. According to the National Archives, the Reagan administration left 171,200 e-mail messages from 1982–88. The first Bush administration left 263,600 messages originating in the National Security Council from 1989–92. The Clinton White House (all branches) produced 20 million e-mails over eight years. That these e-mails still exist is the result of one of our lawsuits.⁹

In November 1986, President Reagan and Attorney General Meese came to the White House press room to announce they had just fired the president's national security adviser John Poindexter and were sending a staffer named Oliver North back to the Marine Corps, because the two had conspired to sell arms to Iran and use the profits to support the contras in Nicaragua. The White House Communications Agency (known as WOCCA) could have simply conducted business as usual: every Saturday they backed-up the entire White House computer system onto computer tapes—all the e-mail, etc.—and every third Saturday they recycled the oldest tapes, overwriting them with new data. But that week, the WOCCA commander Lt. Col. Patrick McGovern stopped the recycling program for the month. Thinking there might be investigations that would need the information, he set aside all the backup tapes for November 1986, and when investigators came calling, they found out the details of what Poindexter and North had been up to and that they had done almost everything on orders from the president.

The White House started its first e-mail system in 1982, a prototype that linked various cabinet departments. A fully operational system—including the National Security Council staff—began only in April 1985. In 1985–86, e-mail had become North and Poindexter's favorite means of communication, allowing them a back-channel called “Private Blank Check” that avoided the central bureaucracy at the White House. By the end of Reagan's presidency in January 1989, more than a million digital

e-mail messages were stored in the various White House systems (171,200 unique records for the Reagan National Security Council alone).

As two of the most prolific e-mailers in the entire government, North and Poindexter had a lot to hide. Over the weekend before they were fired, Oliver North deleted—he had to do it one at a time—750 out of 758 electronic messages saved in his “user area” of the White House system memory. He believed that they were gone for good. John Poindexter knew about the WOCCA backup process, but he thought he was still covered because of the recycling of the tapes. Poindexter also deleted (again, one at a time) 5,012 out of his 5,062 messages that weekend, and believed that the backup versions would be automatically erased within a few weeks. He was wrong because WOCCA did the right thing. The Iran/Contra-related e-mail was set aside and sent off to investigators, where it provided the core evidence for the whole scandal.

In January 1989, as Reagan was about to leave office, his staff were packing boxes and shipping documents off to the archives. One of the National Security Archive researchers, Eddie Becker, was curious about how the National Archives (NARA) was going to preserve all the other White House e-mail. To his enormous surprise, NARA officials told him they did not consider the White House e-mail to qualify as “records” worthy of preservation. They told him the Iran/Contra-related e-mail was all set aside for the ongoing legal cases, but the other e-mail tapes and hard drives from the Reagan White House were scheduled for “disposal” on the night before George Bush’s inauguration, on the orders of the president’s national security adviser Colin Powell.

This news set off a storm in our offices. The archive’s founder and then-director Scott Armstrong was a veteran of the Senate Watergate committee staff and *The Washington Post*; the parallels were not hard for any of the rest of us to grasp, either. Here was a potential “gap” consisting of years—millions of messages—much more than Nixon’s mere eighteen-and-a-half minutes of tape. After a fruitless meeting with top NARA officials on Wednesday, January 18 (less than thirty hours before the “destruction deadline”), we decided to go to court for an injunction. A frenzied night of preparation followed: we pulled together every piece of information ever published about the White House e-mail system, researched the requirements of the federal records preservation laws, drafted legal papers and affidavits, and designed a series of Freedom of Information Act requests for the entire set of tapes—anything that would stop the destruction.

The judge on call the next day at U.S. District Court, the late Barrington D. Parker, called our hearing to order at 5:15 p.m. We expected an assistant U.S. attorney to represent the government but, to our surprise, in walked the Acting Attorney General of the United States, John Bolton.

We knew we had won when Bolton said the White House staff were “just taking the pictures off their walls,” and Judge Parker replied, “They are not seeking a restraining order against taking pictures off the wall.” Bolton could only claim that “[If the plaintiffs prevail] it would be as if the halls of the White House were filled with furniture from the outgoing administration.” Judge Parker ordered the White House to save the backup tapes. For us, that was the whole case. Once historic material was in the National Archives, no judge would order it destroyed.

For the entire duration of the first Bush administration, the government never came up with an argument to destroy the e-mail beyond John Bolton’s weak reasoning before Judge Parker. In January 1993, Judge Charles Richey ruled that e-mail, including the Bush White House tapes as well, had to be treated like all other government records.

Apparently, the Bush White House staff panicked at this point. Out of arrogance or disdain, they had made no plans to save the tapes, and they dreaded the idea of the new Clinton staff pawing through the system. So on Inauguration Eve 1993, January 19, they staged a midnight ride to round up the computer tapes and put them beyond the law. On White House orders, a task force of NARA employees hurriedly rented vans, raced to the Old Executive Office Building, hand-scribbled makeshift inventories, and worked through the night to load thousands of computer tapes into cardboard boxes and haul them away. A subsequent memo from this group complained that due to haste and the lack of bubble-wrap, a number of tapes were simply stacked in boxes with no padding. Several of the tapes were damaged irreparably. The whole process violated NARA’s own procedures for taking custody of electronic information.

Several weeks later, through discovery, we found out that the midnight ride was a sideshow to the main event: a secret deal between President Bush and the Archivist of the United States, Don W. Wilson. Signed in the last few hours before Bill Clinton’s inauguration, the agreement purported to give Bush control over all the computer tapes, ignoring the Presidential Records Act of 1978 that precludes such a claim. Judge Richey’s January 1993 ruling already held that Wilson had abdicated his duties as archivist by approving the original decision to destroy the Reagan White House e-mail. Under fire for the secret deal and for management problems during his tenure at NARA, Wilson then resigned as archivist and accepted a new job as head of the planned George Bush Presidential Library at Texas A&M University.

The incoming Clinton administration could have opted for openness. Instead, Clinton-appointed officials marched into federal appeals court in the spring of 1993 to support not only the Bush and Reagan arguments for destruction of the e-mail but also the infamous Bush-Wilson agreement.

The Washington Post paraphrased top Clinton aide George Stephanopoulos as saying, "like Bush's White House, the Clinton White House does not want a succeeding, potentially unfriendly administration pawing over its computer memos." In August 1993, a unanimous appeals panel ruled that the White House e-mail qualified as records covered by the appropriate laws and had to be preserved. Faced with this resounding legal defeat, the Clinton administration gave up and decided not to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Other important policies and actions were put into place. John Podesta, then White House staff secretary, persuaded the administration to put an electronic record archiving system in place (ARMS). The courts allowed the White House to declare that the National Security Council was no longer an agency covered by the Freedom of Information Act, but a purely presidential creature. Although this was a loss for the FOIA, it was ironically a gain for record preservation, because the Presidential Records Act presumes that the records it covers qualify for history.

Another court allowed NARA to use a general schedule to sanction the destruction of electronic records, as long as the historically valuable items had been printed out. The Society of American Archivists argued against the plaintiffs on this issue on the grounds that it was neither realistic nor desirable to save everything, particularly since long-term archival standards do not yet exist for electronic records. They have a point, yet at the same time a standard that encourages transfer from electronic to paper seems counterproductive, because the electronic links between records are themselves valuable and unique, and future access and searching will require re-digitization at some cost.

Why did three presidents fight so hard, and for so long? There are three levels of answers. The most valid reason was indeed privacy. The authors did not believe that their e-mails would ever see the light of day; precisely for that reason, White House e-mail is an historian's dream, a replacement for all that is lost over the telephone. Historian's dream and privacy nightmare—when I published a selection of White House e-mail in 1995, I tried to address this dilemma by focusing on policy rather than prurience. Even when I did find gossip, I emphasized those e-mail messages that illuminated daily life at the office instead of officials' personal lives. Effective privacy protections are complementary to processes of open government. As plaintiffs, we did not challenge a single one of the government's privacy claims regarding the e-mail.

The National Archives, sad to say, did not have any satisfactory answer to the long-term preservation problems posed by electronic records, so they threw up their hands and went along with the White House. Nobody has all the answers, but that shouldn't keep us from taking on the challenge. The lawsuit forced NARA to take steps it might

have put off, and it was a major influence on initiatives like the National Academy of Public Administration study in 1990–91 that identified key federal databases for long-term preservation.

For the White House, it was a matter of power. Reagan, Bush, and Clinton wanted to control the information precisely because it was too candid for comfort. Power in the public arena derives from an ability to control the debate, define the terms, frame the parameters, and control the information. I am proud to say that our little public interest archive helped shake that hold and open some hidden histories that powerful people would rather not see made public.

Archives not only preserve history, they also serve our present democracy. Openness has meant, for example, that no president has taped his conversations since the release of the Nixon tapes. This is a loss for history but a gain for accountability. We no longer have “plumbers” operating out of the White House. Today, their tactic is to leak a CIA official’s name, but not to break into her psychiatrist’s files. An anecdote illustrates this: in 1975, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger met with the Turkish Foreign Minister in Ankara, who requested that America send military parts through the Germans or Dutch. The US ambassador at Kissinger’s side rejoined, “That is illegal.” Kissinger then said, “Before the Freedom of Information Act, I used to say, ‘The illegal we do immediately; the unconstitutional takes a little longer.’ But since the Freedom of Information Act, I’m afraid to say things like that.”

Notes

¹ <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/japan/1995foiaconferencetranscript.htm>

² <http://www.gwu.edu/%7Ensarchiv/nsa/elvis/elnix.html>

³ <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/>

⁴ For a recent example of coverage of the issue, see Scott Shane, “Since 2001, Sharp Increase in the Number of Documents Classified by the Government,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2005. See also the transcript of the March 2005 hearing of the House Government Reform Subcommittee “Emerging Threats: Overclassification and Pseudo-Classification” at (<http://www.fas.org/sgp/congress/2005/030205overclass.html>), and Jeffrey Richelson, William Burr, and Thomas Blanton, eds., *Dubious Secrets: National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 90* (with contributions from Michael Evans and Robert Wampler) (May 21, 2003), available online at (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB90/index.htm>). For a list of organizations fighting government secrecy, see (<http://www.openthegovernment.org/article/subarchive/64>). All web sites accessed February 28, 2007.

⁵ See James Risen, “Secrets of History: The C.I.A. in Iran—A Special Report: How a Plot Convulsed Iran in ‘53 (and in ‘79),” *New York Times*, April 16, 2000.

⁶ See the National Archive’s report, “Justice Delayed is Justice Denied: The Ten Oldest Pending FOIA Requests,” The National Security Archive. Freedom of Information Act Audit at (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB102/findings.htm>).

⁷ Timothy Garton Ash, "Hungary and the World, 1956: The New Archival Evidence," Budapest, September 26–29, 1996.

⁸ See Hans J. Markowitsch and Harald Welzer, *Das autobiographische Gedächtnis. Hirnorganische Grundlagen und biosoziale Entwicklung* (Stuttgart, 2005); Johannes Fried, *Der Schleier der Erinnerung. Grundzüge einer historischen Memorik* (Munich, 2004).

⁹ See Tom Blanton, ed., *White House E-Mail: The Top-Secret Computer Messages the Reagan/Bush White House Tried to Destroy* (Washington, DC, 1995); and (http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/white_house_email/index.html).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEMORIAL FOUNDATIONS OF GERMAN POLITICIANS AND THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES—A COMPARATIVE VIEW

Dieter Dowe

Comparing the memorial foundations of German politicians with American presidential libraries is not just a case of “apples and oranges”; considering the scale, it is more like mice and elephants.¹ Taking an historical perspective, we can note that the U.S. presidential libraries preceded the German memorial foundations. Konrad Adenauer and his friends, staff, and heirs were well acquainted with the American institutions (which, at the time, did not comprise a network or system, as they do today) before the German foundations came into being. Adenauer’s memorial foundation was the first of its kind. Today, there are five such foundations, yet they did not develop according to any specific plan. Therefore, I will examine the Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus in Rhöndorf (near Bonn) to show the institutional development and typical aspects of this kind of foundation. Next, I shall analyze how other German politicians’ memorial foundations differ. I conclude with some comparative observations regarding American presidential libraries.

Before beginning with an historical outline, we should consider the economic status of the German foundations. In contrast to the usual structure of a foundation, in which assets are designated to an institution for a specific purpose, the memorial foundations of German politicians are funded exclusively by the Federal Republic as part of its annual budget. Until 1998, they were supervised by the Ministry of the Interior, and since then, by the Federal Chancellor’s Deputy for Cultural and Media Affairs.

When Konrad Adenauer died in 1967, many supporters visited his grave and wanted to view his house in Rhöndorf. Within a short time, Paul Lücke, the Minister of the Interior and Adenauer’s right-hand man, together with Hans Globke and the Adenauer family, began to think about erecting a national memorial created by federal law to keep it independent of political changes. Adenauer’s heirs transferred ownership of his house and personal papers to the federal government, which set up a foundation in 1967 under civil law within the Ministry of the Interior as an interim solution. At the time, an SPD/CDU coalition was in power. The mission of the “Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus” was “to preserve the memory of the German statesman and worthy European Dr. Konrad Adenauer” for the German and international public. There were

three main tasks: to establish a memorial, which was opened in 1970; to collect Adenauer's papers; and to organize lectures and conferences with historians and Adenauer's associates.

This interim foundation was dependent upon the ministry; in a changed political environment, it theoretically could have been transformed or even abolished with one stroke of the minister's pen. Therefore, from the very beginning Adenauer's supporters worked to strengthen the institution's legal status. After eleven years, in November 1978, they succeeded in mustering political support for a bill that would constitute the memorial as an independent foundation under public law. It was the same year that the United States Presidential Records Act established that henceforth such records would become the property of the United States government.

The newly founded "Foundation of Federal Chancellor Adenauer House" was and is a non-partisan and non-profit organization. It combines state, family, and societal interests, reflected in the composition of its governing board of trustees. The board consists of five members appointed by the federal president: two members are nominated by Konrad Adenauer's family through the second generation, two by the federal government, and one by the federal president, who normally nominates a representative from the opposition party. The board of trustees (an honorary office) is responsible for all fundamental questions regarding the foundation. The board appoints a board of governors that conducts the business affairs of the foundation, assisted by a full-time executive director. The mission of the foundation, according to the law of November, 30, 1978, is

to preserve the memory of the statesman Konrad Adenauer . . . [his impact] on the freedom and unification of the German people, the European unification process, and reconciliation between the peoples; to contribute to the understanding of contemporary history and of the development of the Federal Republic of Germany; and to collect and preserve the public papers of Adenauer.

While Adenauer was still in office, an initiative began to establish an institution to preserve the Heidelberg birthplace of Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected German head of state. In 1960, the treasurer of the Social Democratic Party and vice-president of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation persuaded the city of Heidelberg to arrange for a small memorial in the apartment where Ebert was born. This was co-sponsored by the state of Baden-Württemberg and the office of the federal president. The memorial was opened to the public in 1962 by President Lübke himself.²

The next organizational steps would take twenty years, however. The example of the foundation established for Adenauer in 1978 played a role in the process of establishing a similar foundation in honor of Ebert, a Social Democrat. The city of Heidelberg bought the property in 1983, and the process was accelerated when Federal President von Weizsäcker met with Minister President Späth of Baden-Württemberg, Social Democratic Party Leader Willy Brandt, and President of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Kühn.³

In Ebert's case, a private promotional association was created, rather than a dependent foundation regulated by civil law, as in the early phase of the Adenauer memorial. This association was the predecessor to a federal foundation, established in December 1986 by the West German parliament.⁴ As with Adenauer's memorial foundation, this law was passed by all the "old" parties: CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP; only the new Green Party resisted.⁵ For the Greens, Friedrich Ebert was no shining example of democracy for the German people because of his role in the suppression of the revolution of 1918–19. But the great majority of the Bundestag honored the first democratically elected president of the Weimar Republic, who strengthened parliamentarianism in Germany. The foundation "Reichspräsident Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte" opened its doors in February 1989 in the presence of Federal President von Weizsäcker. Johannes Rau was the first president of its board of trustees until he became federal president.

The Ebert memorial foundation was modeled on Adenauer's, although there are several differences. With regard to the board of trustees, the state of Baden-Württemberg and the city of Heidelberg each have the right to nominate one member. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation also nominates one member to the board of trustees and the board of governors. The Ebert memorial holds no personal papers because they were destroyed during World War II. For that reason, political education is much more central than in Adenauer's foundation.

Since reunification, three further memorial foundations on the federal level have been established: the Willy Brandt Foundation, the Theodor Heuss Foundation, and the Otto von Bismarck Foundation. The bills to establish these foundations were debated in parliamentary committees nearly simultaneously. However, for political and organizational reasons, they opened their doors at different times between 1994 and 1997.

The first of the three to come into being was the Willy Brandt Foundation in Berlin. When Brandt died in October 1992, his widow Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and the Social Democratic Party joined together to promote a memorial foundation. The other political parties agreed. After intense discussions about Brandt's personal papers, a complex solution was found, combining federal law with a civil

contract. Brandt's personal papers remained in the Ebert foundation, which also houses the Archives of German Social Democracy, as well as trade union archives. A special Willy Brandt archive was established within the institution. Its advisory board was made identical to the board of trustees of the newly constituted federal memorial foundation devoted to Willy Brandt. The board's first president was retired Federal President Walter Scheel, who had been Brandt's foreign minister. The current president is Wolfgang Thierse, President of the German Bundestag. With the exception of the unique set-up of the archive and the fact that the Ebert foundation nominates one member to the board of trustees and one to the board of governors, the Brandt foundation is constituted like the Adenauer and Ebert memorial foundations.

The Brandt memorial foundation makes special reference to his efforts for a North/South dialogue. A permanent historical exhibition was opened to the public in 1997, and the memorial foundation supports research related to the Willy Brandt Archives in Bonn. There are plans to set up a branch in Brandt's home town, Lübeck.

The establishment of the other two memorial foundations took longer and followed very different courses. The federal law establishing the foundation devoted to the Federal Republic of Germany's first president, Theodor Heuss, was unanimously approved by the Bundestag in May 1994. By contrast, vehement debates regarding a foundation for the "Iron Chancellor" Otto von Bismarck occurred before a law finally passed establishing one in June 1997.

The Federal President Theodor Heuss House Foundation is located in the house in Stuttgart where Heuss died in 1963.⁶ From 1964 to 1971, the Theodor Heuss Archives were housed there in a foundation under civil law, like the American presidential libraries. Heinrich Lübke was the president of the board of trustees. The Heuss archives thus existed before the Adenauer memorial foundation was constituted. But this first attempt to make his personal papers public failed for a number of reasons. As a result, Heuss's papers were divided between the Federal Archives in Koblenz, the Archives of German Literature in Marbach, and the Heuss family.

Heuss's personal papers can now be used for research on microfilm in the new foundation, which opened to the public in 2002. With Lord Ralf Dahrendorf as president of its board of trustees, the Heuss foundation has the mission to preserve the memory of the first president of the Federal Republic of Germany. Although the Heuss foundation is structurally constituted like the other foundations, it is oriented more towards political education and outreach.

The Otto von Bismarck Foundation is in many ways an exception. It is the only foundation devoted to an imperial German politician and the

only one dedicated to a monarchist rather than a democrat. Moreover, Bismarck was a figure at variance with the Social Democrats and the Catholic Church. The SPD, PDS, and the Green Party all voted against establishing the memorial foundation.

When the other foundations were established, the leaders of the parties in the Bundestag had reached an agreement beforehand, and the bills passed the parliamentary committees and the plenum with little debate. In Bismarck's case, it began the same way. But after some discussion in the press over whether Bismarck should be honored in this way in a democratic society, a public debate arose. Chancellor Kohl and the parties in power (CDU/CSU and FDP) stressed Bismarck's importance for the unification of Germany in 1871, and they brought the bill through parliament. Gerhard Stoltenberg became the first president of the board of trustees in January 1998, and the SPD also sent a representative to the board. Henry Kissinger became a member of the advisory board. As a result of the criticism expressed in the public debate, the foundation's mission was formulated very generally and defensively: to preserve the memory of Otto von Bismarck, to collect and administer his papers, which remain the property of the family, and to evaluate the papers for the public.

In comparing German memorial foundations and American presidential libraries, it is important to distinguish between these small German memorial foundations, the foundations that are specifically devoted to the history of National Socialism⁷ and the GDR,⁸ and the large foundations of the various German political parties. Regulated by civil law, the large political foundations are responsible for the historical heritage of the political parties and therefore compete to a certain extent with the Federal Archives for the personal papers of politicians. They include the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (CDU) in Berlin and St. Augustin, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (SPD) in Berlin and Bonn, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FDP) in Potsdam and Gummersbach, the Heinrich Böll Foundation (Green Party) in Berlin, and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (PDS) in Berlin. These political foundations (which also receive public funds) have worldwide socio-political activities, maintain archives and libraries, and have much larger staff than the memorial foundations; the largest, the Friedrich Ebert foundation, has nearly 600 employees. Memorial foundations usually have no more than ten to twelve staff members.

