

**COLD WAR MEMORY:
INTERPRETING THE PHYSICAL LEGACY
OF THE COLD WAR**

Conference at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., September 8–9, 2003. Conveners: Keith Allen (Wilson Center) and Christian Ostermann (Wilson Center). Co-sponsored by the Boeing Company, the Cold War Museum, the Eisenhower Foundation and Eisenhower Presidential Library, the GHI (Washington), the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Participants: Dave Berwick (U.S. Advisory Council on Historic Preservation), Thomas Blanton (National Security Archive), Chen Jian (University of Virginia), Michael Devine (Truman Presidential Library), Jeffrey Engel (University of Pennsylvania), Skip Gosling (Department of Energy), Hope Harrison (George Washington University), Carol Hegeman (National Park Service), Dan Holt (Eisenhower Presidential Library), Arnita Jones (American Historical Association), Annette Kaminsky (Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur), Cindy Kelly (Atomic Heritage Foundation), Axel Klausmeier (University of Cottbus), Karl Kleve (Norwegian Aviation Museum), Sue Lamie (National Park Service), Douglas Lantry (U.S. Air Force Museum), Roger Launius (Smithsonian Institution), Melvyn Leffler (University of Virginia), Roger Lotchin (University of North Carolina), Paul Lusignan (National Park Service), Craig Manson (Department of the Interior), Kris Mitchell (Department of Energy), Anna Nelson (American University), Carol Neves (Smithsonian Institution), Leonid Obukhov (Perm-36 Gulag Museum), Vladimir Pechatnov (Moscow State University), Dwight Picaithley (National Park Service), Francis Gary Powers Jr. (Cold War Museum), Constance Ramirez (National Park Service), Donald Ritchie (U.S. Senate), Romulus Rusan (Sighet Memorial), Bernd Schaefer (GHI, Washington), Carol Shull (National Park Service), William Taubman (Amherst College), Jay Thomas (U.S. Navy), Troy Wade (Atomic Testing Museum), Janelle Warren-Findley (Arizona State University), and Rebecca Welch (Office of the Secretary of Defense).

In 2004, Congress is expected to enact legislation directing the National Park Service “to conduct a study to identify sites and resources, and recommend alternatives for commemorating and interpreting the Cold War.” Other pending legislation would require the Secretary of the Inte-

rior to consider Cold War property inventories completed or currently underway at the Departments of Defense and Energy, in addition to the constituent discussions specified in the National Park Service's National Historic Landmark program. It also calls for the publication of an interpretative handbook, as well as the establishment of an advisory board to consult on the study. This legislation and the resulting National Historic Landmark theme study mark a new chapter in the public memory of the Cold War, a story unfolding in the context of the era's "museumification" at former missile installations, prison camps, and new museums around the world.

With this in mind, the organizers invited ninety museum directors and curators, scholars, historic preservation professionals, veterans' advocates, government officials, media and foundation representatives, and others to consider the physical legacy of the Cold War. Conference participants discussed the most recent historical scholarship; explored how United States government agencies are determining the significance of Cold War properties; examined how the Cold War matters to veterans, scholars, and those charged with preserving the conflict's artifacts and places; and assessed museum treatments of the Cold War in the United States and abroad. The pending National Park Service theme study, limited funding, and our location in Washington led us to focus on expressions of Cold War consciousness in the United States rather than to survey the full range of Cold War memory work in the northern (to say nothing of the southern) hemisphere.

In convening this conference, we sought to promote cooperation among those engaged in interpreting the Cold War. A secondary objective was to underscore the international dimensions of the global ideological and military struggle. These goals fit in well with the conference's host and co-sponsor: Since its establishment a dozen years ago—just after the failed hard-line coup in Moscow in August 1991—the Woodrow Wilson International Center's Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) has become internationally recognized as the leading scholarly project in exploiting new opportunities for research in the previously inaccessible archives of the former communist world. Through its multifaceted activities, CWIHP has created a global network of individuals, institutions, and projects dedicated to the collegial exploration of new sources and opportunities for understanding the Cold War.