Both the German memorial foundations and American presidential libraries are based upon the conviction that the general public can more easily appreciate historical processes through the impressive examples of important politicians. The U.S. presidential libraries were a model for the Konrad Adenauer House in Rhöndorf, which in turn was a model for the

other four memorial foundations. But apart from the scale, there are several differences between these American and German institutions. German memorial foundations are financed fully by public means, whereas U.S. presidential libraries are overwhelmingly funded by private sources. American presidential libraries are part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), while each German memorial foundation is legally independent (but financially dependent on the federal budget). They are subject to oversight by the ministry, but they are not part of the German Federal Archives.

Like the presidential libraries, German memorial foundations present permanent exhibitions, publish scholarly books (usually a politician's collected works and correspondence) and occasional papers, and organize seminars and conferences. But with respect to archival holdings there is a great difference. In the United States, all presidents' personal papers and other historical materials since 1929 (i.e., since President Hoover) have been collected in presidential libraries. In Germany, the situation is very different. Only two of eleven heads of state from the Weimar Republic and the Federal Republic (Ebert and Heuss), and only two out of nineteen heads of government (Adenauer and Brandt), have memorial foundations.

Only one German memorial foundation possesses the papers of the politician to whom it is devoted, namely the Adenauer foundation. The Bismarck foundation holds his papers on indefinite loan from the family; the Heuss foundation has microfilm of the widely dispersed materials; the Brandt foundation has only some papers with the rest held by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation; Ebert's papers are nearly totally lost. The personal papers of German heads of state and heads of government are held in a variety of places: the Federal Archives, the archives of political foundations, city archives, private holdings, and even foreign archives.

In conclusion, the current German memorial foundations are the result of a very deliberate, selective process which was (and still is) dependent on German political culture and especially its political parties. Efforts to establish memorial foundations for the most important chancellors of the post-World War II era (Adenauer and Brandt) and the first president of the FRG (Heuss) began after their deaths rather than after their retirements, as in the case of American presidential libraries. The latter would be impossible in Germany. In their early phases, the Adenauer and Heuss memorial foundations were created under civil law rather than public law. It was thus not difficult to achieve the consent of all parties. Once the first institution had been established, the other political parties also sought memorial foundations for politicians from their ranks. When foundations for Adenauer and Ebert existed, it seemed as if the consent of the Christian Democrats to create the Brandt foundation

implied the consent of the Social Democrats to a second foundation for a conservative politician. This was the background to the establishment of the Bismarck foundation, which Kohl was especially eager to set up because he regarded himself as Bismarck's successor with respect to German unification. And, of course, the Liberals also wanted a memorial foundation, the Heuss foundation. The model for these small but important German foundations was the American presidential libraries, but it was altered to fit the conditions of German political culture.

Notes

¹ This paper is based upon the following materials: archival sources in the Konrad Adenauer House in Rhöndorf and the Archives of Social Democracy of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Bonn; information given by the executive directors and archivists of the various federal foundations on the basis of a survey; the web sites of the various federal foundations and presidential libraries; and, finally, the author's own experiences as head of the History Research Center of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and as a member of the History Commission of the Social Democratic Party since the 1980s and as a member of the federal foundations devoted to Friedrich Ebert and Willy Brandt from their beginnings to the present.

² See Stadt Heidelberg and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, eds., *Die Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte in Heidelberg. Bilder und Texte aus der Ausstellung in den Räumen des Friedrich-Ebert-Hauses in der Heidelberger Pfaffengasse* (Heidelberg, 1962).

³ See Ulrike Andersson et al., *Reichspräsident-Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte Heidelberg* (Braunschweig, 1989).

⁴ See the text of the law in *Bundesgesetzblatt*, December 19, 1986, 2553ff.

⁵ The Grün-Alternative Liste Heidelberg distributed a leaflet entitled "Warum gerade Ebert heute?" [Why Honor Ebert Now?].

⁶ For the history of the foundation, see Thomas Hertfelder, ed., *Heuss im Profil. Vorträge und Diskussionen zum Eröffnungsfestakt der Stiftung Bundespräsident-Theodor-Heuss-Haus am 28./29. November 1996* (Stuttgart, 1997); and Thomas Hertfelder, *Machen Männer noch Geschichte? Das Stuttgarter Theodor-Heuss-Haus im Kontext der deutschen Gedenkstättenlandschaft* (Stuttgart, 1998).

⁷ See Ulrike Puvogel, ed., *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn, 1988).

⁸ Annette Kaminsky, ed., *Orte des Erinnerns. Gedenkzeichen, Gedenkstätten und Museen zur Diktatur in SBZ und DDR* (Leipzig, 2003).

PRIDE OR PROTEST?

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES

Frank G. Burke

Today, there are eleven presidential libraries, from Hoover to Clinton. At present, Nixon's library is not part of the federal system, but the Nixon Presidential Materials are, so there are twelve institutions altogether: two in California, two in Texas (with prospects for a third), and one each in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Massachusetts, Michigan, Georgia, and Arkansas. One library's research facility is separated from its museum by 130 miles; one has its records research under federal administration, while the private papers and museum are privately administered 3,000 miles away.

Statistically, we can expect one new library every 5.25 years, or project nineteen more libraries in the twenty-first century. Is this practical? Why aren't these official records of government in the National Archives, alongside the records of federal agencies where many think they belong? And who decides? This is a look at the very beginnings of these institutions and the forces that molded them, whether those forces were pride, protest, or politics. It is a story of how local communities often determine the fate of our most important federal government records. Sometimes, popular political icons (from both parties) have been rejected by communities that did not want their libraries. In other cases, local citizens convinced twentieth-century American leaders to deposit their history in remote rural sites. And it all began with two patricians who contemplated their future and conjured up a life of quiet reflection among their cultural possessions—a vision they never saw realized.

When George Washington left office in 1797, he returned to his estate at Mount Vernon, Virginia. He wrote to a friend that he was considering constructing a building on the estate to house the papers he had brought with him from the capital, then in New York. One hundred forty-one years later, during his second—and presumably last—term in office, Franklin D. Roosevelt contemplated *his* retirement from Washington to *his* estate in Hyde Park, New York. In letters and conversations, FDR cited George Washington as a precedent for bringing his presidential and other papers back to his home as a permanent collection—and not just a few for show or decoration, but in great quantities: “more than a million stamps in 150 matching albums, twelve hundred naval prints and paintings, more than two hundred fully rigged ship models, and fifteen thousand books.”

In many ways, it was not a valid comparison. Washington's *only* alternative to taking his papers with him was to destroy or distribute

them. The Constitution, which established the pattern and responsibilities of the new government, dealt specifically only with the papers of *Congress* in Article 1, Section 5, which declared that "Each House shall keep a journal of its proceedings, and from time to time publish the same." No similar statement relates to the records of the chief executive.

One must also understand that, unlike Washington, Roosevelt was a "collector" of cultural material. In his lifetime of sixty-three years, he amassed written documents and other symbols of that past. Combined with his papers as Secretary of the Navy, Governor of New York, his records for the Democratic Party, and numerous other things, Roosevelt's collection of artifacts and papers would provide a substantial legacy to enlighten future generations of which he was proud.

Before Roosevelt, thirty-one presidents had also applied Washington's precedent and considered their official presidential files as their own. Many were lost, some purposely destroyed, and some were sent to the Library of Congress Manuscript Division. But there was an increasing need to control growth and access to the mass of government documentation. In the nineteenth century, most of it dealt with the millions of acres of western land owned, administered, and sold by the federal government. The condition of records became even more desperate when Civil War pensions and immigration records were added, and when America emerged as a world power in the twentieth century. A national archives was proposed in the 1920s, and the new building was dedicated by President Herbert Hoover just two weeks before FDR took office in March 1933.

When Roosevelt wanted to construct a library just for his administration, opponents continually maintained that his papers should go to the Library of Congress, but the mass of material rendered this impractical. More important to us, but unspoken at that time, was the distinction between the legislative and executive branches. The Library of Congress was indeed the library of *Congress*, not of the executive branch, and the executive branch then had the new National Archives to hold *its* records. On the other hand, concentrating the White House files and associated material in a presidential library hundreds of miles away from the government records held by the new Archives created a sense that the actions of a president are separable from those of other government agencies. While advancing the cause of *preservation* with the idea of a presidential library, FDR in many ways impeded the cause of *access* by placing it far away from the capital.

The formula developed by Roosevelt recognized the president's papers as his private property. He proposed gathering them into a building that he would either donate or have built from funds raised for that purpose. The land, too, would be donated by the president, another institution, or the state, or purchased by a supporting organization or foun-

dation. In other words, the federal government would not have to pay for the construction of the library or for the land it would be built on.

When Roosevelt died suddenly in April 1945, his plan had been fully carried out. He had first donated his papers to the government, and then his Hyde Park estate. The main house, known as Springwood, became the center point of the museum; a smaller building held parts of Roosevelt's collection of memorabilia and artifacts. Administration of the museum, document collections, and grounds was shared between the National Park Service and the National Archives.

Harry Truman, who had been vice-president for only three months, served as president through the termination of World War II, the beginning of the Korean War, the expansion of the Soviet Union, and baby boom years that created the post-war boom. Now reaching the end of his term, he and his hometown supporters looked forward to his return from Washington and wanted to honor this return of the native son with a library built on a prominent hill in Independence, Missouri, within walking distance of his house. Truman grew up in a middle-class family; he did not have an estate. His personal collections were neither large nor extraordinary. However, Truman was proud of his own service, he felt a need to put his reflections on the past into a book and saw a presidential library as the perfect place to write one in his retirement. Thus, although Roosevelt may have "invented" the presidential library concept, it was Truman who strengthened it by emulating the Hyde Park pattern as closely as he could but converting it to an experience shared with the community of his hometown. His friends, neighbors, and city and state officials all cooperated in establishing a foundation that could receive and spend money in order to get land (donated by the city) and construct a library from the ground up. It was a cooperative venture, citizens and government joining hands for a common purpose. With Truman's decision to return to the people, the concept of a presidential library was set.

As one looks back at these beginnings and what has happened in the intervening half century of presidential library growth, one can see the development of four patterns. The Truman, Eisenhower, and Hoover libraries were established through the initiative of hometown communities. Presidents Johnson and Carter linked their libraries to home-state universities, and Ford took the unique step of separating the archive and museum components between his alma mater, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and his congressional district across the state at Grand Rapids. Congress quickly passed a law forbidding *that* in the future. The libraries of both the first and second President Bush were literally put up for bid to any institution that would welcome them. President Clinton took the initiative to have his library associated with his home-state university, even though he had not attended it.

These variations reflect two things: first, that the federal government, before 1978, acknowledged a president's personal ownership of his papers and his decision to place them wherever he wished. The Congress did give the National Archivist authority to evaluate library plans and costs and ruled that there should be a sixty-day waiting period before breaking ground in order to assure legal, financial, and community evaluation of a proposal. It follows that the other condition that the regulations recognized prior to 1978 was the president's freedom *not* to establish a library at all, or even to preserve the papers of his administration, since the files were assumed to be private property. The recognition of these materials as privately owned also implied *personal* control of access, a right extending to a president's family and future heirs. It was also possible for the president or his heirs to donate his presidential papers through a deed of gift and retain control of certain access to and use of the files. In all of these cases, the presidential papers would not be subject to the terms of the Freedom of Information Act.

In retrospect, perhaps the most desirable model of a presidential library to date is the one Harry Truman established in 1957. It is ideal because it was a true community effort. Truman was active in politics and civic affairs all his adult life. He was a veteran of World War I, he served in the U.S. Senate representing his home state, he was a judge, and he knew everybody in the community. It was his neighbors and the city and county governments that raised the money to obtain land in the middle of the city and to construct the library building. When he left office, Truman returned to Independence and lived in a house built by his wife's family, just a short walk from the library. He used the library space as an office where he wrote his memoirs and tended to his correspondence. Quite regularly, he strolled through the museum, stopped to talk with visitors or give impromptu tours, or even play a tune on the piano. Truman played this role until he died, when he was buried on the library grounds, as Roosevelt had been in New York. Unfortunately, Truman was the *only* president who used the libraries to such an extent. If Clinton retains his health, one would expect him to copy the Truman pattern.

Dwight Eisenhower was from the small town of Abilene, Kansas, which was and remains remote, with no convenient rail or air service. Eisenhower and his five brothers were raised in a farmhouse there, but he went off to military college at West Point and never settled in Abilene. His library was initiated in 1945 by the editor of the Abilene newspaper, who wrote to Eisenhower stating that a group of Kansans in New York City proposed to construct a war memorial in Abilene as a tribute to him and members of the armed forces that would include a museum, a library, and an auditorium. In July 1945, his supporters established the National Foundation to Honor General Dwight D. Eisenhower and the

United States Armed Forces, and a fund-raising drive began. When Eisenhower's mother died in the fall of 1946, the six Eisenhower sons deeded the family home and grounds to the foundation. Thus, the library began as a celebration of Eisenhower's *military* service before he was president. After Eisenhower reached the White House in 1953, the museum project added the presidential years to its coverage, and it opened as a presidential library and war museum in 1962. But Eisenhower visited Abilene only half a dozen times.

So it also was with Herbert Hoover, who split his time between a Waldorf Hotel suite in New York and his alma mater Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, when he left office in 1933. At Stanford, he established the Hoover Institution, where he kept his presidential papers but did not open them to research. Hoover's family and neighbors in his hometown of West Branch, Iowa, began a project to honor him by buying and restoring his boyhood home—which he had lived in for only nine years—and developing it into a museum. In a complex saga, Hoover's relationship with Stanford went from crisis to crisis until, in the early 1960s, he sent his presidential papers to Iowa and moved them under the Presidential Library Act to be administered by the National Archives.

Under simpler circumstances, Presidents Johnson and Carter had their libraries constructed near their birthplaces, but not at sites associated with their lives. The University of Texas at Austin donated a location on the campus and used Texas state funds from oil and gas revenues to finance the Johnson library and therefore did not have to launch fund-raising activities in the local community, as had been the case for the Eisenhower and Hoover libraries. President Carter's library is located in Atlanta. It stirred up some concern among the residents when there was a proposal to clear an access highway through parkland. The press dwelt on this before the choice of a structure next to Emory University on a ridge overlooking the city was settled on.

The rapport that Lyndon Johnson had with the University of Texas, and that Clinton apparently has with the University of Arkansas, was conspicuously lacking with three of the biggest names in the twentieth-century presidency: John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. They all confronted citizen or academic protests when they attempted to establish their presidential libraries on the campuses of three major private universities, where one might think that a library of significant presidential documentation would be welcomed. By 1960, however, it was clear that presidential libraries were moving away from the Roosevelt tradition that was based on establishment on a private estate. Harvard is in the center of a bustling community with shops, apartments, and narrow New England streets. Putting a large library and museum for Kennedy on Harvard Square might be equivalent to putting a major

institution in Times Square. Although the document collection of such a library would have been well received by the university community, the associated museum traffic would not have been. For years after Kennedy's assassination in 1963, the Cambridge community, led by Harvard professors who lived there, constantly pressured the family and foundation, who fought valiantly, but, in the end, without John Kennedy's charisma, failed. The pressure of legal action, the ironic issue of complex federal environmental regulations, and a depletion of foundation funds forced the family and foundation to abandon the Harvard site and move the library to Boston's southern suburbs—a beautiful location but without the scholarly and urban atmosphere that Kennedy had intended. The library was not completed until *sixteen* years after his death.

The Kennedy library's failure to establish a relationship with Harvard hinged on municipal concerns; with Richard Nixon, on the other hand, the problems were moral. When Nixon attempted to establish a presidential library at Duke University, the faculty and student body protested, not only because they feared tour groups, traffic, and parking problems, but because they did not think it appropriate to honor him with a memorial, even if Duke was his alma mater. In fact, students and faculty had twice already rejected proposed honors for Nixon long before Watergate. Two acts of Congress directed specifically at Nixon greatly curtailed the more liberal options that had been available to his predecessors. *The Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974* basically seized the records of Nixon, who had wanted to control access to the "Watergate Tapes." Then, Congress established a professional committee to study what might be done in the future, and, as a consequence of this committee's report, it passed the *Presidential Records Act of 1978*. This declared presidential and vice-presidential records relating to their official functions to be federal records, subject to essentially the same government control as the records of the agencies and departments. One hundred seventy-seven years since Washington had taken his papers home to Mount Vernon, these laws culminated in the seizure of the Nixon White House files, which were deposited in the National Archives. The alternative disposition of the body of non-federal Nixon papers was the privately funded archive in Yorba Linda, California. After this legislation, the only vestige of the old system that remained was a president's option to raise private money to build a library administered by the National Archives. If a president ever elected *not* to build such a library, the official records would be housed in the National Archives system, along with most other federal records.

This protest against a major university honoring a president who had brought shame to the office was followed in 1987 by a protest where no

shame was implied: Stanford University turned away an attempt to establish the Ronald Reagan library on campus. The reasons were complicated, but pressure again came from faculty, students, and alumni—in part because of ideological conflicts with the Hoover Institution on the campus. The situation led the Reagans to move south to Simi Valley, California, for the privately built library to operate under the National Archives umbrella. It seems that this pattern of rejection has only developed at large, private universities (Harvard, Duke, Stanford), whereas libraries have been successfully established at public institutions: Texas A&M (for George H. W. Bush) and the University of Arkansas (for Clinton).

This is a very abbreviated history of the presidential libraries in the United States. The eleven libraries constitute a magnificent project to collect, preserve, and make available important documents, and they exhibit judicious stewardship by the National Archives.

The structure of the presidential library system rests on two pillars. The National Archives administers the libraries in a non-partisan way, with trained staff archivists supervised by professionals in Washington. Thus, the keywords are non-partisanship and professionalism. The system attempts to ensure uniformity in the archival function nationwide, while accepting the variations inherent in White House records.

We have looked at the past; now, what of the future of presidential, or even chancellor, archives as research institutions? Since I began with George Washington, I will end with him. Two examples apply. The National Archives is beginning to receive digital records, including some documents *only* in digital form. Elsewhere, a project to process and publish the complete collection of George Washington's papers has recently issued *the entire corpus* in computerized form available on the Internet. Additionally, the Reagan administration was the first to enter almost everything into the White House computer, including staff e-mails and letters from the public. Today, hardly any document is created without a computer, and we can assume that soon most significant research will be conducted on the Internet, which provides access to unclassified government records from all agencies, including the executive office of the president. What does that forecast for the documentary holdings of presidential libraries? Why should researchers go to Abilene, West Branch, or Simi Valley when they have access to Google? They may still go to see the museums and exhibits to gain insight into the nuances of the president or issues in question. The boyhood homes may still serve a purpose, as all historical objects do—it is from them that we learn unwritten statements of life in the past, through the artifacts and arts representing that past, if only to evoke nostalgia in the seniors. A major activity at all of the libraries is sponsoring symposia, individual lectures on historical or cur-

rent events topics, and related public service meetings, all of which are popular programs regularly broadcast on C-Span. I personally believe, though, after a forty-two-year career in archives and manuscripts, that soon researchers will favor online access to full-text document collections over masses of paper and expensive travel and copying costs. For a while, the old paper will remain—until it gets copied to the new electronic formats. Fortunately, as current material is now initially created in digital format, no waiting should be necessary or justified, except for time restrictions on access. The computers that contain *all* of these files need not be in any specific location but could be made available to the Internet, where the exponential expansion of information will also reduce the need for paper and paper storage facilities.

To a large extent, the missing element in all of this may be the shortage of human specialists. At the libraries, there are professional archivists who can discuss the issues and point to the sources that lie in the stacks—or on a hard drive. But technology, which is blamed by many for sloppy research habits, will undoubtedly bring its own solutions to the research puzzles and help us understand more about the cultural system that assists us in probing the nature of government and its impact on our daily lives.

It is difficult to imagine that future presidents would turn down an offer to memorialize themselves for posterity through the medium of a presidential library, and perhaps we can count on such facilities continuing to be built in scattered communities representing the presidents' lives and accomplishments. If we look at the role of the head of state and the efforts, including the personal sacrifices, of such leaders, it seems appropriate to take on the effort and expense necessary to carry on the tradition.

PRESIDENTS' DAY: THE COMMEMORATION OF WHAT?

Barry Schwartz

"Nature yields nothing without ceremony," said Ernst Cassirer.¹ A society's deepest layers are revealed by rituals, performed in times and places invested with meaning. But when these meanings are lost, what happens to the ceremonies? As the national past, in particular, loses significance, how are its great holidays, its ceremonies of memory, transformed? A consideration of America's Presidents' Day helps to refine the models we use to answer these questions.

Two sociological models orient the analysis of national holidays. The "conflict model" ties ritual observance to an elite's quest to maintain power; it construes holidays as social control devices, inducing individuals to transfer emotional attachment from local groups, communities, and regions to the state and its demands for obedience and sacrifice.² The "consensus model," on the other hand, presumes that elites identify with the masses and share their values. Emile Durkheim's classic statement of this view holds that

There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings, where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments . . .³

Many holidays embody both conflict and consensus, but for some, neither model seems to apply. It is questionable whether Presidents' Day, America's most peculiar and confusing holiday, upholds collective sentiment of any kind. It is still more doubtful whether its function is really to sustain the hegemony of a dominant class. The case of Presidents' Day suggests the need for a third model that encompasses the "abortive rituals" that the other two fail to capture.

Abortive rituals are those which have lost their capacity to instruct and to inspire. The adjective "abortive" is synonymous with "fruitless," "unsuccessful," "imperfectly formed or developed." Presidents' Day is abortive in this respect, but when juxtaposed with other practices, including the establishment of presidential libraries, Presidents' Day tells a great deal about the presidency's changing place in American memory and about the erosion of that memory.

Up through World War II, newspaper editors recognized the two major presidential holidays, Washington's Birthday and Lincoln's Birthday, by placing their images on their front page and providing articles indicating where business, trade, civic, and religious organizations would meet to celebrate the day. In many communities, the two holidays were occasions for family visits, basketball games, movies, and special community events. In 1932, the *Chicago Tribune* addressed Washington's relevance with a cartoon, "Inspiration" [Figure 12], representing Uncle Sam and a young man, both with their hats respectfully removed, viewing a painting of George Washington and his men at Valley Forge. The image suggests that the great man's life was more than just a story to recall; it was a way of experiencing the great trials of the present (in this case, the Depression) in terms of the greater trials of the past.

Picture frame companies commonly offered to cover the local newspaper's color picture of Washington in glass and insert it into a handsome frame for home display. Decorating one's home with images of public figures was widespread during and before the 1930s. Print distributors sold many such images. Through these pictures, people drew upon the symbols of their nation, oriented themselves in time, and found meaning and identification. February was the month in which Washington and Lincoln came alive.

Throughout World War II, Washington and Lincoln remained vital frames of reference for interpreting experience. In one of the Office of War Information's early posters, distributed on Washington's Birthday, contemporary soldiers in modern battle dress, armed with modern weapons, parade at Valley Forge (the low point of the Revolution) before the ranks of Washington's bedraggled soldiers [Figure 13]. The scene made sense of early losses in the war by defining them as momentary episodes in a longer, transcendent narrative. The accompanying caption, "Americans will *always* fight for liberty," reiterates the point as it emphasizes national continuity. In another illustration, a war bond advertisement, silhouetted profiles of Washington, Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson are set against a background of bombers flying off on a mission. The title, "From Every Mountain Side Let Freedom Ring," formulates the mission's ultimate purpose [Figure 14].

As Washington images keyed a present war to the Revolution, Lincoln images keyed it to the Civil War. In February 1942, nine weeks after Pearl Harbor, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* depicted Lincoln with an encouraging hand on the shoulder of a despondent Uncle Sam, cringing at the latest war news [Figure 15]. War bond promotions made the point even more graphically. The *Inquirer's* Sunday supplement of February 7, 1943, shows a soldier in battle gear, lying face up, dead. Elevated above the fallen soldier is Daniel Chester French's statue of Lincoln. Lincoln looks



Figure 12. Cartoon from *The Chicago Tribune*, February 12, 1932.

down upon the soldier, and both are illuminated by the same mysterious light. An excerpt from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address sets the tone: "That We Here Highly Resolve That These Dead Shall Not Have Died in Vain."

Valentine's Day was also celebrated in February during the Depression and the war, but it was modest, with no consumer frenzy. There was

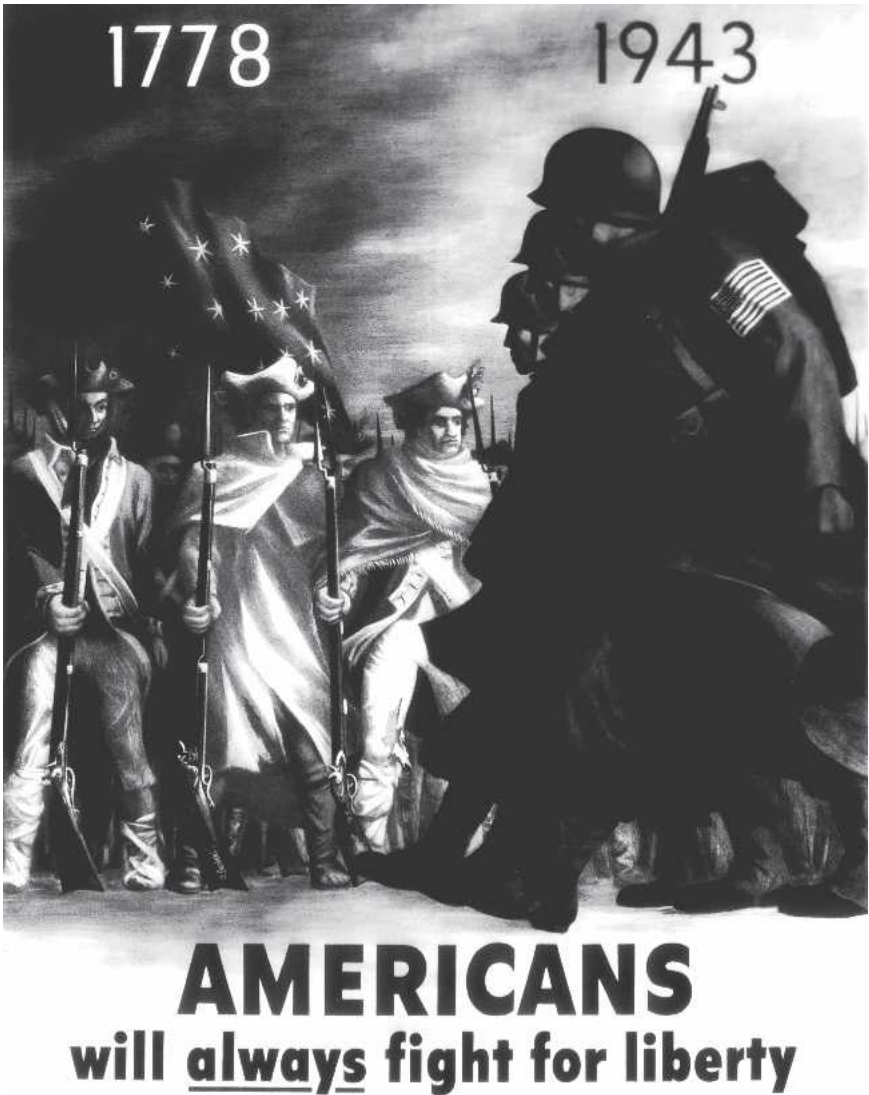


Figure 13. Poster, United States Office of War Information, 1943. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

also Negro History Week, but few whites knew anything about it. Today, the pattern has changed: the February 1988 cover of *The New Yorker* shows Washington and Lincoln exchanging Valentine cards, a sign that their commemoration is no longer as important [Figure 16]. In schools, too, Washington and Lincoln occupy a diminished place. Black History Month, successor to Negro History Week, receives as much attention.⁴



Figure 14. Poster, 1944. Reproduction courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Museum and Library, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee.

Major newspapers often do not mention Washington's or Lincoln's birthday.

America's greatest presidents will be remembered in future decades, but the tone and texture of their remembrance will remain attenuated.



"COURAGE!"

Figure 15. Cartoon from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 12, 1942. Reproduction courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Museum and Library, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee.

Feb. 15, 1988

THE NEW YORKER

Price \$1.75

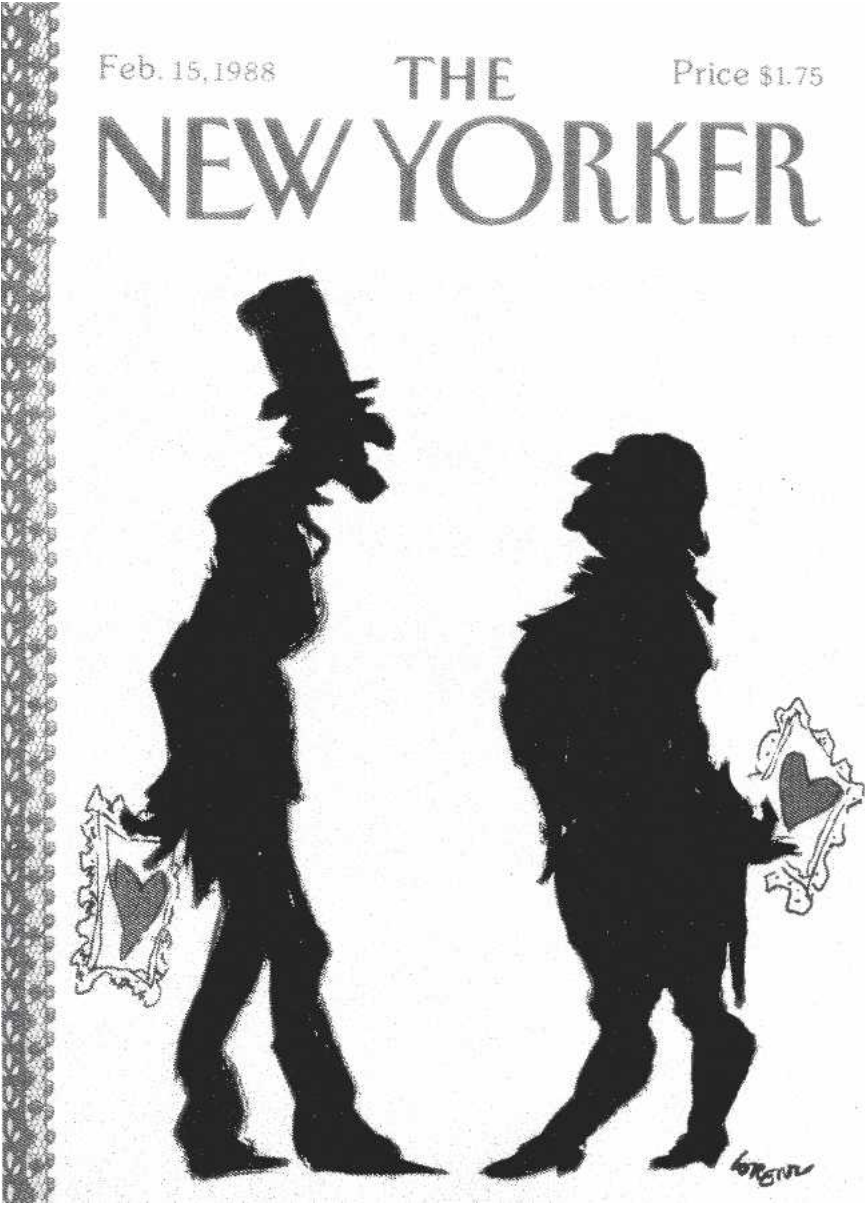


Figure 16. Front cover, *The New Yorker*, February 15, 1988. Lee Lorenz, *The New Yorker*, © Condé Nast Publications, Inc.

The 1968 Uniform Holiday Act reveals the muting of that tone and the vagueness of that texture. It articulates Americans' diminished belief in Washington and Lincoln's greatness.⁵ What is the Uniform Holiday Act, and how did it originate? Why was it passed in 1968, rather than earlier or later? What has been its impact?

Representative Samuel Stratton of New York had tried throughout the 1960s to create long weekends by having all national holidays, including July 4 and Thanksgiving, fall on a Monday. In 1967, his idea caught on. Congress enthusiastically enacted the Monday holiday bill because it promised (1) to create jobs in the travel industry; (2) to increase local tax revenue through tourism; (3) to cut absenteeism by preventing workers from adding days to midweek holidays; (4) to end costly midweek shutdowns and start-ups for businesses, and (5) to expand the do-it-yourself home repair industry.⁶ Scores of organizations supported the bill, including the American Hotel and Motel Association, American Petroleum Institute, National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Retail Federation. No hegemonic force drove this bill; labor unions also favored it, including the AFL-CIO, American Federation of Government Employees, and National Association of Letter Carriers.

Patriotic organizations opposed the bill because they felt moving holidays would diminish their significance. Churches were concerned that it would cut Sunday attendance. The strongest opposition came from those who believed more long weekends would increase the number of automobile accidents. To counter this, Representative Robert McClory ordered a study of five holidays since 1947 that showed lower accident rates on long weekends than on weekdays. Employee preference surveys overwhelmingly preferred long weekends.⁷ Paradoxically, Louis Harris's 1968 survey showed a clear majority *opposing* a change in the holiday dates.⁸

By mid-1967, there were twelve different holiday bills in Congress, but representatives could not agree on which holidays would be assigned new dates.⁹ The tie-up concerned Thanksgiving, July 4, and the transforming of Washington's Birthday into Presidents' Day. Once these issues were resolved and a new federal holiday added (Columbus Day, which thirty-four states already celebrated), the Uniform Holiday Bill passed 350–27 in the House and by a voice vote in the Senate.¹⁰

The original draft of the bill proposed changing Memorial Day, July 4th, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, and Thanksgiving to the nearest Monday; Washington's Birthday would be replaced by Presidents' Day. The House rejected changing July 4, Presidents' Day, and Thanksgiving (because it would interrupt the pre-Christmas retail cycle, which begins on the day after Thanksgiving and runs through the weekend). Congress did change the observance of Washington's Birthday from February 22 to the

third Monday of the month. Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Columbus Day became federal holidays observed on Mondays.

The *Christian Science Monitor* spoke for a majority of Americans when it said that date-switching weakens the holidays' "intrinsic meaning."¹¹ The bill prevailed, however, and The Uniform Holiday Act, so-named in the hope that the states would follow the federal example,¹² was signed into law by Lyndon Johnson on June 28, 1968, and went into effect in 1971.¹³

In the bicentennial year 1976, journalist Sean O'Gara wrote about George Washington's diminished place in the new holiday calendar: "This subtle disparaging of Washington as the father figure supreme of our country . . . is a blatant indication that the actions of our forefathers and the lessons of the past are insignificant in today's America." O'Gara recalled bitterly,

In 1942, when our nation was endangered, we reached down into our well of national heroes and resurrected them selfishly and possessively, because we needed them, and we used them shamelessly to buoy our hopes in that time of travail; now, with danger apparently passed, we are discarding them by relegating them to secondary memory.¹⁴

The bill's supporters, however, denied that it denigrated America's heroes. After all, holiday dates were largely arbitrary. On the Julian calendar in use in 1732, Washington's birthday was February 11 (rather than February 22, when the old holiday was observed); Memorial Day had no historical link with its day of observance; Veterans Day covered all wars and need not be coupled with the November 11 World War I Armistice. Several days elapsed before all delegates signed the Declaration of Independence, so there was no reason to be sentimental about July Fourth. The historical basis for a Thursday Thanksgiving was equally flimsy.¹⁵

Supporters argued that it "is not the precise calendar date, but rather that we should have adequate time and opportunity to pause and recall the life and works of our first president."¹⁶ But if Monday holidays were advantageous, then why should not Christmas also be made a Monday holiday? Some holidays are clearly too solemn to be changed, despite their arbitrariness. Those suspicious of the reformers asked why the supposed benefit of Monday holidays was not recognized until the late 1960s? Convenience has a price; one put up with the inconvenience of midweek holidays because of the moral cost of doing otherwise. Prior to 1950, Congress never thought of changing Washington's Birthday. Tampering with the date disturbs something vital, located in a past to which all Americans are connected and with which all define themselves. Abolishing Washington's Birthday disorients its remaining celebrants and

mutes the events that made Washington worth remembering in the first place. If the holiday schedule no longer distinguishes Washington from Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, or Benjamin Harrison, then it is a commemoration of everything and nothing. It is precisely this confusion that makes Presidents' Day symptomatic of our age, in which, according to postmodernist Frederic Jameson, fragmentation, confusion, and a sense of being lost are the defining pathologies.¹⁷

A lack of a clearly articulated meaning of Presidents' Day is evidence of this confusion.¹⁸ Between June 1968 and February 1971, government agencies printed new calendars and revised work schedules. Many, but not all, businesses did the same; the Uniform Holiday Act is a federal law, applying only to federal and District of Columbia employees. States adjusted their holiday calendars to the federal system, but they selected from the federal menu as they saw fit. Many states have adopted it (twenty-three by 2004). When it was first debated in Congress, however, no one was certain what "Presidents' Day" even referred to. Some believed it was a tribute to all presidents; others assumed that it merged Lincoln's and Washington's Birthday, a view reinforced by the choice of the third rather than fourth Monday in February, which guarantees that the holiday would never fall on Lincoln's or Washington's original birth date. President Nixon thought he settled the matter in 1971, with an executive order enacting the 1968 congressional legislation. The Uniform Holiday legislation plainly recognizes George Washington's Birthday, not Presidents' Day.

However, the Uniform Holiday Act continues to mean different things in different regions and to different groups within each state. In the West (where the Revolutionary War and the Civil War are less significant for regional identity), Presidents' Day is recognized by eleven out of thirteen states; only three out of seventeen East Coast states do so. Of nine former Confederate and Southern-border states, only three recognize Presidents' Day. Southern representatives cast twenty-three of the twenty-seven votes opposing the bill, the other four were cast by Midwestern Republicans.

There is a great deal of inconsistency. Illinois observes Lincoln's and Washington's Birthday in addition to Presidents' Day. Arizona names the third Monday of February "Lincoln/Washington/Presidents' Day". Texas officially observes Presidents' Day, but does so "in honor of George Washington." California observes Presidents' Day and, in alternate years, Abraham Lincoln's Birthday. There are other ambiguities. The United States Postal Service officially declares Washington's Birthday as its employee holiday but refers to it locally as Presidents' Day. In many states, including those which do not officially recognize Presidents' Day, banks

close on what they recognize as Presidents' Day. National and local news media often follow their lead. Thus, even in states where Presidents' Day is not recognized, most residents probably believe they observe it.

Washington's Birthday (the federal holiday) is no less ambiguous on state calendars. The original holiday was February 22, but Georgia observes it on December 27 in order to give its employees more days off at Christmas. In New York, not all government units get the day off. In New Jersey, Washington is honored every other year. In Alabama, his birthday is shared with Thomas Jefferson; in Arkansas, with civil rights activist Daisy Bates. Utah observes Washington-Lincoln Day. Like Presidents' Day, Washington's Birthday has become elastic in meaning.

The public quickly became accustomed to the long Presidents' Day weekend. But opponents have sought to repeal the law since the 1970s. President Gerald Ford restored Veterans' Day to its original date. Numerous legislative attempts have been made to restore Washington's Birthday, too.¹⁹

A general cultural erosion sustains Presidents' Day, however. There is still an American community of memory, but it is an abstraction. This community celebrates itself by listing dates to be observed, but not embraced. These abortive holidays stand for little and inspire little. In an essay from 2001, entitled "Shrinking Lincoln," Paul Greenberg notes,

Presidents' Day. That's what happens to the mythic after it has been safely shrunk and bubble-wrapped. If you do manage to unwrap it, there's nothing inside. . . . Each generation makes its own accounting with the past; ours just tends to be blank at the moment.²⁰

But it is a mistake to blame the Uniform Holiday Act for this blankness. The act was a symptom of a legacy whose clarity had already diminished. By 1968, the holidays were largely empty.

Why did Presidents' Day appear when it did? Why was it conceived in 1959, put forward in Congress during the early 1960s, then debated and passed in 1968? Why not during the 1930s or the 1970s? Clearly, Presidents' Day could not replace Washington's Birthday until the latter had already lost most of its significance, which happened as the relevance of all presidents eroded. Presidents' Day is thus part of the diminution of the "recommitment holidays" that once extolled the nation's heroes. Holidays like July Fourth and Memorial Day, whose purpose is to preserve shared beliefs, have declined as the relevance of "tension management" holidays like New Year's Day, Halloween, and Valentine's Day has grown.²¹ Practices that once linked an individual to the nation have atrophied, and holidays of recommitment are no longer experienced as

such. Once observed with ritual and enthusiasm, they are now merely rest days.

Since World War II, the United States has faced many conflicts, but none has produced a comparable sense of mission. Diminution of national purpose, however, should not be mistaken for a disappearance of nationalist sentiment. Patriotic displays are ubiquitous. Yet recent manifestations of nationalism are no longer strongly tied to past events. True, there was talk of Pearl Harbor after 9/11, and analogies were drawn between Saddam Hussein and Hitler, but few took them literally. Today, nationalism is largely present-oriented; it has little need for the past.

The declining prestige of traditional hero-presidents is a primary precondition of Presidents' Day. It is an aspect of American nationalism's deteriorating time frame. From 1956 to 1999, the popularity of Lincoln, Roosevelt, Washington, and Eisenhower fell sharply (see Appendix). Recent presidents, mainly Reagan and Clinton, absorbed most of this lost popularity. The greatest change occurred between 1956 and 1975, corresponding with the genesis of the Uniform Holiday Act. The year the law was signed (1968) was the peak of American civil unrest and criticism of American institutions. Annual citation counts in newspapers and the *Congressional Record* are not as direct a measure of presidential prestige as polls, but they locate the context of its decline more precisely. In the 1960s, citations of both Washington and Lincoln abruptly fell.²² Furthermore, visits to sites associated with Washington and Lincoln leveled off after the 1960s, even as the population grew enormously. Textbook representations of the presidents are yet another measure of the changing public view. One study found that, whereas most presidents had an unambiguously positive rating in the 1940s and 1950s, this rating fell sharply by the 1980s. George Washington's rating declined the most.²³

Several satiric pictorial representations also furnish insight into our generation's receptivity to the emptiness of Presidents' Day. After Congress abolished the traditional presidential holidays, popular art played much more freely with presidential images. A 1994 cover of *Scientific American* is typical [Figure 17]. Abraham Lincoln walks arm in arm with Marilyn Monroe. The designer, modifying old photographs to illustrate the power of digital forgery, makes Lincoln appear prudish and stuffy beside the vivacious Marilyn. Numerous other pop-culture advertisements pun on Lincoln and Washington to promote trashy movies for teens ("four score and seven beers ago . . .") and other commercial kitsch. Such images are a far cry from the inspirational references of the 1930s and 1940s. Today, great presidents are often merely a vehicle for commercial promotions or a vulgar glorification of materialism and permissiveness, which goes hand in hand with the abortiveness of Presidents' Day.