This project is particularly timely. As we heard from one of the leading scholars of the Cold War, University of Virginia historian Melvin Leffler, a global outpouring of new archival materials during the past decade has led Cold War historians to a vastly new interpretation of the Marshall Plan and its impact on the Kremlin; new understandings of the first major battlefield confrontation during the Cold War, the Korean

War; extraordinary new perspectives on the Russian and Chinese involvement in Indochina during the 1950s and 1960s; a huge accumulation of knowledge about the Cuban Missile Crisis, as well as the Cuban role in Africa and the Soviet-American competition in that part of the world; the impact of the Helsinki agreements in Eastern Europe; as well as Soviet embroilment in Afghanistan and the importance of this conflict to the conclusion of the Cold War. Leffler hinted that this new knowledge is not entirely driven by the release of new documentary evidence. Analysis of non-state actors, gender theories, the power of ideas, and simply the distance we are gaining on these events are all shaping interpretations that recast our understanding of this period. Nevertheless, as Leffler's response to a question about when exactly the Cold War began and ended showed, a growing multiplicity of sources and perspectives has not produced a consensus on this central question.

What opportunities exist to shape public memory of the Cold War? One answer is that it depends on where you live. As University of Virginia historian Chen Jian noted, in China, no public space is devoted to the most devastating exercise in Cold War domestic mobilization, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In Hanoi, the Vietnam Army Museum displays Chinese-made guns and Russian-made missiles without mentioning foreign support in that country's wars of liberation. In Pyongyang, an exhibit room set aside as a tribute to the million-plus Chinese "volunteers" in the Museum of the Victorious Patriotic War for Liberation is only unlocked for the occasional Chinese visitor. Memorials to Soviet-style repression such as the Perm-36 Memorial Museum of Political Repression and Totalitarianism, the only extant historic site devoted to the history of the Gulag, located eight hundred miles east of Moscow, and the Memorial Museum of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Sighet, Romania, benefit from the support of Western governments and foundations. (It is no coincidence that the Perm-36 Museum debuted an English-language travelling exhibit in the Russell Senate Office Building Rotunda three weeks after our conference.) More colorful endeavors in this region include the Soviet Sculpture Garden at Grutas Park, also known as "Stalin World," a seventy-five-acre theme park located eighty miles southwest of Vilnius that mimics a Soviet prison camp, as well as the House of Terror in Budapest, located in a mansion once home to Hungary's communist-era secret police. In Germany, as in several other Central European nations, a government-supported foundation supports scholarly research, assistance to victims, and the creation of archives and exhibits with a view toward coming to terms with the region's communist past.

Interest in the Cold War is also strong throughout the United States. In New York, State Parks Commissioner Bernadette Castro has re-

sponded enthusiastically to veterans' calls to establish a Long Island Cold War Heritage Trail; Castro feels the trail would be popular because of the post-September 11 focus on homeland security. In South Florida, another group of veterans wishes to include in the National Register of Historic Places the surface-to-air Nike nuclear missile sites in the Everglades they once manned, while visitors at the nation's oldest nuclear museum in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, board an "atomic train" to the K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Building, a Manhattan Project engineering marvel that sprawls across forty-four acres. In Washington, D.C., a Victims of Communism Memorial Museum, to be built on the Mall with a proposed budget of \$100 million, has been authorized by an act of Congress and approved by then-President Clinton.

High-priced tours of Cold War sites also indicate that the buying and selling of the Cold War is far from over. Since 1991, the National Atomic Museum has offered a \$40 day trip to the normally off-limits location of the world's first atomic explosion, the Trinity Site. Brisk demand led the museum's director in 2000 to include a stop at the Nevada Test Site. Created in 1951, the desert area sixty-five miles northwest of Las Vegas includes a vast expanse of basins and ranges larger than Rhode Island, where mock towns, bridges, bomb shelters, bank vaults, underground parking structures, and railroads were exposed to nuclear explosions. Six years ago, the success of these tours encouraged a broad coalition of Nevadans to create the Nevada Test Site Historical Foundation. In 2004, their ten-thousand-square-foot Atomic Testing Museum will open just off the Strip in Las Vegas. In southern West Virginia, since 1995 more than two hundred thousand visitors have paid \$25 to tour the 153-room concrete bunker where Congress might have reconvened had Soviet ICBMs incinerated the capital. In 2000, the Smithsonian Institution put together a weeklong tour of Manhattan Project sites in Albuquerque and Los Alamos. Participants spoke to descendants of the Los Alamos greats, visited the dark rock obelisk at the Trinity Site (imagine a miniature dark cousin to the Washington Monument), and received primers on the construction of "the device."

The federal government's role in identifying and preserving Cold War era properties quickly became a central focus of our discussions. Besides Congress, the Secretary of the Interior, the Departments of Defense and Energy, and a host of other federal agencies where preservation rarely ranks high in a long list of priorities, in conducting the theme study, the National Park Service must work closely with a lesser-known, though highly important, federal entity, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Established in 1966, the Advisory Council is charged by Congress to balance historic preservation concerns with federal project requirements, as outlined in the National Historic Preservation Act of

that year. As the head of the Navy's Cultural Resources Office Jay Thomas explained, site managers are only required to offer the Advisory Council an opportunity to comment on projects that appear to threaten properties eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. (Also created by the 1966 Act, the Register seeks to promote greater appreciation, though not necessarily protection, of historic properties).