Figure 17. Front cover, *Scientific American*, February 1994. Courtesy of Jack Harris.

Early twentieth-century Americans may have imagined Washington and Lincoln as men more perfect than they were and revered them more than they deserved. In contrast, so many alternative frameworks exist today that one can no longer believe in an absolute truth. Late twentieth-century man, "The Last Man," as Francis Fukuyama calls him, "knows better than to risk his life for a cause, because he recognizes that history was full of pointless battles in which men fought over whether they should be Christian or Muslim, Protestant or Catholic, German or French."²⁴ How, then, can he take seriously the commemoration of these events? The contemporaneity of the past has been lost, and the new commemorative rituals are the last thing we can expect to restore it. Holidays no longer mediate present and past, and their mediating func-

tion has not been replaced. Americans have lost sight of themselves as historical beings; they forget they have inherited, not created, the most valuable of their possessions. Postmodern America's historical knowledge grows with its archives, but its continuity with the past declines.

This loss of historical continuity is evident in the triviality and confusion of Presidents' Day. Gustav Mahler once said, "History must preserve the fire, not the ashes, of the past." If history is fire, then Presidents' Day is cold rain. Those earlier generations of Americans looked up to are now smaller men. Paradoxically, they are now better known. Today, anyone can access thousands of history web sites by computer. No previous generation has enjoyed such effortless access to so much information, yet no generation has identified with the past less closely.

For Freud, identification is the expression of an emotional tie with another person.²⁵ The sociologist Talcott Parsons later defined it as "the process by which a person comes to be inducted . . . into a collectivity . . . in accord with [its] pattern of values."²⁶ Identification with the past differs from mere knowledge; it implies an internalization of tradition in the individual's moral consciousness. Commemorative events, like holidays, lend themselves to identification more readily than does history. But such events, according to Pierre Nora, are screens hiding the fact that archives alone preserve the past: the "new vocation is to record," not to celebrate; to delegate to the archive, not the holiday, the responsibility of remembering.²⁷ Yet archives cannot do everything. They are storehouses for selected information, but they cannot create an emotional attachment to that information. Such is the function of commemoration.

Presidents' Day makes more sense as an "abortive commemoration" than as a product of conflict or consensus. Whether holidays are tools for the control of the masses by the elite, or instead an expression of their unity, their impact—a moral transformation—cannot be accomplished, as Durkheim says, "except by means of reunions, assemblies, and meetings" which reaffirm what participants have in common. Presidents' Day inspires few such reunions, assemblies, and meetings. Indeed, many Americans are unaware of the holiday until they find their bank closed or mail undelivered. Holidays cannot become "cultural performances" or "public events"²⁸ unless people somehow participate. To say that a holiday is alive is to say that it transforms and elevates its participants and strengthens them morally and socially. Not until they can relate this day to their own lives and interests will it make sense to celebrate it. Presidents' Day is not the only holiday that now fails to put individuals in touch with their national traditions. Whether we can expect, as Durkheim did, that warmer, effervescent holidays will return in the future is a question that time will answer.

Appendix

*Percentage of Respondents Designating Selected Presidents as "One of America's Three Greatest Presidents"**

	1956	1975	1985	1991	1999
Lincoln	62	49	47	44	40
Kennedy	—	52	57	49	35
Roosevelt	64	45	41	28	24
Washington	47	25	25	24	24
Truman	22	37	27	20	10
Eisenhower	38	24	17	12	8
N	1,385	1,507	1,540	1,013	1,001

* Gallup Poll: 1956, 1975, 1985, 1991; University of Maryland Survey, 1999

Notes

¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2 (New Haven, 1955), 38–9.

² John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1992); Ellen M. Litwicky, *America's Public Holidays, 1865–1920* (Washington, 2000).

³ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York, 1965), 475. Recently, Amitai Etzioni drew on Durkheim to develop his ideas on holidays as “seedbeds of virtue.” See Amitai Etzioni, *The Monochrome Society* (Princeton, 2001), 113–40. See also Lloyd Warner, *The Living and the Dead* (New Haven, 1959).

⁴ Robert Lerner, Althea K. Nagai, and Stanley Rothman, *Molding the Good Citizen: The Politics of High School History Texts* (Westport, 1995), 69–88 and 125–50.

⁵ See Barry Schwartz and Howard Schuman, “History, Commemoration, and Belief: Abraham Lincoln in American Memory, 1945–2001,” *American Sociological Review* 70 (April 2005): 183–203.

⁶ Discussion of the Uniform Holiday Act is found in the *Congressional Record* from January 1967 through June 1968. More discussion followed, especially after it took effect in 1971.

⁷ *Congressional Record*, HR, May 6, 1968, 1827–30.

⁸ *Ibid.*, April 3, 1968, 8923.

⁹ At the same time, Monday holidays were being considered in eight different states.

¹⁰ *Congressional Record*, Senate, June 25, 1968, 18510.

¹¹ Quoted in *Congressional Record*, April 3, 1968, 8923.

¹² *Ibid.*, January 17, 1969, 1269.

¹³ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1968, 19438.

¹⁴ Quoted in *Congressional Record*, HR, March 30, 1976, 8715.

¹⁵ The theme of the arbitrariness of dates appears repeatedly. For one of the earlier discussions, see *Congressional Record*, Appendix, February 20, 1967, A739.

¹⁶ *Congressional Record*, HR, February 10, 1971, 2338.

¹⁷ Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92.

¹⁸ *Chase's Calendar of Events*, the authority on American holidays, defines Presidents' Day thus:

Presidents' Day observes the birthdays of George Washington (February 22) and Abraham Lincoln (February 12). With the adoption of the Monday Holiday Law . . . some of the specific significance of the event was lost and added impetus was given to the popular description of that holiday as Presidents' Day. Present usage often regards Presidents' Day as a day to honor all former presidents of the United States, although the federal holiday is still Washington's Birthday.

This confusing entry assigns two meanings to the day. Washington's Birthday is observed as Presidents' Day, which honors all presidents. On the other hand, Presidents' Day honors Washington and Lincoln. See *Chase's Calendar of Events*, 2003 (Chicago, 2003), 138.

¹⁹ Edward Derwinski, *Congressional Record*, HR, October 23, 1973, 34899; William Ketchum, HR, February 24, 1976, 4244; Daniel Inouye, Senate, January 19, 1999. Representative Roscoe Bartlett and Tom Tancredo's bill is discussed by Matthew Spalding, "By George: It's Not Presidents' Day. It's Washington's Birthday," *National Review Online*, February 16, 2004.

²⁰ Paul Greenberg, "Shrinking Lincoln," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, February 12, 2001. The blankness of Presidents' Day is also distinguished by its widening commercialization: the "Presidents' Day sale."

²¹ Etzioni, "Holidays: The Neglected Seedbeds of Virtue," 118–22.

²² Barry Schwartz, "Postmodernity and Historical Reputation: Abraham Lincoln in Late Twentieth-Century American Memory," *Social Forces* 77 (1998): 63–103.

²³ Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman, *Molding the Good Citizen*, 145–9. The downgrading of presidents largely reflects the way their policies affected women, African Americans, and other minorities. Lincoln's positive textbook rating through the 1980s is consistent with this bias.

²⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992), 306.

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York, 1960), 46–53.

²⁶ Talcott Parsons, *Social Structure and Personality* (New York, 1970), 91.

²⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 13.

²⁸ John MacAloon, ed., *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia, 1984), 1–15; Don Handelman, *Mirrors and Models: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge, UK, 1990).

NIXON IN AMERICAN MEMORY

David Greenberg

In Search of the “Real Nixon”

In one sense or another, Richard M. Nixon was always covering up. Throughout his long tenure on the American political stage, he concealed his illicit activities, his secret diplomacy, and his inner feelings. Socially awkward, personally inhibited, lacking in spontaneity, he constantly hid behind a series of public personae. According to John Herbers, a reporter who covered him for *The New York Times*, Nixon was “a distant and enigmatic figure as seen backwards through a telescope.”¹ “Nixon remains the most enigmatic of American presidents,” agreed his admirer Paul Johnson, a conservative British journalist, “. . . the inner man is almost totally inaccessible.”² Adlai Stevenson, the Democrats’ presidential nominee in 1952 and 1956, said it first and perhaps best: “This is a man of many masks,” he stated, “but who can say they have seen his real face?”³

This elusiveness helped to make Nixon a hotly contested symbol, probably more than any other American politician. Easily our most controversial president, he was viewed in starkly contrasting ways by different groups in society. For fifty years, Nixon relished combat, nourished suspicions, and polarized citizens. No one was more admired (he was the most respected man in America four years in a row, Gallup reported), yet no one more loathed (for six years, he ranked among the world’s most hated men, twice edging out Hitler). The editor Michael Korda called Nixon “the one American president of this century about whom it is absolutely impossible to be indifferent.”⁴

Nixon’s protean quality, his ability to assume different forms in the eyes of his interpreters, is especially striking given his unparalleled longevity and prominence in post-World War II American politics. For half a century he stood at or near the center of American life, garnering headlines as a congressman, senator, vice-president, president, ex-president, and deceased president. The journalist Theodore H. White ranked him together with Franklin Delano Roosevelt “as the most enduring American politicians of the twentieth century.” He galvanized debates over the Red Scare, negative campaigning, Vietnam, the Great Society, the media’s role in politics, and Watergate. After his resignation in 1974, *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis called the years since World War II “the Age of Nixon,” a term echoed by other historians.⁵

Compounding Nixon's inscrutability was his dedication to controlling the impression he made on others. His obsession with public relations—pronounced even for politicians—made his true self even harder to identify. Examples of his concern with his appearance are legion. To note but one, Nixon once told his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, that he needed a full-time public relations adviser who could coach him on matters including “how I should stand, where the cameras will be,” and even “whether I should [hold] the phone with my right hand or my left hand.” Given “the millions of dollars that go into one lousy thirty-second spot advertising a deodorant,” he said, it was “unbelievable” that his image didn't receive equal attention.⁶ Even the joke that haunted him his whole career—“Would you buy a used car from this man?”—spoke to his relentless yet clumsy efforts at salesmanship.⁷

Nixon often refashioned his public identity. As early as 1953, journalists wrote about the emergence of a “new Nixon.” Apparently coined by an Alabama newspaper, the term would resurface at each stage of Nixon's career.⁸ Some of these “new Nixons” gained wide acceptance. In 1960, Nixon resolved to erase his old reputation as a below-the-belt campaigner and wound up losing the presidency to John F. Kennedy by only a whisker. In 1968, Nixon persuaded critics, including the skeptical Walter Lippmann, that he had evolved into “a maturer, mellower man who is no longer clawing his way to the top.”⁹ But as often as Nixon remade himself, he equally often met failure; his failures ended up directing attention to his attempts at manipulation. Indeed, the transparency of these efforts, their sheer clumsiness, reinforced the long-standing view of him as a chameleon and an opportunist.

Thus, alongside the motif of the “new Nixon,” a related theme runs through the Nixon literature: the search for the “real Nixon.” With that search came “disturbing speculation,” in the words of his first psychoanalytic biographer, Bruce Mazlish, “about who the ‘real’ Nixon is.” Mazlish's biography bore the title *In Search of Nixon*;¹⁰ others were called *The Nixon Nobody Knows*, *Richard Nixon: The Man Behind the Mask*, *The Real Nixon*.¹¹ But many doubted that any real Nixon existed. The historian William Appleman Williams called the search “a shell game without a pea.”¹²

To study the series of images that Nixon projected from 1946, when he first ran for Congress, to the present is to tour the social history of America in the post-World War II era, for each of his personae reveals not only his qualities but also features of his interpreters.¹³ More narrowly, however, it can be instructive to examine how Nixon has been remembered since his resignation in 1974. For while there has been much talk to the effect that Nixon succeeded in rehabilitating himself, a close study of Nixon's image in American memory belies such easy conclusions.¹⁴ On

the contrary, while recent years have witnessed the emergence of various “new Nixons” to challenge his older image as America’s chief villain, none of these new interpretations has earned dominance. Indeed, talk of each “new Nixon” has ultimately served to reinforce the perdurability of Nixon’s persona as an unscrupulous and incorrigible manipulator.

Nixon’s Images, 1946–1974

Before exploring the more recent images of Nixon that have gained currency, it is worth reviewing briefly the parade of Nixons that traversed the national scene between 1946 and 1974. Not every one of those personae is well remembered. For example, at the time of his political debut, Nixon was widely regarded as a kind of populist everyman.¹⁵ Entrepreneurs and professionals on the make in postwar Southern California rallied around Nixon in 1946, regarding the young candidate as the embodiment of the traditional principles of hard work, family, religion, and patriotism, which they feared were in eclipse under New Deal liberalism. Clean-cut Navy veteran, new father, family man, churchgoer—Nixon struck these Southland conservatives as the personification of their time-honored values. Magazine and newspaper profiles fawned over him. “He looks like the boy who lived down the block from all of us,” gushed the *Washington Times-Herald*; “he’s as typically American as Thanksgiving.”¹⁶ Over the next few years, through his efforts to expose Alger Hiss as a Soviet spy, he won largely warm words from journalists and even many liberals. Negative portrayals of Nixon are almost entirely absent from the historical record during his first years in Washington.¹⁷

By 1952, however, a rival view was emerging. That year’s presidential election catapulted Nixon to fame as the Republican Party’s vice-presidential nominee, and a new image of him crystallized that was practically a photographic negative of his supporters’ middle-class hero. Many liberals and intellectuals who had closely watched Nixon’s career were already disturbed by his lacerating attacks on all manner of opponents as “soft on communism.” Starting with the Checkers speech—the historic address televised in September 1952 in which Nixon defended himself from charges of financial chicanery—these critics refined a portrait of Nixon as not merely a Red-baiter but an unprincipled opportunist who used the new techniques of television, advertising, and public relations to hoodwink the middle classes into thinking he was one of them. Liberals saw Nixon as a quintessentially inauthentic mid-century man, whose opportunism, when harnessed to his mastery of propaganda, threatened American democracy itself.¹⁸

These were the origins of “Tricky Dick,” a nickname that stayed with Nixon his whole life.¹⁹ But even the negative portraits of Nixon that

emerged in the 1950s and then proliferated during his presidency were not monolithic. They varied in nuance and emphasis as new constituencies reinterpreted Nixon in light of their own concerns. The radical young activists of the New Left who had become a political force by the time of Nixon's presidency saw him as something more nefarious than the Machiavellian opportunist of liberal demonology. For many of these radicals, Nixon embodied the darkest martial and conspiratorial impulses of what they called the "national security state." His stubborn refusal to end the war in Vietnam and his ramping up of repressive law-enforcement measures at home made him seem like a monarch-in-waiting and a Hitler-like dictator. "Tin soldiers and Nixon coming," sang Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young after the killing of Kent State students by National Guardsmen in May 1970, solidifying his link with the American war-making machine. The pages of underground newspapers and left-wing magazines teemed with scathing parody, vitriolic and obscene rants, and caricatures of Nixon as king or Führer.

In a still different vein, the members of the Washington press corps who covered Nixon's White House eschewed such extremism. For them, Nixon's sinister designs lay in his attempts to control the news. This view was hardly limited to radicals. CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite, while accepting the "Broadcaster of the Year" award in 1971, billed Nixon's anti-press campaign "a grand conspiracy."²⁰ Ben Bradlee, the editor of the *Washington Post*, charged on the Dick Cavett show in 1973 that "the First Amendment is in greater danger than any time I've seen it."²¹ Focusing on their backyard concerns, journalists formed a picture of Nixon as the consummate spin doctor (in the parlance of a later day), draining democracy of its lifeblood through a war on the press.²²

Finally, still other critics of Nixon during his presidency drew on the newly fashionable insights of psychoanalysis to sketch a portrait of him as a repressed and insecure narcissist with an insatiable need for love and power—shortcomings, they argued, that contained the seeds of Watergate. When Nixon acted in ways that defied rational explanation—such as the night in May 1970 he stole out of the White House to mingle with student protesters on the Washington Mall—or when confidants reported him to be cracking under Watergate's strain, these psychoanalytic interpretations, whatever their deficiencies, gained vogue.²³

Each of these unflattering views of Nixon had unique aspects. But Watergate, a scandal of unprecedented dimensions, had the effect of stressing the commonalities rather than the differences between these personae. After all, "Watergate" became synonymous with the whole panoply of unconstitutional abuses of power that pervaded and defined Nixon's administration. As revelations mounted—the dirty tricks, the enemies lists, the burglars and plumbers, the wiretaps, and the tapes—a

large majority of the public came to see him as a liar, a criminal, and a man without morals. As such, the scandal seemed to end the debate about Nixon's identity. The humor columnist Art Buchwald wrote that a high-level White House source ("Deep Toes") confessed to him, as if it were a mind-bending revelation, that "there is no New Nixon and there never was . . . It was the old Nixon with makeup on";²⁴ after Watergate, no amount of resourceful image-making seemed able to change the public perception of the president. Though they seem distinct in retrospect, at the time the assorted negative views of Nixon commingled in the singular figure of "Tricky Dick," a uniquely and criminally dishonest president.

New Nixons nonetheless appeared in the years after his ouster. As soon as Nixon left the White House, he labored to resurrect himself, encouraging kinder interpretations and feverishly courting Clio's favor. Nixon did not ultimately manage to rehabilitate himself. But he and his supporters did succeed in introducing competing images of the fallen president into the public debate that would ensure that he would remain a subject of controversy for years to come.

Nixon as Victim

Even before Watergate, Nixon enjoyed the support of a minority of Americans who believed that the president was not a villain but a victim of liberals, radicals, and the media. Even at Nixon's nadir, when he resigned in the summer of 1974, he enjoyed support from 24 percent of Americans, many of whom insisted his sole error lay in provoking the ire of powerful liberals and journalists. The linchpin for this view was the insistence that Nixon's misdeeds were no worse than any other president's but that the press used a "double standard" in judging them. Having nursed a sense of grievance much of his life, Nixon convinced himself that Lyndon Johnson and John Kennedy had sanctioned burglaries no different from those at the Watergate. The belief was false, but undeterred, Nixon responded to the incipient Watergate crisis in June 1972 by pushing the "everybody does it" line. Both in his private conversations and, later, in his public statements, Nixon constantly sounded this theme.²⁵

The president and his aides aggressively spread this idea. They contacted grassroots pro-Nixon groups, such as the National Citizens' Committee for Fairness to the Presidency, run by a retired Massachusetts rabbi named Baruch Korff, and brought them into the White House orbit. They planted column ideas with friendly journalists, such as Nixon's longtime friend Victor Lasky, who had secretly been on the payroll of the Committee to Re-Elect the President.²⁶ They created a "surrogates" program under which Nixon's friends, family members, and aides agreed to mouth White House-issued talking points.

And there were plenty of citizen defenders, media sympathizers, and Republican colleagues who needed no direction from the administration to believe that Nixon was being scapegoated. No one in the White House had to give marching orders to the Southern rock group Lynyrd Skynyrd when it sang in its 1974 hit "Sweet Home, Alabama," the lines "Now Watergate does not bother me/Does your conscience bother you?" The reason this view of Nixon held sway over a certain constituency had less to do with the facts of the Watergate case than with the turmoil of the 1960s. Unreconciled to the revolutionary changes that were transforming America, Nixon's loyalists understood the campaign to oust the president as a metaphor for the cultural displacement of their values of family, propriety, and patriotism. A member of the Italian-American League of Canarsie summarized the common sentiment: "Watergate was bullshit, pure and simple. . . . I don't care what he did. It's disgraceful what they did to the country—the press and Congress and the protesters. . . . I loved Nixon for loving the country."²⁷ "Nixon, Now More than Ever" had been the president's bumper-sticker slogan during his 1972 campaign; during Watergate, his diehard supporters invested it with new meaning and brandished it with redoubled pride. The more he was pilloried, the more he seemed a victim—the target of a cultural war waged by decadent liberal élites—and the stronger their affection grew. Over time, thanks to their efforts, other Americans showed a greater willingness to treat Nixon as a victim.

At one end of the spectrum of sympathetic feeling for Nixon was a view of him as an essentially pitiable figure. In 1976, singer Neil Young released a bittersweet dirge called "Campaigner" after watching a TV report about a watery-eyed Nixon shuffling into the hospital to visit his wife Pat, who had suffered a stroke. Originally titled "Requiem for a President," the song didn't exactly treat the ex-president as a victim, but it was a far cry from "Ohio." The new song painted Nixon as pathetic and excessively demonized: "Hospitals have made him cry/But there's always a freeway in his eye/Though his beach just got too crowded for his stroll/Roads stretch out like healthy veins/And wild gift horses strain the reins/Where even Richard Nixon has got soul." When the British television personality David Frost interviewed Nixon in 1978, he sought to generate a poignant moment by asking Nixon about Pat's stroke. Although Nixon's standing with the public remained abysmal after the broadcast, 44 percent of Americans nonetheless claimed to feel more compassion for him.²⁸

For some, the defanged Nixon even became an object of contrarian admiration. Because the image of Tricky Dick was lodged so securely in the public consciousness, self-styled conservative rebels who reveled in thumbing their noses at liberal norms took to admiring Nixon for his very

unpopularity. One of the most popular television shows of the 1980s was the sitcom "Family Ties," which ran from 1982 to 1989 and starred Michael J. Fox as Alex Keaton, a stereotypical young conservative who rebelled against his parents' countercultural values. Alex's admiration for Nixon was a touchstone of his perversity: his first word as a baby was said to have been "Nixon," and he kept by his bedside an autographed picture of the former president. Yet the character was basically a good-hearted contrarian; his conservatism rendered him annoying but hardly villainous. His support for Nixon was provocative or amusing but never threatening.

In contrast to these mild versions of Nixon's victim persona, a more angry and extreme form was manifest in fantasies that construed Watergate as what White House aide Bruce Herschensohn deemed a "coup d'état . . . by a non-elected coalition of power groups." In far-right (and some far-left) circles, baroque conspiracy theories proliferated. In June 1972, Nixon had concocted a cover story for Watergate that blamed the Central Intelligence Agency for the break-in (he had aides warn the FBI not to delve into the crime too deeply, lest it reveal classified activities). Although later exposed as lies, such theories about the CIA or other government forces scheming to topple Nixon caught the fancy of assorted loyalists, amateur researchers, and professional conspiracy buffs, some of whom called themselves revisionists. A more accurate label might have been "Watergate Deniers," since their scenarios dispensed with the whole train of abuses of which the fateful burglary of June 17, 1972, was but a tiny part. In 1991, there appeared a magnum opus of Watergate Denial called *Silent Coup*, which hypothesized a secret counter-history of Watergate centering on successive plots by White House Counsel John W. Dean and Chief of Staff Al Haig. Though it was taken seriously by very few historians, the book became a best seller. Its popularity revealed a public appetite for a picture of Nixon as a victim rather than the chief perpetrator of the scandal.²⁹

But if the image of Nixon as Watergate's main casualty would long retain adherents, it never came close to supplanting the view that his removal from the presidency was warranted—perhaps because it simply did not hold up under scrutiny. Most obviously, while an intense liberal hatred toward Nixon had certainly fueled the drive to oust him, that antagonism was hardly decisive; it was only when members of Nixon's own party, from the moderate Republican Lowell Weicker to the hard-right Barry Goldwater, withdrew their support that Nixon's presidency finally collapsed. Unlike many of the scandals surrounding other presidents or politicians, Watergate transcended ideology or partisan politics; Americans across the spectrum saw Nixon's own crimes as the primary source of his undoing.

Nixon as Statesman

In contrast to the victim image, another reading of Nixon flourished in his last decades, which resonated with a substantially broader swath of the public: that of an elder statesman who redeemed himself after his resignation by offering sage commentary on global affairs. Nixon promoted this image even more assiduously than his victim persona. He styled himself “an *homme sérieux*,” as his speechwriter Ray Price asserted, “a man of large vision who knows the world and whose views carry weight.”³⁰ He served up a raft of books, speeches, op-ed pieces, and dinnertime conversations with foreign-policy hands—not to mention legal efforts to thwart the release of government materials that might further embarrass him—to burnish his new look. At Nixon’s funeral, this image was most commonly hailed as proof of a purported comeback.

By basing his recovery on his international achievements, Nixon was playing to a long-standing strength. During his presidency, Nixon’s foreign policy had been widely judged a success, especially his initiation of diplomatic relations with China and pursuit of *détente* with the Soviet Union (Vietnam was a major exception). After resigning, Nixon tried to build upon the respect he enjoyed in the diplomatic realm by styling himself a global thinker. To this end, he received the friendly help of what has often been called the foreign-policy establishment—the journalists, government officials, and policy hands who came of age during the Cold War and believed that a president’s conduct of foreign affairs should heavily determine his legacy.

Nixon’s first gambit in his campaign to rehabilitate himself—a February 1976 trip to Beijing, the scene of his greatest triumph—brought mostly brickbats. Even the normally dispassionate David Broder of the *Washington Post* savaged Nixon as willing to do anything “to salvage for himself whatever scrap of significance he can find in the shambles of his life.”³¹ By 1981, however, Nixon had moved to New York and begun hosting elaborate dinner parties with key players in journalism and foreign-policy circles. Regaling his guests with stories about Mao Zedong and Charles de Gaulle, Nixon would demonstrate his mastery of issues around the globe.³² Publicly, too, he cultivated the statesman aura. He wrote book after book, as well as op-ed pieces and magazine articles, opining on foreign policy and appearing on the “Today” show or other unconfessional television programs for additional exposure. He orchestrated public relations stunts—such as the release in 1992 of a memo criticizing President George Bush’s policies toward Russia—to bring himself more attention.³³ And he offered his counsel to his successors, whether they wanted it or not.

This multifaceted campaign eventually created an impression that Nixon had regained a modicum of respectability. When Nixon resigned, his friend Clare Boothe Luce had predicted that his place in history books would be marked by the sentence, "He went to China."³⁴ By the late 1980s, her forecast seemed to be gaining plausibility. The anxiety-provoking militarism of Reagan's early presidency made many foreign-policy hands nostalgic for Nixon's peace initiatives. Journalists who had plied their craft during the Cold War, such as Theodore H. White and Hugh Sidey, waxed admiring of Nixon, and younger emulators who shared their bias toward foreign policy as preeminent, such as Strobe Talbott of *Time*, recruited Nixon to comment on world affairs.³⁵

In popular culture, too, references to Nixon as a skilled diplomat joined the familiar jokes about him as a liar and crook. Nixon's Beijing trip provided the story line for the 1987 opera "Nixon in China," directed by Peter Sellars, whose choice of topic led some reviewers to charge that he was abetting Nixon's whitewashing of history. "Nobody trills [an aria called] Watergate," one sniped.³⁶ In 1986, Nixon's former aide John Ehrlichman, in his post-prison career as a pulp novelist, wrote a potboiler called *The China Card* that imagined Zhou Enlai secretly enlisting a young Nixon aide to bring about the reconciliation between the countries.³⁷ And in the 1991 movie *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, set in the distant future, Mr. Spock of the planet Vulcan tries to convince Captain Kirk of the Starship Enterprise to make peace with old enemies. "There is an old Vulcan proverb," Spock counsels. "'Only Nixon could go to China.'"³⁸

Praising Nixon's global expertise did not always mean downplaying Tricky Dick. Many establishment types who championed Nixon's statesman image were in no hurry to forget Watergate. A common way to reconcile the two personae was to call Nixon a "tragic" figure, to see his life as "the stuff of Shakespeare," as his former aide David Gergen wrote.³⁹ The stress on the tragic was meant to honor Nixon's complexity, to suggest that a disaster like Watergate was bound to occur under Nixon since the same white-hot resentment that fueled his rise also led him to abuse his power. But the "tragic" and "Shakespearean" labels, if intended to deepen the understanding of Nixon, ultimately served to simplify his image, reducing deeply embedded traits to surface foibles. Instead of a true "tragic flaw" that was constitutive of Nixon's character—his amorality, paranoia, vindictiveness, or ambition—his flaw was now seen as some minor shortcoming that just happened to trip him up. Talk of Nixon's tragic nature thus bolstered the notion of the statesman, giving him more credit than he deserved.

Nonetheless, to conclude that Nixon's statesman image was triumphant would be an error. Many of these renderings of Nixon's diplomacy, after all, were far from flattering. The Nixon of Sellars's opera, for ex-

ample, was no wise man but another variant of Tricky Dick, bent on swaying history's judgment. Notably, too, scholarly opinion in these years also grew more critical of Nixon's diplomacy.⁴⁰ More to the point, the notion that Nixon had returned to a position of actual influence always rested on a shaky premise. To be sure, the mandarins of the foreign-policy establishment liked dining with him in his Upper East Side townhouse or his manse in suburban New Jersey, and sitting presidents took his calls. But Nixon was never asked to take on special diplomatic tasks in his twilight years, as Jimmy Carter has been. Scholars showed scant interest in the content of Nixon's opinions, which had minuscule impact. His books and articles, though voluminous, never provoked intellectual discussion, as would those of a thinker such as Samuel Huntington, Francis Fukuyama, or even Henry Kissinger—only water-cooler chitchat. To the extent that Nixon's policy pronouncements attracted interest, it had little to do with the pronouncements and almost everything to do with Nixon, who as the most enigmatic leader of recent times exerted a continuing fascination. "We are suckers for a good show," explained Robert G. Kaiser of *The Washington Post* ten years after Watergate, calling Nixon's journey "America's longest-running soap opera," filled with "pathos, bathos, intrigue, surprise."⁴¹ People wanted to hear him because he was America's chief villain, the only president to resign, or (at best) because he was a figure of bewitching inscrutability, but not because they expected—or wanted—him to solve the world's ills. Nixon himself accepted this fact. Of his audiences, he told *Newsweek*, "They're here because they want to hear what I have to say, but they're [also] here because they say, 'What makes this guy tick?'"⁴²

What was more, the constant focus on the idea of comeback, ironically, revealed it to be a will-o'-the-wisp. For in virtually all the stories announcing Nixon's return, Michael Schudson has written, "rehabilitation, not Richard Nixon, became even more prominently the main subject for public discussion of Nixon."⁴³ Journalists profiled the former president as an elder statesman often, but just as often they framed these stories as tales of Nixon's battle to replace Watergate's legacy with that of China and détente. In such a context, Watergate and the flight from it remained central, if submerged, themes of Nixon's late career. The president's rehabilitation drama thus revealed not so much a New Nixon as the pertinacity of the Old Nixon, as keen as ever to win history's favor.

Nixon realized his efforts achieved limited gains. After he published *In the Arena*, his third memoir, in 1990, he grouched to his assistant Monica Crowley that reviewers dwelled exclusively on the material about Watergate. "None of the other stuff in there, like on the Russians or the other personal stuff, made it into the news or even the reviews," he sighed. "Watergate—that's all anyone wants."⁴⁴

Nixon as Liberal

A third image of Nixon that challenged his darker identities was one that neither he nor his critics ever would have predicted in his lifetime: the notion of Nixon as the last big-government liberal. Decades after his resignation, many historians who looked back on his policies began to argue that his real legacy lay not so much in Watergate as in his contribution to the Great Society: proposing a guaranteed minimum income, establishing the Environmental Protection Agency, desegregating Southern schools, embracing Keynesian economics. Indeed, by the twenty-fifth anniversary of his abdication, this notion had gained a place in the public discourse. A *Washington Post* columnist commemorated Nixon's departure from office by noting his progressive environmental record and spending on social services.⁴⁵ *U.S. News & World Report* rhapsodized about Nixon's farsighted policies toward American Indians, worker safety, and the arts.⁴⁶ Even Nixon's old adversary Daniel Schorr saluted "the other Nixon" who fought hunger and bequeathed a legacy of desegregated schools.⁴⁷

The pundits' commentary rested on a bed of recent historical scholarship that delved into Nixon's domestic policies and judged them surprisingly substantive. For example, historian Melvin Small published *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, which included chapters arguing the case for the president as a reformer. A synthesis of Nixon scholarship, Small's work capped a decade of other historians' labors along similar lines, notably that of Joan Hoff and Tom Wicker.⁴⁸ Quickly, the idea progressed from a challenge to the conventional wisdom about Nixon—a kind of "man bites dog" story with a mischievously contrarian appeal—to a sound-bite repeated so often that it approximated the conventional wisdom itself.

Yet whatever currency it gained in certain quarters, this picture, too, failed to gain dominance. The problem wasn't just that countervailing instances of Nixon's conservative policies abounded alongside his liberal accomplishments. More to the point, the reading of Nixon as a liberal didn't reckon with what "liberal" and "conservative" meant circa 1970, when the political center of gravity in America stood far to the left of where it would be decades later. Nor did it take into account the majorities that the Democrats possessed in Congress during Nixon's presidency, which forced him to tack leftward for his political survival.

Most fatally to their argument, advocates of the liberal Nixon image struck from consideration not only contextual facts about the era but also the very person of Nixon himself. When the biographer Richard Norton Smith reviewed Hoff's *Nixon Reconsidered*, he lamented that "process crowds out personality," and that "in pursuing her vision of Nixon with-

out Watergate, Ms. Hoff comes dangerously close to giving us Nixon without Nixon."⁴⁹ The "Nixon as liberal" argument rested on the fallacy that a president's true legacy lay in his policies, not his personality. But as Smith recognized, the ways that people in the past understood the worlds they inhabited—including what they thought about public figures such as the president—constitute, as much as the filigree of policymaking, the proper subjects of history. At a 1987 conference about Nixon that included much discussion of his purported liberalism, the historian Stanley Kutler argued, "We are, to some extent, in danger of forgetting—not forgetting Richard Nixon, but forgetting what he did and what he symbolized to his contemporaries. History is, after all, not just what the present wishes to make of the past for its own purposes. . . . Historians must judge the past by the standards of that past, not their own."⁵⁰ In the end, Kutler need not have feared; the notion of Nixon as a liberal never caught hold because it avoided rather than confronted the emotions and associations that Nixon provoked and that in turn defined him.

The Endurance of Tricky Dick

Thus, although Nixon's image remained contested at his death, with new views emerging periodically, his image also remained overwhelmingly negative. The lasting picture was not terribly different from that of August 1974: a dishonest, vindictive political animal whose hunger for approval and resentment of his perceived foes drove him to violate the Constitution and bring about his own fall. Tricky Dick still predominated.

A range of indicators supported this judgment. In political arguments and writings, book reviews, even private conversation, talk of Nixon's statesmanship, victimhood, or progressiveness never superseded his reputation for deceit and manipulation. Anniversaries that recalled his life invariably commemorated the Watergate break-in or his resignation, not any positive achievements of his presidency. Politicians rarely claimed his legacy, and no post-resignation or posthumous honors or laurels accrued to his name. The obituaries led with Watergate and his resignation.

In the realm of quantitative measures, survey numbers showed that most Americans still associated Nixon with corruption and dishonesty. A Gallup poll of March 2002 showed that 54 percent of Americans still "disapproved" of Nixon's performance as president, while 34 percent "approved." The data showed an improvement for Nixon over some previous polls, but he still fared worse than any other president since Kennedy.⁵¹ Polls of historians likewise showed Nixon, despite having modestly bettered his lot in recent years, registering poorly overall. Even conservative scholars evaluated him unfavorably compared to other presidents.⁵²

Cultural indicators pointed in a similar direction. Nixon's impact on the language attested to his enduring meaning. "Nixonian" has become a synonym for Machiavellian. The "-gate" suffix, appended like laundry tags to the names of new scandals, demonstrates Watergate's lasting power as the benchmark of political wrongdoing. Nixon going to China has also entered the lexicon as shorthand for playing against type to effect a dramatic political change. But even as it evokes Nixon's creativity and bravura in diplomacy, the phrase also calls to mind his trademark political resourcefulness and untrustworthiness.

Popular culture, too, continues to portray Nixon mostly as a villain, scoundrel, or failed president. The novelist Philip Roth, whose pitch-perfect 1971 satire *Our Gang* had President Trick E. Dixon campaign against Satan for president of Hell,⁵³ kept Tricky Dick vividly alive in the 1990s in such novels as *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist*, in which Nixon represents nothing less than the subversion of American democracy. In the former, the character Lou Levov, watching the Senate Watergate hearings in 1973, figures that if they could just "Get Nixon," then "America will be America again, without everything loathsome and lawless that's crept in, without all this violence and malice and madness and hate. . . . Cage the crook!"⁵⁴ In the latter novel, Murray Ringold, a survivor of the Red Scare, looses a frenetic tirade against what he calls the "barely endurable" spectacle of Nixon's funeral, railing against "the man who turned a whole country's morale inside out, the generator of an enormous national disaster, the first and only president of the United States of America to have gained from a handpicked successor a full and unconditional pardon for all the breaking and entering he committed while in office."⁵⁵ Less well-known, Mark Maxwell's 1998 novel *Nixon-Carver* presented Nixon's life story as if recounted by minimalist short-story writer Raymond Carver, using staples from the psychobiographical literature on Nixon for satiric and dramatic effect.⁵⁶

Low culture matched high culture in suggesting that Nixon's darker images were the ones that elicited public response. On the prime-time cartoon show *The Simpsons*, Nixon appears frequently as an emblem of political wrongdoing. In one episode, Homer told Bart that Checkers went to doggy hell; on another, Moe the Bartender used an Enemies List to plot acts of revenge. "If you would have told me 25 years ago that I'd be making a living by making fun of Richard Nixon, I would have been so happy," said the show's creator, Matt Groening. The singer James Taylor, in a song called "Line 'Em Up," recalled even Nixon's tearful resignation speech as a contrived act: "I remember Richard Nixon back in '74/And the final scene at the White House door/And the staff lined up to say good-bye/Tiny tear in his shifty little eye." In film, Oliver Stone's 1994 movie *Nixon* dredged up the conspiratorial president of New Left

iconography,⁵⁷ Andrew Fleming's 1999 *Dick* showed a malevolent, if incompetent, schemer undone by two ditzzy teenage girls, and Niels Mueller's *The Assassination of Richard Nixon* used the president to embody all that was bleak and corrupt in 1970s America.⁵⁸

The Comeback Artist, or the New Nixon as Old Nixon

If one conception of Nixon might be said to have carried equal weight to Tricky Dick in American memory, it is that of the comeback artist. Nixon's tenacity in trying to become again a player "in the arena," as he liked to say, recurred as a theme throughout both positive and negative portraits. The most requested Nixon item from the National Archives, and the best-selling image at the Nixon Library and souvenir shops, was a photograph of Nixon and Elvis on the occasion of the rock star's visit to the White House in December 1970 (it even inspired a small corpus of kitsch, including a novel and a made-for-cable-TV movie).⁵⁹ Apart from its incongruousness, the photograph was compelling because it captured two iconic American comeback artists in full glory. Like the late-career Elvis, Nixon elicited, along with the easy ridicule, a grudging regard for his perseverance—a recognition that he had made a difference in an era of politicians who seemed small and insignificant.

Indeed, in all the streams of commentary about Nixon after his death, whether critical of his cynicism or admiring of his grit, a common theme held that his reinventions showed a determination to stay relevant. In fact, the blanket awareness of his labors proved not that he had "come back" but the reverse: that everyone remained acutely aware of his resolve to control how others would perceive him. The comeback artist, on close inspection, turned out to be a close cousin of the old political manipulator. Even at his funeral, Nixon was, as *New York* magazine put it, "spinning from his grave."⁶⁰ Again he was trying to refashion his public persona, to fight for rehabilitation, to roll out this year's model of the new Nixon. Alas, whether it was new or used, this time around most Americans weren't buying.

Notes

¹ John Herbers, *No Thank You, Mr. President* (New York, 1976), 36.

² Paul Johnson, "In Praise of Richard Nixon," *Commentary* (October 1988): 50.

³ Quoted in Fawn M. Brodie, *Richard M. Nixon: The Shaping of His Character* (New York, 1981), 306.

⁴ Robert K. Murray and Tim H. Blessing, "The Presidential Performance Study: A Progress Report," *Journal of American History* 70, no. 3 (December 1983): 535–55, 543; Reuven Frank, *Out of Thin Air: The Brief Wonderful Life of Network News* (New York, 1991), 339; David Wallechinsky, Irving Wallace, and Amy Wallace, *The Book of Lists* (New York, 1977), 1; Michael Korda, *Another Life: A Memoir of Other People* (New York, 1999), 462.

⁵ Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1972* (New York, 1973), 18; *New York Times*, August 19, 1974, 29; Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, 1994), 346; Herbert Parmet,

Richard Nixon and His America (Boston, 1990), 620–46; Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence, KS, 1999), 311.

⁶ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962–1972* (New York, 1989), 314.

⁷ Stephen Whitfield, “Richard Nixon as a Comic Figure,” *American Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 116.

⁸ Earl Mazo, *Richard Nixon: A Political and Personal Portrait* (New York, 1959), 136.

⁹ Quoted in Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston, 1980), 589.

¹⁰ Bruce Mazlish, *In Search of Nixon* (New York, 1972), 74.

¹¹ Henry Spalding, *The Nixon Nobody Knows* (Middle Village, NJ, 1972); Gary Allen, *Richard Nixon: The Man Behind the Mask* (Boston, 1971); Bela Kornitzer, *The Real Nixon* (New York, 1960).

¹² William Appleman Williams, “Excelsior!” *New York Review of Books* 18 (February 24, 1972): 7–12.