Charged with encouraging federal agencies to consult with state and local preservation officials, Indian tribes, applicants for federal assistance, and influential members of the public when making final project decisions, the Council's views on Cold War properties carry weight. For this reason, we asked Dave Berwick, the Advisory Council's Army Affairs Coordinator and one of the authors of a May 2002 review of the Army's stock of Cold War housing, to share the Advisory Council's perspectives on some of these properties. The Army's Capehart-Wherry housing is one example of such property. These housing units were constructed between 1949 and 1962 to house new career soldiers immediately following the Second World War. According to the Army's 2002 blanket review, Berwick reported, all of the nineteen thousand Capehart-Wherry family units may now be renovated or sold as the Army deems necessary. Aside from the considerable expense in conducting a preservation review of each building, Berwick reported that the housing failed to qualify for protection because the expansion of the military's housing stock would have occurred whether or not there had been a Cold War.

An individual preservation review of each building would have been costly, no doubt, and the Advisory Council's decision may or may not be precedent setting for future attempts to preserve other Cold War structures. As we learned from Janelle Warren-Findley, Professor of Public History at Arizona State University, a micro-level focus on individual homes and communities can lead one to think in new ways about the methods and goals of historic preservation. Warren-Findley reported that in the arid American Southwest, many Cold War homes arrived on the flatbed of a truck. During the early 1960s, houses were constructed in Gila Bend near Phoenix by setting them on footers and inflating a balloon to push out the walls, creating suburban communities in some of the most inhospitable places in North America.

Social and cultural historians will yearn to know more about Gila Bend, as well as the crabgrass frontier of Capehart-Wherry housing that the Advisory Council has decided should not be preserved. For Berwick, Thomas, and many others, the overriding concern is one they acknowledge is a source of heartache to colleagues in these academic sub-fields. In establishing priorities among resources, mission must take precedence.

Thomas insisted that site managers rarely have the luxury or the inclination to go beyond the requirements of legal compliance, instead focusing their attention on properties built fifty years ago, or, more important, current facilities needs. Sites such as the Washington Navy Yard have multiple historical contexts, forcing managers to balance the interests—and interest groups—of different historical eras. Much of what the Navy has done historically—such as building ships and housing sailors—is now outsourced. Larger ships require bigger, more elaborate piers, making preservation impractical. Base closures, new fleet distributions, and of course the problems of public access after September 11 add to the woes of the site manager. Finally, striking a chord resonant with Berwick's analysis, Thomas asserted that knowing what is special about historic properties, even assuming one had full access to available documentation, is no easy matter, as the Navy's historical relevance lies beyond the horizon.

Although for historians the Cold War has barely ended, the tug-of-war between mission, preservation, and interpretation is nothing new. While the struggles surrounding the 1995 Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum have become legendary, few are aware that as early as 1991, Congress directed the Department of Defense to establish a Legacy Resource Management Program to "inventory, protect, and conserve the physical and literary property and relics of the Department of Defense" associated with the Cold War. This "Legacy Project," according to Rebecca Welch, now a historian in the Historical Office of the Secretary of the Defense and the project's second task manager, was one that the Department neither asked for nor wanted. Initially, her project staff visited installations in the continental United States, Asia, and Europe, consulted with counterparts within the government and historical experts, examined existing federal and state laws and regulations, and began drafting the mandated report to Congress. Welch's objective—to take guidelines developed by Paul Green, the preservation officer at the former Air Force Combat Command, and extend them to all installations of the Department of Defense—remained unfulfilled, though she deserves much credit for encouraging the Army and Navy to move toward servicewide guidelines on Cold War properties. Beyond the report submitted to Congress, Welch and her team of contractors produced a series of multi-service studies, as well as a database of Cold War material culture assets. Uniting civilian preservationists and military operators, the services, as well as headquarters offices and the field, and finally scholars in a common effort to define the significance of Cold War places and things proved difficult for Welch, and will no doubt challenge the theme study's authors as well.