¹³ For this larger study, see my *Nixon’s Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York, 2003), from which parts of this essay are derived.

¹⁴ See Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory* (New York, 1992) and Thomas J. Johnson, *The Rehabilitation of Richard Nixon: The Media’s Effect on Collective Memory* (New York, 1995).

¹⁵ See, for example, the works cited by Mazo, *Richard Nixon*, as well as Eleanor Harris, “The Nixons,” *American Weekly*, August 24, 1952, 4–5; Lawrence Wright, “Why We Liked Dick,” *Washington Monthly*, December 1986, 17–20; James Keogh, *This Is Nixon* (New York, 1956); Ralph de Toledano, *Nixon* (New York, 1960); and Irwin F. Gellman, *The Contender: Richard Nixon, The Congress Years, 1946–1952* (New York, 1999).

¹⁶ *Washington Times-Herald*, January 21, 1947.

¹⁷ Exemplifying the liberals’ outlook, William V. Shannon of the *New York Post* wrote of Nixon in 1955, “The prestige of his participation in the unmasking of Alger Hiss for example is untarnished and not in dispute, but he cannot live on that forever.” Liberal criticism of Nixon’s role in the Hiss case arose mainly after he became vice-president. He scarcely appears in the books on the Hiss case written before then. And although it’s certainly true that Nixon engaged in some nasty Red-baiting during his 1946 congressional race against Jerry Voorhis, most of the accounts of it and the harsh words for Nixon appeared only later after he had already earned the enmity of many critics, who then reexamined his past in search of the origins of his dark side.

¹⁸ See, for example, Richard J. Donovan, “Birth of a Salesman,” *The Reporter*, October 14, 1952; Richard Rovere, “Nixon: Most Likely to Succeed,” *Harper’s*, September 1955; Americans for Democratic Action, *Nixon: The Second Man* (pamphlet), 1956; William Lee Miller, “The Debating Career of Richard M. Nixon,” *The Reporter*, April 19, 1956; Irving Howe, “Poor Richard Nixon,” *The New Republic*, May 7, 1956; Gene Marine, “What’s Wrong with Nixon,” *Nation*, August 18, 1956; August Hecksher, “The Future of ‘The Party of the Future’: The Nixon Problem Is Not Yet Settled,” *The Reporter*, September 20, 1956; Morris H. Rubin, “The Trouble With Nixon: A Documented Report,” *The Progressive*, October 1956; William Costello, *The Facts About Nixon: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York, 1960); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Kennedy or Nixon: Does It Make Any Difference?* (New York, 1960); and Herbert Block, *Herblock Special Report* (New York, 1974).

¹⁹ The nickname was actually first affixed during his 1950 Senate race against Helen Gagan Douglas.

²⁰ Quoted in Gary Paul Gates, *Air Time: The Inside Story of CBS News* (New York, 1979), 320.

²¹ Quoted in Joseph C. Spear, *Presidents and the Press: The Nixon Legacy* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 191.

²² In addition to Spear, see, for example, William L. Rivers, *The Adversaries: Politics and the Press* (Boston, 1970); Fred Powlledge, *The Engineering of Restraint: The Nixon Administration*

and the Press (Washington, DC, 1971); James Aronson, *Deadline for the Media: Today's Challenges to Press, TV and Radio* (Indianapolis, 1972); William J. Small, *Political Power and the Press* (New York, 1972); David Wise, *The Politics of Lying: Government Deception, Secrecy and Power* (New York, 1973); Lewis W. Wolfson, ed., *The Press Covers Government: The Nixon Years from 1969 to Watergate* (Washington, DC, 1973); Timothy Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus* (New York, 1973); William E. Porter, *Assault on the Media* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1976); Michael Baruch Grossman and Marthta Joynt Kumar, *Portraying the President* (Baltimore, 1981); Marilyn Lashner, *The Chilling Effect in TV News: Intimidation by the Nixon White House* (New York, 1984); and John Anthony Maltese, *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992).

²³ Besides the works cited above by Brodie and Mazlish, see also, for example, Bruce Mazlish, "Towards a Psychohistorical Inquiry: The 'Real' Richard Nixon," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1 (Autumn 1970), reprinted in *The Leader, the Led and the Psyche: Essays in Psychohistory* (Hanover, NH, 1990), 198–246; Michael Rogin and John Lottier, "The Inner History of Richard Milhous Nixon," *Transaction* 9, 1–2 (November–December 1971): 21; James David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972); Arthur Woodstone, *Nixon's Head* (New York, 1972); Eli S. Chesen, *President Nixon's Psychiatric Profile: A Psychodynamic-Genetic Interpretation* (New York, 1973); Alan B. Rothenberg, "Why Nixon Taped Himself," *Psychoanalytic Review* 62, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 201–23; Leo Rangell, "Lessons from Watergate: A Derivative for Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (1976): 37–61; David Abrahamsen, *Nixon vs. Nixon: An Emotional Tragedy* (New York, 1977); James W. Hamilton, "Some Reflections on Richard Nixon in the Light of His Resignation and Farewell Speeches," *Journal of Psychohistory* 4, no. 4 (Spring 1977): 491–511; Steven R. Brown, "Richard Nixon and the Public Conscience: The Struggle for Authenticity," *Journal of Psychohistory* 5, no. 4 (Spring 1978): 93–111; James P. Johnson, "Nixon's Use of Metaphor: The Real Nixon Tapes," *Psychoanalytic Review* 66, no. 2 (1979): 263–74; Henry W. Lawton, "Milhous Rising," *Journal of Psychohistory* 6, no. 4 (Spring 1979): 519–42; Leo Rangell, *The Mind of Watergate* (New York, 1980); Jules Levey, "Richard Nixon as Elder Statesman," *Journal of Psychohistory* 13, no. 4 (Spring 1986): 27–48; Peter Loewenberg, "Nixon, Hitler and Power: An Ego Psychology Study," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 6, no. 1 (1986): 27–48; Blemma S. Steinberg, *Shame and Humiliation: Presidential Decision Making on Vietnam* (Pittsburgh, 1996); and Vamik D. Volkan, Norman Itzkowitz, and Andrew W. Dod, *Richard Nixon: A Psychobiography* (New York, 1997).

²⁴ *Washington Post*, May 21, 1974.

²⁵ George W. Johnson, ed., *The Nixon Presidential Press Conferences* (New York, 1978), 340–3.

²⁶ "Is the Press Living by a Double Standard?" *U.S. News & World Report*, October 10, 1977, 29.

²⁷ Quoted in Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1985) 159.

²⁸ Cameron Crowe, "Neil Young: The Last American Hero," *Rolling Stone*, February 8, 1979; David Alpern, "Nixon Speaks," *Newsweek*, May 9, 1977, 25–39.

²⁹ Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin, *Silent Coup: The Removal of a President* (New York, 1991).

³⁰ Raymond K. Price, "Nixon's Reassessment Comes Early," in *The Nixon Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives on Richard M. Nixon*, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham, MD, 1982), 389.

³¹ *Washington Post*, February 25, 1976, A15.

³² See, among others, Julie Baumgold, "Nixon's New Life in New York," *New York*, June 9, 1980, 24; Jennifer Allen, "Richard Nixon is Making Something of a Comeback," *Manhattan*, January 19, 1981, 1–3; *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 1981, 1; Tony Fuller, Morton M. Kondracke, and John J. Lindsay, "The Sage of Saddle River," *Newsweek*, May 19, 1986, 32; Michael Beschloss, "How Nixon Came in from the Cold," *Vanity Fair*, June 1992, 114ff.; and Korda, 451–62.

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- ³⁴ Quoted in John Stacks and Strobe Talbott, "Paying the Price," *Time*, April 2, 1990.
- ³⁵ See Russ Witcher, *After Watergate: Nixon and the Newsweeklies* (Lanham, MD, 2000), and Monica Crowley, *Nixon off the Record* (New York, 1996), and *Nixon in Winter* (New York, 1998).
- ³⁶ Quoted in Thomas Monsell, *Nixon on Stage and Screen: The Thirty-Seventh President as Depicted in Films, Television, Plays, and Opera* (Jefferson, NC, 1998), 157.
- ³⁷ John Ehrlichman, *The China Card* (New York, 1986).
- ³⁸ Nicholas Meyer, dir., *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, Paramount Pictures, 1991.
- ³⁹ David Gergen, *Eyewitness to Power* (New York, 2000), 21
- ⁴⁰ See, for example, Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*; William P. Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York, 1998); Jeffrey P. Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS, 1998); and Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York, 2001).
- ⁴¹ Robert G. Kaiser, "What Power does he Hold over Us?" *Washington Post*, April 5, 1984, C1.
- ⁴² Quoted in Fuller et al., "The Sage of Saddle River," 33.
- ⁴³ Schudson, *Watergate*, 194–6.
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in Crowley, *Nixon in Winter*, 286.
- ⁴⁵ *Washington Post*, August 20, 1999, A35.
- ⁴⁶ Michael Barone, "Nixon's America," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 20, 1999, 26.
- ⁴⁷ *Washington Post*, August 7, 1994, C1; *Christian Science Monitor*, August 13, 1999, 11.
- ⁴⁸ Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence, KS, 1999); Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*; Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York, 1991).
- ⁴⁹ Richard Norton Smith, "The Nixon Watch Continues," *New York Times Book Review*, October 30, 1994, 9.
- ⁵⁰ Stanley I. Kutler, "Watergate Reexamined: Discussant," in *Watergate and Afterward: The Legacy of Richard M. Nixon*, ed. Leon Friedman and William Levantrosser (Westport, CT, 1992), 35–6.
- ⁵¹ Gallup poll, March 18–20, 2002. Available from Public Opinion Online at <http://www.publicopiniononline.com>. For Nixon, see accession number 0401463. For other presidents, see accession numbers 0401458–65.
- ⁵² On recent surveys of historians, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Ultimate Approval Rating," *New York Times Magazine*, December 15, 1996, 46; "C-SPAN Survey of Presidential Leadership," at www.americanpresidents.org/survey/historians.overall.asp; Gary L. Gregg, "Liberals, Conservatives and the Presidency," *The Intercollegiate Review* (Spring 1998): 26–31; and the Federalist Society poll of November 2000, cited in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 17, 2000, 5.
- ⁵³ Philip Roth, *Our Gang (Starring Tricky and His Friends)* (New York, 1971).
- ⁵⁴ Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (Boston, 1997), 299–300.
- ⁵⁵ Philip Roth, *I Married a Communist* (Boston, 1998), 277–80.
- ⁵⁶ Mark Maxwell, *NixonCarver: A Novel* (New York, 1998).
- ⁵⁷ Oliver Stone, dir., *Nixon*, Buena Vista, 1995.
- ⁵⁸ Andrew Fleming, dir., *Dick*, Columbia Pictures, 1999.
- ⁵⁹ Jonathan Lowy, *Elvis and Nixon: A Novel* (New York, 2001); Alan Arkush, dir., *Elvis Meets Nixon*, Showtime, 1998.
- ⁶⁰ Jacob Weisberg, "Spinning from His Grave," *New York*, May 9, 1994, 39.

FRIEDRICH EBERT IN GERMAN POLITICAL MEMORY

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In 2003, ZDF, one of two major public television channels in Germany, asked its viewers to vote for the 200 most important national personalities, past and present. The results were hardly surprising: Konrad Adenauer was chosen as the greatest German in history, followed by Martin Luther and Karl Marx. Two more chancellors were among the top ten, namely Willy Brandt and Otto von Bismarck. Both had memorial foundations established in the 1990s.

Leading political and religious figures were not the only ones who made the list. In the top 200 were teen idols like Daniel Kübelböck (number 16), Las Vegas stage stars Siegfried and Roy (149), athletes like Michael Schumacher (26), Steffi Graf (32), and NBA star Dirk Nowitzki (64). Theodor Heuss, the first president of the FRG, placed 114, right behind Rosa Luxemburg and Bertolt Brecht, but just above Kaiser Otto I and Sigmund Freud. The chancellor of German reunification, Helmut Kohl, belongs to the front-runners; he placed 13. The sitting chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, had to accept number 89, which did beat Kaiser Wilhelm II (130).

Friedrich Ebert, president of Germany from 1919 to 1925, did not make the ZDF hit parade of the 200 greatest Germans [Figure 18].¹ The poll, of course, is only a snapshot of Germany's cultural memory in 2003, not a broad consideration of Ebert's long-term role.² Here, I will survey Friedrich Ebert's changing image in four chronological steps. First, I will examine how he tried to influence his own image during his lifetime when he was president. Next, I will explore his image after his death in 1925, considering both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The third part explores Ebert's image after World War II and in the two German states (1945–1989). Finally, I will discuss how Ebert has been viewed since Germany's reunification.

To understand Ebert's self-portrayal as the Weimar Republic's first president, we should recall that during the Kaiserreich, the monarch was automatically accepted and honored by the majority as the head of state. Ebert, however, did not have this bonus. Nor did he possess the "leader's nimbus" of his successor, General Paul von Hindenburg, who was able to transform his military reputation into political charisma after the breakdown of the old system in 1918.³ Ebert had no symbolic or political capital when he took office in February 1919. His policies as the leader of the revolutionary interim government between November 1918 and February 1919 were controversial.

Moreover, the monarch had been prepared since childhood to be-



Figure 18. Reich President Friedrich Ebert at his desk in the Presidential Palace, 1924.

come head of state, whereas Ebert was a Social Democrat from a modest background. He was relatively unprepared when he made the leap from party chairman to head of state. He was unlike Kaiser Wilhelm II or Hindenburg, who intensively practiced their poses in order to create a picture for the present and for posterity. Ebert did not have a penchant for self-portrayal, nor was he eager to paint his own historical portrait. He represented the republic in a reserved way and avoided any kind of personality cult. In his speeches, he always stressed that he wanted no personal homages. He wanted the audience to cheer for the republic, for Germany, or for the Reich, but not for the president.

Moreover, Ebert did not travel much. In his six years in office, he only went on thirty trips throughout Germany. Most of these were in 1922, in connection with the presidential election (which was eventually postponed). In 1921, he only left Berlin once in an official capacity.⁴ Ebert once wrote in a private letter that official presidential trips were no pleasure for him.⁵

Ebert did not have a systematic publicity strategy: he had no court photographer or court reporter. Very few of Ebert's photos are captivating. In most pictures, he appears stiff, even prudish, and he always dressed correspondingly; not a single picture shows him with his sleeves

rolled up. Only rarely did the public get a glimpse of the president's private life—few pictures of his family were ever printed in the newspapers. Ebert refused several press requests to do a story on “a day in the president's home.” Only one article exists about his youth in Heidelberg; it was published in January 1925, several weeks before Ebert died, but was in no way sponsored by his office.⁶

Not much is known about the effect of Ebert's reserved self-portrayal on the public. But one picture, taken in the summer of 1919, did have an immediate, and negative, impact. The August 1919 cover of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* showed a photograph of Ebert and Minister of Defense Gustav Noske (SPD) standing in the Baltic Sea, dressed in bathing suits. It was the same day that Ebert swore his oath on the new constitution. The “bathing suit picture” became notorious; it angered all who regretted the downfall of the Kaiserreich to see the new republic's head of state nearly naked. The picture became a model for acrimonious caricatures.⁷

Moving pictures, used so aptly by Wilhelm II, were also absent from Ebert's “advertising strategy.” Few celluloid images of him exist. When Ebert came to Dresden in September 1919, a film team was sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But only a few very short sequences from Ebert's arrival at the railway station were shot. The longest sequence (several minutes) in the film archives was shot at Ebert's funeral in March 1925. Very few *Wochenschau* shots exist. By contrast, Wilhelm II was often filmed at military maneuvers or at public appearances. Ebert did not make much use of mass media.

Ebert's lack of concerted public relations did not help combat the deep prejudices against him. For conservative monarchists, he remained a figure of the hated revolution. To them, Social Democrats were traitors to the fatherland, their opponents during the Kaiserreich. Ebert was still an interloper who had illegitimately become head of state.⁸ Ebert became the victim of an unprecedented smear campaign. The president defended himself by taking the defamers to court. In 1924, one verdict—out of nearly 200 cases that he initiated—even found him guilty of high treason for his wartime policies.⁹

Whereas conservative antirepublicans accused him of having betrayed the country, the radical left (Communists and left-wing socialists) felt he had betrayed the working class in the revolution. The majority of the liberal bourgeoisie, however, respected him for his nonpartisan policies as head of state. After he was elected president, Ebert sought to run his office independently of any party doctrine, as an “agent of the whole German people, not as a leader of a single party.”¹⁰ Because of this political course, frictions with his own party inevitably emerged, which culminated in an attempt by some in the party to dismiss the former

chairman in 1924.¹¹ Only in the course of the defamation campaign against Ebert did his party close ranks behind him again.

After his tragic early death in February 1925 following protracted appendicitis, all past differences were forgotten. The SPD stood by "their" Ebert once again. But it soon became apparent that the quarrel about Ebert would continue. Immediately after his death, the government prepared a bill for the state to pay the costs for Ebert's funeral—a funeral for the head of state who died in office. The parliamentary debate was contentious: Communists and National Socialists rejected the bill. Hermann Remmele (KPD) fulminated against Ebert as a dictator who had suppressed the proletariat and a criminal who had betrayed the working class—precisely the picture the Communists had painted before. The bill passed, nevertheless.¹²

Friedrich Ebert's funeral ceremonies were the first republican act of state in German history, attended by nearly one-million citizens.¹³ Alive, Ebert had been unable to mobilize such masses. His burial place was modest—no pantheon, no mausoleum. According to his family's wishes, he was laid to rest in a simple grave in his hometown of Heidelberg. The grave site did not become a general place of pilgrimage. Only the SPD and the "Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold," an organization dedicated to the defense of the republic, held annual celebrations there. In 1925, when the SPD convention met in Heidelberg, members assembled at the Bergfriedhof. Hermann Molkenbuhr, who had worked with Ebert in the party leadership from 1905, delivered a commemoration speech in which he compared Germany's first democratic president to George Washington.¹⁴

Ebert did not become a legend after his death—in contrast to Bismarck or Hindenburg, who had already become icons in their lifetime.¹⁵ The former chancellor Hans Luther claimed in his memoirs, published in 1960, that Ebert's name was soon forgotten.¹⁶ This may have been true for the political right, but not for the SPD and the republican center.¹⁷ Just after Ebert's death, the party set up a foundation for his commemoration, the "Friedrich Ebert Foundation." For the presidential elections in March 1925, the SPD designed a poster for their candidate Otto Braun with the motto "a solid course for the republic." It depicted a "ship of state" steered by a captain standing under a portrait of Friedrich Ebert.

Commemorations initiated by the SPD and the Reichsbanner were attended by nearly 50,000 people in 1926, and about 30,000 in 1927. On such occasions, Ebert was celebrated as a man of the people, a democrat, and the founder of the republic. The party press hailed him as a symbol of social democracy. Ebert appeared all the more positive compared with the current head of state Hindenburg, a man of the old system—undemocratic imperial Germany.

Ebert also became a symbol for centrist republicans. The first issue of

Deutsche Republik, a magazine published by Ludwig Haas (DDP), Joseph Wirth (Zentrum), and Paul Löbe (SPD), was dedicated to "our first president, Friedrich Ebert."¹⁸ However, Ebert was never accepted, let alone revered, by all parties. Still, schools, streets, and housing estates were named after him. "Ebert commemoration stones" were erected in many places, mainly on the initiative of the SPD and the Reichsbanner.¹⁹ Memorial coins and reprints of paintings were advertised in the social democratic press.

It is noteworthy that Ebert's family did little for his public remembrance. In 1926 and 1927, Ebert's eldest son published three volumes of his father's speeches and notes, but that was all.²⁰ Other attempts were made to popularize him. A social democratic vicar from Bremen, for instance, wrote a "Fritz Ebert novel,"²¹ and a commemorative book was published in 1926 with articles by Ebert's friends and other politicians.²² No academic analysis of Ebert's life and work, but only short biographical articles, were published during the Weimar years, however.

During the Weimar period, the government only did what was expected. Hindenburg never visited Ebert's grave. Each year on the anniversary of his death, the chancellor sent a wreath but did not attend the ceremony in person. Some regional governments also sent wreaths until the election that brought Hitler to power in 1933.

In 1927, a bust of Ebert was erected in the Reichstag at the same time that a statue of the current president Hindenburg was dedicated. A stamp with Ebert's portrait was issued in September 1928, but again the recognition of Ebert only went forward with a simultaneous honor for Hindenburg. The stamp showing Ebert was banned by the National Socialists in April 1933. When the National Socialists came to power, they immediately tried to extinguish the memory of the so-called "November criminals." For the Nazis, Ebert symbolized the despised Weimar Republic. Ebert streets were renamed and memorials destroyed.

Nevertheless, Ebert's name lived on in resistance circles and among exiles. In 1935, on the tenth anniversary of his death, a social democratic resistance group published an illegal pamphlet called "In Remembrance of Friedrich Ebert" that commemorated the first president as a man of the people. In March 1945, German exiles held a ceremony in honor of Ebert in New York as well.²³

The fate of the Ebert statue in Frankfurt's Paulskirche is symbolic. The monument was unveiled on August 11, 1926, which was Constitution Day during the Weimar Republic. Thousands of people attended the ceremony. Immediately after Hitler's election, the statue was covered; it was dismantled in April 1933. In February 1950, five years after the end of the Second World War, a new Ebert statue was ceremoniously unveiled on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death.²⁴

The line which divided Germany after the Second World War also split the Ebert family. Friedrich Ebert's widow Louise lived with one of her sons in Heidelberg, West Germany, until her death in 1955, and her eldest son Friedrich became successful in the GDR as mayor of East Berlin and a member of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). In the GDR, an image of Ebert as a traitor to the working class predominated, the same basic picture that the Communists had created during Ebert's lifetime. Ebert became a cipher for the failures of the SPD during the revolution of 1918–19 and during the first republic. It is not known how Friedrich Ebert, Jr.—a leading SED member—reacted to this. Georg Ebert, the son of Friedrich Ebert, Jr., stated in a 2004 interview with *Neues Deutschland* that his father had never appreciated the “traitor” label but shared the critical view of his father's role during the revolution. Friedrich Ebert, Jr., was a member of the GDR Historical Commission, and many debates were said to have taken place over the official historical portrayal of Ebert.²⁵

Ebert's East German descendents were not able to influence his image in the GDR. Yet, the West German branch of the family did not undertake any noteworthy activities to influence Friedrich Ebert's image. They were never interviewed. His widow remained in the background, as she had always done during her husband's lifetime. Louise Ebert was invited to memorial ceremonies, but not a single historian interviewed her to find out more about Ebert's life.²⁶ Her rare interviews with journalists did not provide new insight into Ebert's character or politics. None of Ebert's sons has published memoirs.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, on the other hand, Ebert was celebrated as a pioneer of German democracy. For many Social Democrats in the FRG who had grown up in the Weimar years, Ebert remained a symbolic figure, especially for state presidents like Wilhelm Kaisen (from Bremen) and Christian Stock (from Hessen). Others SPD members were sharply critical of Ebert, such as Wilhelm Dittmann, a former chairman of the dissident USPD (1917–22). Dittmann declined to write an article for the SPD paper *Vorwärts* in honor of Ebert in 1950. But such disagreements did not develop into large controversies. In public, the SPD did not treat Ebert critically. The SPD even tried to resurrect the memorial ceremonies in 1950. These events were themed “Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit” (unity, law, and freedom)—lines from the “Deutschlandlied” by Hofmann von Fallersleben (“Deutschland über alles”), which Ebert had established as the German national anthem in 1922. Thus, Friedrich Ebert received a key position in the memorial tradition of postwar social democracy.

In a speech in honor of Ebert in 1950, the first president of the Federal Republic Theodor Heuss (FDP), a former liberal member of the Reichstag

during the Weimar Republic, called him the “Abraham Lincoln of German history.” As Lincoln was killed by bullets, Ebert had been killed by defaming words.²⁷ Heuss was not the first to draw this parallel. An English newspaper, *The Observer*, had compared Ebert with Lincoln in 1923.²⁸ Others, however, saw Ebert as “the Stalin of German social democracy.”²⁹ Even though this judgment is completely unjustified, it was often repeated to garner attention. “A German Lincoln or the Stalin of the SPD?” was the provocative title of a commemorative article published in *Die Zeit* in 1975.³⁰ A similar title even appeared in *Vorwärts* in 1989.³¹

The postwar commemoration of Ebert did not, however, firmly secure his place in the political and historical perception of most Germans. The early historical research, which was mainly conservative, portrayed Ebert as the key figure in preventing a Soviet-style dictatorship in Germany. This assessment prevailed in West German history textbooks until the late 1970s. But as the revolutionary period of 1918–19 was reexamined, the view of Ebert changed. New studies written in the 1960s revealed that the majority of the workers’ and soldiers’ councils were not as radical or communist as had been supposed and had, in fact, supported the creation of a parliamentary democracy. Consequently, the revolutionary phase was not simply a struggle between democracy and bolshevism. In the new perspective, historians emphasized that the revolutionary government, and Ebert in particular, had missed opportunities to stabilize democracy.³²

Still, in 1988 Willy Brandt claimed that the failures of 1918–19 were fundamental mistakes which led to the breakdown of democracy in 1933.³³ In 1989, however, historian Peter-Christian Witt persuaded the SPD to finally accept Ebert as an ancestor of the current party and of German democracy.³⁴ By contrast, another historian who is personally close to the SPD, Heinrich August Winkler, held that Ebert should not even be considered a statesman.³⁵ The SPD clearly had serious, lingering difficulties with its former chairman, Friedrich Ebert.

Outside academia, the general public still honored Ebert as a democrat and a statesman who had taken responsibility in Germany’s darkest hours. This appreciation was also shared by the members of the middle class. The CDU used Ebert as a symbol of opposition to the SPD government’s Ostpolitik in the early 1970s. The CDU remembered Ebert as a key figure who guaranteed the nation’s unity in very difficult times, as they accused the SPD of forsaking German unity with the new Ostpolitik. By contrast, the SPD invoked Ebert’s memory in order to deflect attacks against President Gustav Heinemann (SPD). Several weeks before Ebert’s hundredth birthday (February 4, 1971), Heinemann had given a controversial speech for the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the German Reich.³⁶ He stressed that he did not see the Federal Republic in

the tradition of the Reich of 1871. The conservatives were furious; they accused Heinemann of rejecting the basis for the constitution. Herbert Wehner, on the other hand, the chairman of the SPD parliamentary caucus, cautioned against a defamation campaign directed at a German president, given the example of the smear campaign against Friedrich Ebert.³⁷

Even though Ebert was remembered less as a person than a symbol, it is noteworthy that in spite of the mass of literature on the Weimar Republic, there is still not a single academic study on Ebert as president. There are several reasons for this. First of all, Ebert's private papers were lost to historians: they were burned in a bomb attack in 1943. The second main reason for the lack of a comprehensive biography of Ebert is Ebert himself. He was not a charismatic politician. Former president Johannes Rau once said that Ebert did not possess "the aura of an extraordinary man . . . which usually fascinates historians."³⁸ Ebert did not illuminate his office with glamour, pathos, poses, passionate speeches, or symbolic acts. His appearances were demure; he was described as staid. He rarely issued statements about political strategies or visions. He contributed no distinctive expressions to political language. The lack of early academic studies of Ebert left a vacuum filled by simple pronouncements, such as the comment by left-wing writer Kurt Tucholsky that Ebert was a "paperman,"³⁹ a drab bureaucrat lacking flesh and blood, "personally clean and professionally dirty."⁴⁰ Such judgments were primarily aimed at Ebert's political persona but hit at his private person; their stylistic brilliance has even colored the academic discussion of Ebert.

Ebert was not as charismatic as other politicians of his age, such as Gustav Stresemann.⁴¹ All in all, Friedrich Ebert has always been remembered less as president than as a man of vital importance during the revolutionary phase. His historical image is heavily influenced by clichés about his attitude towards the revolution.⁴² In 1971, on Ebert's hundredth birthday, Günter Arns stated quite rightly that one could only refer to marginal historical notes when trying to evaluate Ebert's presidential policies.⁴³ As with other anniversaries, Ebert's centennial inspired new academic research. The first representative publication with photos and original handwritten documents was published in 1971.⁴⁴ That same year, Peter-Christian Witt published what he modestly announced as a "biographical attempt."⁴⁵ It was the first book on Ebert's life and work which was based on broader source material and has since been expanded. In the wake of the hundredth birthday, many articles were published on aspects of Ebert's career. Yet a detailed academic examination has yet to be undertaken.

Despite the different academic judgments of Ebert, a real "historians' controversy" about him never took place, as some anticipated might

occur in connection with the seventieth anniversary of his 1919 election.⁴⁶ His image in studies on the Weimar Republic has always been blurred. Nonetheless, Heinrich August Winkler softened his earlier judgment in a survey of German history published in 2000: "It would be wrong to call Ebert a great statesman."⁴⁷ Now Ebert is a statesman after all, just not a great one. What explains this modification?

The events of 1989 and the following years cast a different light on the revolution of 1918–19 and the first years of the Weimar Republic. German reunification took place in 1990 in a peaceful Europe, when the Federal Republic was economically stable. But the problems which emerged during reunification have reopened the question of how the foundation of a democracy in 1918, at the end of a lost war, has to be assessed. From this perspective, Ebert's policies appear much more positive. Ebert's successes are emphasized: a parliamentary democracy despite military defeat, hunger, and social disintegration. But this new view has not yet prevailed in the historical research.

After reunification, some schools and streets in the former GDR were named after Ebert; commemoration stones that had been destroyed under the Nazis were rebuilt.⁴⁸ In 1989, when the GDR regime broke down, the "Reich President Friedrich Ebert Memorial Foundation" was inaugurated. The foundation's history, however, dates back to the 1960s.

During the Weimar Republic, only a commemorative plaque was installed on the house where Ebert was born in 1871 as a son of a tailor. In 1960, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Bonn) and the City of Heidelberg initiated a plan to turn Ebert's birthplace into a memorial. The opening of the small museum in May 1962 was attended by President Heinrich Lübke.⁴⁹ In 1982, the first efforts were made to set up a national memorial foundation, again initiated by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the City of Heidelberg. In the run-up to the memorial's inauguration, it became apparent that Ebert was not one of the universally respected personalities in German history. The current chairman of the Green Party Reinhard Bütikofer, for instance, who was at that time a member of the district council of Heidelberg, called Ebert "a dead weight for democracy."⁵⁰ The law creating the memorial foundation was passed by the Bundestag in December 1986 against the votes of the Green Party.⁵¹ The aim of the foundation is to preserve the memory of Friedrich Ebert and to contribute to an understanding of German history during his lifetime.

The memorial foundation signifies the institutionalization of the memory of Friedrich Ebert in the Federal Republic of Germany. On February 11, 1989, the memorial and its permanent exhibition were opened to the public in the presence of President Richard von Weizsäcker. The polemical debates about Ebert now belong to the past. Germany's first

president has finally found his place in history as a pioneer of democracy and a founder of the republic.

Notes

¹ For Ebert's biography, see Walter Mühlhausen, *Friedrich Ebert—Sein Leben, sein Werk, seine Zeit. Begleitband zur ständigen Ausstellung in der Reichspräsident-Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte* (Heidelberg, 1999). For a short introduction, see Walter Mühlhausen, "Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925)," in *Die Weimarer Republik. Portrait einer Epoche in Biographien*, ed. Michael Fröhlich (Darmstadt, 2002), 139–52.

² Cf. my recently finished study: Walter Mühlhausen, *Friedrich Ebert 1871–1925. Reichspräsident der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn, 2006).

³ Wolfram Pyta, "Paul von Hindenburg als charismatischer Führer der deutschen Nation," in *Charismatische Führer der deutschen Nation*, ed. Frank Möller (Munich, 2004), 109–47.

⁴ Bernd Braun, "Integration, Kraft, Repräsentation—Der Reichspräsident in den Ländern," in *Friedrich Ebert als Reichspräsident. Amtsführung und Amtsverständnis*, ed. Eberhard Kolb (Munich, 1997), 157–87.

⁵ Letter of February 7, 1921, in *Friedrich Ebert und seine Familie. Private Briefe 1909–1924*, ed. Walter Mühlhausen (Munich, 1992), 127.

⁶ *Das Illustrierte Blatt*, January 11, 1925 (Frankfurt/Main).

⁷ The bathing suit picture and some of the caricatures are reprinted in Mühlhausen, *Ebert—Sein Leben*, 326–8.

⁸ Walter Mühlhausen, "Strategien gegen den Systemfeind—Zur Politik von Staat und Gesellschaft gegenüber der Sozialdemokratie im Deutschen Kaiserreich, 1871–1914," in *Freiheitsstreben—Demokratie—Emanzipation. Aufsätze zur politischen Kultur in Deutschland und den Niederlanden*, ed. Horst Lademacher and Walter Mühlhausen (Münster, 1993), 283–329.

⁹ Wolfgang Birkenfeld, "Der Rufmord am Reichspräsidenten. Zu Grenzformen des politischen Kampfes gegen die frühe Weimarer Republik 1919–1925," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 5 (1965): 453–500.

¹⁰ Speech of February 11, 1919, quoted in Mühlhausen, *Ebert—Sein Leben*, 227.

¹¹ Walter Mühlhausen, "Reichspräsident und Sozialdemokratie. Friedrich Ebert und seine Partei 1919–1925," in *Friedrich Ebert als Reichspräsident*, 259–310, 305 ff.

¹² Walter Mühlhausen, *Die Republik in Trauer. Der Tod des ersten Reichspräsidenten Friedrich Ebert* (Heidelberg, 2005), 62–3.

¹³ Mühlhausen, *Die Republik in Trauer*, 38–61; Volker Ackermann, *Nationale Totenfeiern in Deutschland. Von Wilhelm I. bis Franz Josef Strauß. Eine Studie zur politischen Semiotik* (Stuttgart, 1990), 78–9, 245–8.

¹⁴ Bernd Braun, *Hermann Molkenbuhr (1851–1927). Eine politische Biographie* (Düsseldorf, 1999), 360.

¹⁵ See Christian Jansen, "Otto von Bismarck: Modernität und Repression, Gewaltsamkeit und List. Ein absolutistischer Staatsdiener im Zeitalter der Massenpolitik," in *Charismatische Führer*, 63–83.

¹⁶ Hans Luther, *Politiker ohne Partei. Erinnerungen* (Stuttgart, 1960), 329.

¹⁷ Bernd Buchner, *Um nationale und republikanische Identität. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und der Kampf um die politischen Symbole in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn, 2001), 354–60

¹⁸ *Deutsche Republik* 1 (Nov. 1926): 2.

¹⁹ See Werner Plum, *Gedenken an Friedrich Ebert in der darstellenden Kunst. Provisorischer Katalog* (Bonn, 1985).

²⁰ Friedrich Ebert, *Schriften, Aufzeichnungen, Reden. Mit unveröffentlichten Erinnerungen aus dem Nachlass* (Dresden, 1926); Friedrich Ebert, *Kämpfe und Ziele. Mit einem Anhang: Erinnerungen von seinen Freunden* (Dresden, 1927).

²¹ Emil Felden, *Eines Menschen Weg. Ein Fritz-Ebert-Roman* (Bremen, 1927).

- ²² Löbe, Paul et al., *Friedrich Ebert und seine Zeit. Ein Gedenkwerk über den ersten Präsidenten der deutschen Republik* (Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1926).
- ²³ Ludwig Richter, ed., *Rückbesinnung und Neubeginn. Eine Gedenkfeier zu Ehren Friedrich Eberts am 2. März 1945 in New York. Eine Dokumentation* (Heidelberg, 1995).
- ²⁴ Dieter Rebentisch, *Friedrich Ebert und die Paulskirche. Die Weimarer Demokratie und die 75-Jahrfeier der 1848er Revolution* (Heidelberg, 1998).
- ²⁵ Interview with Georg Ebert, *Neues Deutschland*, November 19, 2004.
- ²⁶ Friedrich Winterhager, *Louise Ebert (1873–1955). Von der niedersächsischen Häuslerkate zum Präsidentenpalais in Berlin* (St. Augustin, 1995).
- ²⁷ Theodor Heuss, *Die großen Reden. Der Staatsmann* (Tübingen, 1965), 118.
- ²⁸ *The Observer*, November 11, 1923.
- ²⁹ Carl E. Schorske, *Die große Spaltung. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie von 1905 bis 1917* (Berlin, 1981), 167, originally published as *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA, 1955).
- ³⁰ *Die Zeit*, February 28, 1975.
- ³¹ *Vorwärts*, February 11, 1989.
- ³² Peter-Christian Witt, "Friedrich Ebert. Stadien der Forschung nach 1945," in *Friedrich Ebert und seine Zeit. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung*, 2d ed., ed. Rudolf König, Hartmut Soell and Hermann Weber (Munich, 1991), 11–33.
- ³³ Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, Vol. 2, *Deutsche Geschichte vom "Dritten Reich" bis zur Wiedervereinigung*, 3d ed. (Munich, 2000), 462.
- ³⁴ *Vorwärts*, February 11, 1989, 31.
- ³⁵ Heinrich August Winkler, *Der Schein der Normalität. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1924 bis 1930* (Berlin, 1985), 232.
- ³⁶ Gustav W. Heinemann, *Zur Reichsgründung 1871—Zum 100. Geburtstag von Friedrich Ebert* (Stuttgart, 1971).
- ³⁷ Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948–1990* (Darmstadt, 1999), 262.
- ³⁸ Johannes Rau, "Vorwort," in *Friedrich Ebert und seine Zeit*, ed. König et al., 7.
- ³⁹ Kurt Tucholsky, "Die Rolle des Intellektuellen in der Partei," in *Gesammelte Werke in 10 Bänden*, ed. Mary Gerold-Tucholsky and Fritz J. Raddatz (Reinbek, 1975), 7:16.
- ⁴⁰ Tucholsky, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:402.
- ⁴¹ See Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann. Weimar's Greatest Statesman* (Oxford, 2002); John P. Birkelund, *Gustav Stresemann. Patriot und Staatsmann. Eine Biografie* (Hamburg, 2003).
- ⁴² Detlef Lehnert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Parteienstaat und Massengesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1999), 247.
- ⁴³ Günter Arns, "Friedrich Ebert als Reichspräsident," *Historische Zeitschrift*, Supplement 1, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Theodor Schieder (Munich, 1971), 1–30, 1. It is notable that early on, North American historians contributed studies on Ebert, such as Dieter Kurt Buse, "Friedrich Ebert and German Socialism, 1871–1919," Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1972. Subsequently, Buse, a Canadian, published instructive essays and monographs on Ebert, including *Friedrich Ebert—Sein Weg zum Politiker von nationaler Bedeutung (1915–1918)* (Heidelberg, 1994); "Reichspräsidentschaft und neue Exekutive 1919: Friedrich Ebert und die Wendepunkte deutscher Geschichte" in *Deutsche Umbrüche im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Dietrich Papenfuß and Wolfgang Schieder (Cologne, 2000), 109–33.
- ⁴⁴ *Friedrich Ebert, 1871–1925*, 2d ed., with introduction by Peter-Christian Witt (Bonn, 1980).

⁴⁵ Peter-Christian Witt, *Friedrich Ebert. Parteiführer—Reichskanzler—Volksbeauftragter—Reichspräsident*, 3d ed. (Bonn, 1992).

⁴⁶ *Vorwärts*, February 11, 1989.

⁴⁷ Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, Vol. 1, *Deutsche Geschichte vom Ende des Alten Reiches bis zum Untergang der Weimarer Republik*, 3d ed. (Munich, 2000), 457. Helga Grebing has also recently changed her view of Ebert. Cf. Helga Grebing, *Friedrich Ebert. Kritische Gedanken zur historischen Einordnung eines deutschen Sozialisten* (Bonn, 1971), and *Friedrich Ebert: Von der Verantwortung für die Demokratie in Deutschland* (Heidelberg, 1996).

⁴⁸ This happened, for example, in Schwarzburg (Thuringia), where Ebert signed the constitution on August 11, 1919. The commemoration stone was rebuilt in 1994. See Landkreis Rudolstadt, ed., *Friedrich Ebert in Schwarzburg. Aus Anlaß des 75. Jubiläums der Unterzeichnung der Weimarer Verfassung* (Rudolstadt, 1994).

⁴⁹ Stadt Heidelberg and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, eds., *Die Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte in Heidelberg* (Heidelberg, 1962).

⁵⁰ *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*, October 25, 1985 (Heidelberg).

⁵¹ During the debates in the Bundestag in 1986, Hans-Christian Ströbele (Alliance 90/The Greens) railed against the bill to create a national foundation, whereas Hartmut Soell (SPD) defended the initiative. It had been introduced by CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP. See *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages: 10. Wahlperiode, Drucksachen*, Vol. 344 (Bonn, 1986), 6642; *Stenographische Berichte*, Vol. 139 (Bonn 1986), 18669–72; and Vol. 140, 19892–4.

STILL A MYTH? PUBLIC REMEMBRANCE OF OTTO VON BISMARCK AND THE BISMARCK FOUNDATION

Andreas von Seggern

What motivates a democratic nation to create a publicly funded memorial for Otto von Bismarck? Though Bismarck was without doubt of significance, he was by no means a pluralist. This question, posed by a skeptical public, has remained unanswered since the Otto von Bismarck Foundation was founded in Germany in the 1980s.

Previously established memorial foundations commemorated politicians who were leading representatives of a democratic Germany, so Bismarck hardly fits in. Apparently, the conservative element now back in power attempted to introduce a new perception of German history "through the back door." Uta Titze-Stecher (SPD) was outraged at this idea and aired her worst fears during the 1996 parliamentary debate on the bill to establish the Otto von Bismarck Foundation. She accused the liberal-conservative majority in parliament of promoting "images of history from the chancellor's office," suggesting that Helmut Kohl wanted to set himself up as the "success[or] to the title of 'Iron Chancellor.'" She finished her speech with a warning about a "dangerous precedent" and her fear of further "personality cults . . . from Frederick the Great to Hermann the Cheruscan."¹ However, with the votes of the Christian Democrats/Christian Social Union and the Liberal Democrats, the legislation for the establishment of the federally funded Otto von Bismarck Foundation passed. Still, the hefty controversy about the aims of this new institution did have a lasting effect. A ceremony held by the foundation on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of Otto von Bismarck's death was accompanied by demonstrations, admittedly minor, by political extremists of both the left and right.²

Now a decade after it began under somewhat difficult conditions, the Bismarck Foundation has since established itself alongside similar cultural and historical institutions. Today, even those who were at first critical now acknowledge its achievements. At this point, we can look back at the work carried out in public remembrance of Otto von Bismarck from an historical perspective in order to evaluate the accomplishments of the Bismarck Foundation located in Friedrichsruh (near Hamburg).