Notwithstanding the differences of opinion and approach our meeting brought to the fore, one of the most striking aspects of our discussions was enthusiasm for the power of Cold War places and artifacts. In thinking about the Cold War, one site to which the mind almost invariably races is Berlin. George Washington University historian Hope Harrison demonstrated how the building of the Berlin Wall was more a product of East Germans' desire to shape their own destiny than a calculated move on the part of the Soviet leadership in a larger struggle against the West. Archaeologist Axel Klausmeier of the Technical University at Cottbus showed us what is now being done, nearly a decade and a half after its fall, to identify features of the Berlin Wall, Europe's Cold War relic par excellence, and possibly conserve them as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

While all participants acknowledged that the Cold War was much more than a mere military struggle restricted to any one nation's borders, no one addressed explicitly the thoughtful questions raised by Assistant Secretary of the Interior Craig Manson in his introduction: How much preservation is too much? What should the balance be? Two examples illustrate this dilemma. Dan Holt, director of the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, explained that the civil rights movement is embedded in the story of international ideological competition, and thus his museum's new exhibit on the Eisenhower presidency considers Little Rock alongside Operation Solarium. Similarly, according to University of North Carolina historian Roger Lotchin, in a sense, we should put California cities in the display cases as well, since as he explained, broad municipal coalitions coalesced there around successful drives to secure Cold War manufacturing and research assets.

Preserving land- and cityscapes is unrealistic, and as the Advisory Council's solution to the dilemmas of Capehart-Wherry housing indicates, the wind may be blowing in the opposite direction. Other types of documentation, such as oral history testimonies, video documentation, or museum exhibits featuring these and other media offer ways to compensate for lost sites and structures, though exactly how these sources might convey the state of mind those of us over thirty-five associate with the Cold War remains unclear. Whatever is kept, and certainly whatever is exhibited, should connect personal stories and places to global developments. One forerunner here is the Norwegian Aviation Museum, located in Bodø, a town some one hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle, where, as we learned from curator Karl Kleve, museum professionals and historians are seeking to explain community change and international politics through large, complicated objects. Cold War scholars, too, are increasingly working at the intersection of localities and transnational developments: a conference organized in April 2003 by historian Jeffrey

Engel, "Lives and Consequences: The Local Impact of the Cold War," shows that the interdynamics of high politics and place is now becoming a focus of scholarly research, while a series of conferences at Germany's Institute for Social Research in Hamburg is engaging what the historian Bernd Greiner is calling the "societal history of the Cold War." Linking these ventures in popular and academic history-making will, as Kleve and National Park Service historian Sue Lamie indicated, require practitioners to decipher the tribal languages of science, arms, and preservation; to address the power of stereotypes; to draw together civilian participants and military veterans; and, last but not least, to come to terms with the subjects of Cold War secrecy and document declassification. Kleve asked how one might exhibit intelligence during the Cold War when most important documents remain classified, a question some of us took up after a post-conference tour of Washington's new International Spy Museum.

Few places in the United States are more secret than the Cold War "signature facilities" of the Department of Energy, and arguably few places deserve more the status of Cold War emblems. The physical impression of sites almost none of us will actually see ranges from the stunning to a massive hole in the ground (the Sedan Crater was the product of an experiment to develop engineering uses for nuclear explosives directed by Troy Wade, now the driving force behind the new Atomic Testing Museum in Las Vegas). Skip Gosling's description of his trip to the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, Texas, where for over a quarter of a century all U.S. nuclear weapons have been assembled and disassembled, demonstrated that truth is stranger than fiction. Remarkably, Gosling's description was topped by the Pantex plant historian Kris Mitchell, who described to us something he and his colleagues called "gravel gerties" (the name comes from a Dick Tracy cartoon character). The gerties contain seventeen feet of dirt and gravel suspended in a dome over the workroom, above the heads of the workers. In the event of an accidental high explosive detonation, Mitchell explained that the dirt and gravel would collapse into the workroom and provide a measure of containment against the spread of special nuclear material beyond the facility. When he showed us an image of the gerties, someone asked where the exit was, whereupon Mitchell replied without missing a beat that the only exit from this structure in the event of an accident would be in the form of a gas. Pantex may be the site least likely to become a Cold War museum, though its relevance to any scientific, economic, and cultural understanding of the Cold War is indisputable.

As the Cold War takes shape as public memory, emotions, agendas, and scholarly arguments are colliding with concerns over representation, community economic development, life-and-death environmental issues,

and a host of governmental regulations (from design codes to property rights to preservation requirements). Much like the Cold War, these battles are waged simultaneously on different continents, all too often with the chief protagonists unaware of lessons learned in other places. Respected for their knowledge of the past, in the business of Cold War memory, historians will ultimately be judged by their ability to thoughtfully engage unfamiliar professional questions. This conference has attempted to contribute to this process.

Keith Allen and Christian Ostermann