The picturesque village of Friedrichsruh in the middle of the Sachsenwald just outside Hamburg became famous as the last residence of Bismarck, who acquired the estate and the surrounding forests as a gift for unifying the German states in 1871. Until Bismarck's death in 1898, the

formerly sleepy village received visits from princes, statesmen, and numerous ordinary people, especially from the middle classes. Until 1890, Bismarck performed a large part of his official duties there. Journalists from the *Hamburger Nachrichten* visited him regularly and became a kind of mouthpiece for his opposition to the Kaiser.³

During his time as chancellor, Friedrichsruh became a popular destination for thousands of Bismarck's admirers. After 1890, it was a place for the nationalist-minded German bourgeoisie to pay homage to the "unifier of the Empire." This "pilgrimage tourism" to the Sachsenwald reached its peak during the celebration of Bismarck's eightieth birthday on April 1, 1895. Thousands traveled to Friedrichsruh to pay tribute to the "Iron Chancellor," and more than ten thousand students from all corners of the empire paraded in front of the chancellor's estate.⁴

A central element fueling the admiration for Bismarck was the unification of Germany under Prussian rather than Austrian leadership, the so-called "kleindeutsche Lösung" of 1871. According to Hans-Walter Hedinger, "there was no clear distinction between the concept of 'empire' and 'nation' in the minds of the majority."⁵ Bismarck became a "symbol of identification beyond compare." Elevated from his "concrete individuality as a real historical figure . . . he gave those with a vested interest in even the boldest of national political aspirations an opportunity to project their hopes."⁶

The cult around Bismarck was a central pillar of nineteenth-century German national mythology.⁷ The almost sacred nature of the admiration for the first chancellor of the empire found its most visible expression in a wave of Bismarck monument-building. These monuments began to be erected throughout the empire as early as 1875. They were symbols of an era, an extreme case of a young nation searching for its national identity.⁸ By 1914, more than 700 such memorials had been planned and almost 500 actually built in his honor. Moreover, these were merely the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds of statues, busts, and allegorical figures were on the nationalist agenda. Wolfgang Hardtwig speaks of a "monument craze" in Germany in this era.⁹ At the time, there were calls for a "radical aesthetic re-evaluation."¹⁰ The Bismarck statues were a distinct, biographical sort of nationalist memorial which contrasted with the pantheism of the Valhalla, the mythological theme of the Kyffhäuser memorial, or the extravagant allegory of the Niederwald memorial in Rüdesheim.¹¹ The number of Bismarck memorials even exceeded the numerous Kaiser Wilhelm memorials. Furthermore, in contrast to the latter, the initiatives for their construction were motivated "less . . . by a desire on the part of officialdom to cultivate patriotism than by a spontaneous gesture." For large sections of the population, they were "genuinely popular and . . . fulfilled the function of a true national monument in the consciousness of many

Germans, more so than any other so-called national monuments."¹² Apart from the classic memorial statues, such as the one by Begas erected in 1901 in front of the Reichstag in Berlin, the Bismarck towers and pillars, which now seem so grotesque, above all stylized him as a mythic symbol of unification.¹³ Whoever approaches the colossal Bismarck monument in Hamburg's harbor—it resembles the statue of medieval Roland, the defender of a city's rights and a symbol of strength—can experience something of the surge of patriotic feeling which makes a pragmatic and differentiated appraisal of Bismarck as an historical figure difficult, even today.

After his death in 1898, any lingering inhibitions the German Right had about claiming Bismarck wholly for their own propaganda disappeared. The official unveiling of the Bismarck pillar in the small village of Silk (two kilometers from Friedrichsruh) was emblematic.¹⁴ Following solstice celebrations interpreted as an ancient Germanic custom, the pillars (almost 200 were planned throughout the German Empire) were supposed to be honored "in mutual celebration [of the] transfigured hero" in order "to tell future generations the story of how conflict between factions subsided upon encountering the sacred silence of the grave in the Sachsenwald . . . in honor of the great chancellor who lives on in the hearts of his people."¹⁵ This was the essence of the emotional and historically distorted call by German students for the building of these memorials. The bizarre climax of the cult surrounding Otto von Bismarck in and around Friedrichsruh was the consecration of the memorial stone by the fanatic Austrian anti-Semite and leading Pan-German Georg von Schönerer. It was erected on the occasion of Bismarck's hundredth birthday celebration in 1915 in Aumühle, two kilometers away. Its inscription is in the unmistakable diction of ultra-nationalistic propaganda loudly proclaiming, in anticipation of times to come, "In great times we come to you, Bismarck! Your work, your will is our path—A Pan-Germanic nation is the goal! Schönerer and the Pan-Germanic movement of Austria 100 years after the birth of Bismarck."¹⁶ The Bismarck myth, summarized in the nickname "the Iron Chancellor," was a sign of an increasingly aggressive nationalism at the turn of the century: a desire for a national identity coupled with an aversion to "enemies" from within and without, which fostered a range of fears about the future. In fact, this all had little to do with the historical reality of Bismarck's domestic and foreign policies.

The "pilgrimages" to the Bismarck memorials in the Sachsenwald were dominated by national agitation, at least through 1945. The opening of the museum and mausoleum there in 1928 was celebrated as a "new national shrine."¹⁷ True to the National Socialist vision of a "final victory," the mausoleum was intended to remind Germans "that a person

can do a lot for his fatherland when he invests all his strength and treads his path with a will of iron."¹⁸

After the total defeat of Nazi Germany, a paradigm shift quickly occurred in the public perception of the "Founder of the Empire." But the myth was not shattered; it merely changed its outward appearance. Up through 1945, Bismarck's role as a merciless, authoritarian politician at home and abroad had been emphasized. After the defeat, his admirers—almost dutifully—viewed him mainly as a talented politician in foreign affairs after 1871, whose political efforts could in no way be held responsible for the fatal turn taken by German nationalism.¹⁹ In the decades after WWII, Friedrichsruh remained a place of pilgrimage for right-wing conservatives as well as extremists, who gather there on January 18, April 1, or July 30. When Walter Busse visited the mausoleum in October 1970, he was amazed at the "wreath-laying organizations" that were previously unknown to him: at the sarcophagus, he found dedications "to the chancellor of the old empire from the Bismarck Union of the Conservative Party of Berlin and West Germany," and "to the 'great chancellor' from the 'German Block.'"²⁰ In addition to these suspicious-sounding groups, federal and various regional governments paid official respects on Bismarck's one-hundred fiftieth birthday in 1965. In 1971, the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the empire, even Willy Brandt (SPD) sent a wreath.

In spite of the events held to commemorate Bismarck's achievements, the number of visitors to Friedrichsruh continually declined after the 1970s. This was surely a consequence of the critical examination by a new generation of historians of the "real Bismarck as well as the mythical figure."²¹ Nuanced scholarly studies in the 1980s and '90s added to this;²² thus in 1998, Ute Frevert could observe that among historians Bismarck no longer aroused "hefty emotions" and was "neither a cult figure nor a dusty relic."²³ In academic terms, the myth seemed to have been neutralized. However, the public debates surrounding the establishment of the national memorial foundation showed that Bismarck was still controversial.

Though he remains a disputed figure, Bismarck was doubtless one of the most important nineteenth-century German statesmen. However, against the backdrop of his burdened legacy and from a democratic-didactic point of view, the idea of establishing a memorial foundation dedicated to him was bound to meet with resistance. With Adenauer, Ebert, Heuss, and Brandt, it was generally recognized across party lines that they all basically stood for democratic and constitutional traditions in Germany. Bismarck, on the other hand, at best represented the "ambivalence between tradition and modernism" so typical of the German Empire after 1871.²⁴ The Janus-faced nature of the constitution he shaped, with its uneasy balance between the traditional monarchical order and

rudimentary parliamentary freedom; his domestic policies, which resulted in years of fierce battles against Catholics and the labor movement; and, not least, the thoughtless abuse of power by the Imperial Chancellor's office—made all attempts to “restyle [Bismarck] as a democrat . . . seem quite outrageous.”²⁵

In spite of this, tentative plans to honor Bismarck with a federal memorial foundation under public law were made as early as 1987. The idea grew out of a project originally conceived at the local level to preserve the historic railway station in Friedrichsruh. Moreover, there was concern about reports of the poor state of Bismarck papers still in the possession of the family. After a visit to Friedrichsruh in July 1987, Federal Minister of the Interior Friedrich Zimmermann set up a committee to investigate the possibility of setting up a government-subsidized foundation.²⁶ Similar to other, equally controversial historical projects of the Kohl era, the establishment of a Bismarck foundation was soon made an “issue of utmost priority.” Chancellor Helmut Kohl expressed worry about the “unsatisfactory state of archives” at Friedrichsruh and strongly supported the idea of establishing a foundation.²⁷ A decision in favor of setting up an institution along the lines of the national heritage estates in Rhöndorf and Heidelberg was made in October 1987.²⁸

In the following period, however, a lively controversy arose, initially at the regional level. Incurable Bismarck worshipers demanded that Friedrichsruh be renamed “Bismarcksruh.”²⁹ Social Democrats and members of the Green Party expressed deep concerns about the project. In the ensuing debate, some Greens expressed fears that the project would become more than a Bismarck museum (which already existed) and “have as its sole function the promotion of neo-conservative thought and the reconstruction of national identity.”³⁰ This kind of objection was raised time and again during the early years of the Otto von Bismarck Foundation; it was criticized as a tool of historical revisionism and as nothing but a think-tank of conservative historians with pro-government leanings.³¹ But because the liberal-conservative government still held a safe majority in parliament, the foundation was able to start work in the second half of 1997. Probably as a concession to the project's numerous critics, Michael Epkenhans, a Social Democrat and an historian, was appointed executive director. He had previously worked as a research assistant at the Friedrich Ebert Memorial in Heidelberg. He did not sway in his ideological approach: “Our starting point can only be the current state of research on Bismarck, no matter how many people feel the urge . . . to reinterpret him.”³² This was mainly directed against the Bismarck Alliance's intention to exert its influence on the foundation's work while it was still in the process of being established. In Epkenhans's opinion, the structures being

put in place in Friedrichsruh were to help “reach a certain degree of normality in coming to terms with a problematic ancestor.”³³

The Otto von Bismarck Foundation not only had the responsibility to deal with the sensitive issue of the “ancestor” but also with its own site as a point of reference for the latent (although hardly flourishing) Bismarck cult. The foundation’s task included more than an historically differentiated appraisal of Bismarck’s epoch; it also needed to highlight the grave consequences of the Bismarck cult “as a key element in the cultural and ideological history of German nationalism.”³⁴ The foundation has faced up to this responsibility and steered clear of interference by politicians or the Bismarck family. The main focus of its academic work is a new critical edition of Bismarck’s writings; the need for such an edition is generally acknowledged by Bismarck scholars because the shortcomings of previous editions from the 1920s and 1930s are too obvious.³⁵ The foundation also sponsors academic conferences, seminars for students of modern and contemporary history, and lectures by renowned scholars.³⁶ It is also active in public education and teacher training, cooperating closely with adult education institutions despite its relatively remote location. Regularly rotating exhibitions on various subjects contribute to the debate on Bismarck and his times. The members of the board of trustees and the academic advisory committee were able to avoid any abrupt changes in the foundation’s academic and educational activities following the election of a new government in 1998.³⁷ Their influence has also quieted down criticism over the years.

The particular challenge faced by a national institution which is dedicated to a committed monarchist such as Bismarck remains the driving force behind the foundation’s activities, especially when it is viewed in comparison to other memorial foundations dedicated to democratic political leaders. There is no question that a thorough understanding of modern Germany’s development is impossible without studying Bismarck, whom Theodor Fontane called “the most interesting person” despite his deep mistrust of the chancellor.³⁸ If Bismarck is viewed as a reference point for a wide-ranging and detailed study of the “long nineteenth century,” then it is no longer valid to criticize the memorial site in Friedrichsruh for persistent “hero worship.” The history of the Otto von Bismarck Foundation confirms that the “past always remains a highly contentious political issue” and that in “pluralist societies . . . the politics of history are constantly being made.”³⁹ Whether the founders of the Bismarck Foundation indeed hoped “to instill an affirmative relationship toward our past” through a neo-historicist approach remains an open question.⁴⁰ The brief comments in the foundation’s guest book record the diverse ways in which Bismarck is viewed by the general public. While one guest praised the “refreshingly critical” presentation, another was

impressed by the “shrewd and moderate politician.” This reflects the open-minded approach taken by the foundation in Friedrichsruh, a place where one can study Germany’s long and winding road toward a modern parliamentary democracy. Such an approach was urgently required to restore the critical “memory of the place”⁴¹ to redress the imbalance created by the idealized presentations of the Bismarck cult, namely the museum and the mausoleum, which are both still owned by the family.

Notes

¹ Bundestag debate of June 5, 1996, in *Deutscher Bundestag*, 13. Wahlperiode, 178. Sitzung, Drucksache 16065.

² “Männer machen Geschichte,” *Tageszeitung* (Hamburg), July 14, 1998, and “Skin-Aufmarsch im Wohngebiet,” *Tageszeitung* (Hamburg), August 10, 1998.

³ See Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck. Der Reichskanzler* (Munich, 1998), 626–7.

⁴ Archive of the Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung, He 005/001–036.

⁵ Hans-Walter Hedinger, “Bismarck-Denkmal und Bismarck-Verehrung,” in *Kunstverwaltung, Bau- und Denkmal-Politik im Kaiserreich*, ed. Ekkehard Mai and Stephan Waetzhold (Berlin, 1981), 277–314, 288.

⁶ Lothar Machtan, “Bismarck-Kult und deutscher National-Mythos, 1890 bis 1940,” in *Bismarck und der deutsche National-Mythos*, ed. Lothar Machtan (Bremen, 1994), 68–9. See also Richard E. Frankel, *Bismarck’s Shadow: The Cult of Leadership and the Transformation of the German Right, 1898–1945* (New York, 2005).

⁷ Wulf Wülfing, Karin Bruns, and Rolf Parr, *Historische Mythologie der Deutschen* (Munich, 1991), 4.

⁸ See Hedinger, “Bismarck-Denkmal,” 277–314. See also Wolfgang Hardtwig, “Der bezweifelte Patriotismus—Nationales Bewusstsein und Denkmal, 1786 bis 1933,” in *Orte der Erinnerung—Denkmal, Gedenkstätte, Museum*, ed. Ulrich Borsdorf and Heinrich Theodor Grütter (Frankfurt/Main, 1999), 169–88; Georg L. Mosse, *Die Nationalisierung der Massen. Politische Symbolik und Massenbewegungen von den Befreiungskriegen bis zum Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt/Main, 1993), 67ff.; Gunther Mai, “Denkmäler und politische Kultur im 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Das Kyffhäuser-Denkmal 1896–1996. Ein nationales Monument im europäischen Kontext*, ed. Gunther Mai (Cologne, 1997), 9ff.

⁹ Wolfgang Hardtwig, “Der bezweifelte Patriotismus,” 171.

¹⁰ Wilhelm Bode, “Vier Denkmäler,” *Der Kunstwart* 20 (1907): 437–40, 440.

¹¹ See Thomas Nipperdey, “Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie*, ed. Nipperdey (Göttingen, 1976), 133–174, 135ff.

¹² *Ibid.*, 166.

¹³ See Günter Kloss and Sieglinde Seele, *Bismarck-Türme und Bismarck-Säulen* (Petersberg, 1997).

¹⁴ See Andreas von Seggern, “Stein gewordener Mythos—100 Jahre Bismarcksäule in Reinbek-Silk,” *Jahrbuch für den Kreis Stormarn* (2003): 6–13.

¹⁵ *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, June 22, 1903.

¹⁶ Cited in “Zeichen gegen rechtes Gedenkgut,” *Bergedorfer Zeitung*, February 10, 2001.

¹⁷ “Ein neues Nationalheiligtum im Sachsenwald,” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 27, 1928.

¹⁸ “Am Sarkophage Bismarcks,” *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, April 2, 1943.

¹⁹ See Wilhelm Mommsen, *Bismarck. Ein politisches Lebensbild* (Munich, 1959).

- ²⁰ Walter Busse, *Deutsche Andenken. Bismarckdenkmäler im Sachsenwald, in Wallfahrtsstätten der Nation. Vom Völkerschlachtdenkmal zur Bavaria* (Frankfurt/Main, 1971), 32.
- ²¹ Claus Heinrich Meyer, "Der Recke, der Roland, der Schmied. Eine Annäherung an den Bismarck-Mythos," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 1, 1993.
- ²² Lothar Gall, *Bismarck. Der weiße Revolutionär* (Frankfurt/Main, 1980); Ernst Engelberg, *Bismarck. Urpreuße und Reichsgründer* (Berlin, 1986); Ernst Engelberg, *Bismarck. Das Reich in der Mitte Europas* (Berlin, 1990); Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck. Der Reichsgründer* (Munich, 1997); Otto Pflanze, *Der Reichskanzler* (Munich, 1998).
- ²³ Ute Frevert, "Bismarck und die Deutschen—Eine Erinnerungsgeschichte. Vor hundert Jahren starb der 'Eiserne Kanzler,'" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, July 30, 1998.
- ²⁴ Michael Epkenhans, *Die Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung, 1996–2000* (Friedrichsruh, 2000), 12–13.
- ²⁵ Lothar Gall, cited in Godehard Weyerer, "'Held Bismarck, segne uns Herz und Hand'. Vor hundert Jahren starb der Eiserne Kanzler—erst jetzt wird er langsam entdämonisiert," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 25/26, 1998.
- ²⁶ "Arbeitskreis soll die Gründung einer Bismarck-Stiftung prüfen," *Bergedorfer Zeitung*, July 30, 1987.
- ²⁷ Helmut Kohl to Friedrich Zimmermann, October 8, 1987, Reference file von Schmude, Archive of the Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung.
- ²⁸ Friedrich Zimmermann to Helmut Kohl, November 25, 1987, Reference file von Schmude, Archive of the Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung.
- ²⁹ *Lübecker Nachrichten*, January 17, 1988.
- ³⁰ "Grüne Fraktion: Bismarck nicht beweihräuchern," *Bergedorfer Zeitung*, February 29, 1989.
- ³¹ See Karl-Heinz Janssen, "Die Qual mit der Geschichte," *Die Zeit*, January 10, 1986, reprinted in *Deutsches Historisches Museum. Ideen—Kontroversen—Perspektiven*, ed. Christoph Stölzl (Frankfurt/Main, 1988), 286.
- ³² Quoted in Harald Biskup, "Die unruhige Ruhestätte in Friedrichsruh," *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, July 30, 1998.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung, 1948–1990* (Darmstadt, 1999), 23.
- ³⁵ See Otto Köhler, "Dann lieber Bismarck," *Ossietzky* 11 (2000): 368. The first volume has been published: Otto von Bismarck, *Gesammelte Werke, Schriften 1871–1873*, revised by Andrea Hopp, Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe (Paderborn, 2004).
- ³⁶ A survey of its activities is found in Michael Epkenhans, *Die Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung, 1996–2000* (Friedrichsruh, 2000).
- ³⁷ Current board of trustees members (April 2004) include, in addition to members of the Bismarck family: Rudolf Seiters, Hans-Ulrich Klose, Dr. Wilfried Maier, and Silke Stokar. Members of the academic advisory committee are Lothar Gall, Klaus Hildebrand, Konrad Canis, Eberhard Kolb, Elisabeth Fehrenbach, Ulrich von Hehl, Henry A. Kissinger, Joseph Rován, Werner Knopp, Dieter Langewiesche, Klaus Tenfelde, Volker Ullrich, and Hartmut Weber.
- ³⁸ Cited in Volker Ullrich, "Die denkbar interessanteste Figur," *Die Zeit*, October 8, 1997.
- ³⁹ Edgar Wolfrum, "Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1949–1989. Phasen und Kontroversen," in *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Petra Bock and Edgar Wolfrum (Göttingen, 1999), 55–81, 57.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.
- ⁴¹ See Aleida Assmann, "Das Gedächtnis der Orte," in *Orte der Erinnerung*, 59–77.

The Legacies of German and American Politicians

This volume emerged from the conference *Access—Presentation—Memory: The Presidential Libraries and the Memorial Foundations of German Politicians* held at the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C. Facilitating dialogue across disciplinary boundaries as well as the Atlantic, it brought representatives from the U.S. presidential libraries, the National Archives, and the five German memorial foundations together with professors, archivists, and members of public interest groups. The selected essays offer unique insights into the legal, cultural, and historical influences on the formal construction of political legacies.

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