

**ACCESS—PRESENTATION—MEMORY:
THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES AND THE
MEMORIAL FOUNDATIONS OF GERMAN POLITICIANS**

Conference at the GHI, September 8–11, 2004. Conveners: Astrid M. Eckert (GHI), Christof Mauch (GHI). Co-sponsored by the GHI and the Office of Presidential Libraries at the National Archives (College Park, Maryland), the Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus (Rhöndorf), the Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung (Berlin), the Reichspräsident-Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte (Heidelberg), the Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung (Friedrichsruh), and the Stiftung Bundespräsident-Theodor-Heuss-Haus (Stuttgart).

Participants: David E. Alsobrook (Clinton Presidential Library), Thomas S. Blanton (National Security Archive), John Brademas (New York University), Frank G. Burke, Richard Claypoole (Office of Presidential Libraries, NARA), Bruce Craig (American Historical Association), Michael J. Devine (Truman Presidential Museum and Library), Heinrich-Dietrich Dieckmann (Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus), Dieter Dowe (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung), Astrid M. Eckert (GHI), David Eisenhower (University of Pennsylvania), Sharon Fawcett (Office of Presidential Libraries, NARA), David Greenberg (Rutgers University), Gerhard Gross (Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung), Liselotte Gross (Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung), Jay Hakes (Jimmy Carter Library), Thomas Hertfelder (Stiftung Bundespräsident-Theodor-Heuss-Haus), Andrea Hopp (Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung), Wolfram Hoppenstedt (Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung), Konrad H. Jarausch (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam), Christof Mauch (GHI), Sam McClure (Office of Presidential Libraries, NARA), Hans-Peter Mensing (Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus), Walter Mühlhausen (Reichspräsident-Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte), Gabriele Müller-Trimbusch (Stiftung Bundespräsident-Theodor-Heuss-Haus), Michael Naumann (DIE ZEIT), John C. Powers (Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, NARA), Bernd Rother (Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung), Martin Sabrow (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam), Bernd Schaefer (GHI), Wolfgang Schmidt (Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung), Barry Schwartz (University of Georgia), Thomas A. Schwartz (Vanderbilt University), Hans-Peter Schwarz (Bonn University), Andreas von Seggern (Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung), Nancy Smith (Office of Presidential Libraries, NARA), Gary Stern (Office of Presidential Libraries, NARA), Martin Teasley (Eisenhower Library), Hartmut Weber (Bundesarchiv Koblenz/Berlin), Karl Weissenbach (Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, NARA).

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the first U.S. president to recognize his presidential papers as part of a "national heritage" and to preserve them for posterity. His predecessors had considered their own papers to be private property, and had simply taken them home. Roosevelt's decision in December 1938 to set up a library at his private estate in Hyde Park, New York, and to donate his papers to the American public marks the beginning of the Presidential Library system. Subsequent presidents followed suit, and Roosevelt's innovation expanded. With the Presidential Libraries Act of 1955, the system became part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Its Office of Presidential Libraries today administers eleven Presidential Libraries and the Nixon Presidential Materials, and supports a staff to assist with the current administration's preparations for opening its own library.

By contrast, in Germany, there is no law that would establish a foundation for a former chancellor or federal president. In principle, the Federal Archive (Bundesarchiv) is in charge of preserving politicians' papers. But the Bundesarchiv faces stiff competition from party foundations, private institutions, and, to a lesser degree, from the various memorial foundations of German politicians. There are only a few such foundations. Funded by public money, they were set up to honor a select group of German statesmen, including Otto von Bismarck, Friedrich Ebert, Konrad Adenauer, Theodor Heuss, and Willy Brandt.

As different as the systems may be, there is nonetheless a pressing need for transatlantic communication. From September 8–10, 2004, the GHI hosted a conference bringing together for the first time practitioners and scholars from the eleven Presidential Libraries, the five German memorial foundations, and NARA. They were joined by historians studying American presidents and German chancellors, archivists, and representatives of public interest groups working to promote 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.

David Eisenhower opened the conference with his keynote speech, "The Past in Trust for the Future: The Presidential Library System." He analyzed the impact of the libraries on the interpretation of American political history. In his view, the institutions looked bright indeed: The libraries and their museums are "the best expression of the American political tradition," and they are fulfilling their mission to make the presidency accessible to the people.

The first panel took a comparative look at the history of the Presidential Library system and the various memorial foundations of German

politicians. Frank Burke illuminated the development of the Presidential Library system. His paper "Pride or Protest: Community Responses to Presidential Libraries" focused on the different reactions of local communities to the prospect of hosting a Presidential Library. Whereas the Truman Library in the president's home town 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 to Columbia Point, overlooking Boston's harbor, instead. The potentially fruitful cooperation between a university campus and a Presidential Library also did not mean that such an arrangement was necessarily 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 means of financing a Presidential Library 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 the famous tapes led to the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974 and the Presidential Records Act (PRA) of 1978, settling the ownership question in favor of the state. NARA thereby became the designated custodian of presidential and vice-presidential papers.

Dieter Dowe presented the corresponding story for the German memorial foundations. As much as the American Presidential Libraries were the model for the creation of the foundations, a quick look at the respective budgets, exhibition space, personnel, and visitors is humbling, and drives home the point that comparing the American system to the German system is like comparing 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, and in 1978, it was turned into a federal institution. The same procedure was applied in the late 1980s to the 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-Theodor-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, and set off a heated debate in the Bundestag. The influence of party politics on the decision to finance a memorial foundation with federal money is indeed one of the major ways the German system differs from the American system. In Germany, a parting chancellor or president does not automatically see a foundation named after him. Who decides whether a statesman is "wor-

thy" enough, and what accounts for "worthiness" or historical "greatness" in the first place, remain difficult questions.

The second panel focused on the role of biography as a genre in historiography. Moderator Jay Hakes pointed to the commercial success of biographies on the American market. History, he held, reached a broader audience primarily by way of historical biographies. Presidential biographies in particular could not be written without the Presidential Libraries and the documents in their archives. To Thomas A. Schwartz, the popularity of presidential biographies comes as no surprise, since the office of the president stands at the core of the political system. The presidency provides one easy way of structuring political history. Abstract issues and processes can be boiled down and explained from the White House perspective. However, reducing complexity and focusing on presidents alone comes at the expense of a multifaceted analysis of American politics. The role of Congress and other political players tends to become marginalized.

In his paper "The Statesman's Biographer: Hunting for Fame, Fortune, and the Truth," Hans-Peter Schwarz offered a tour d'horizon of the current scene of biographies of German statesmen. Schwarz likened the biographer to a hunter searching for the secrets a politician wants to hide. Those secrets, once unveiled, become the meat of the biography and, in no small amount, account for its readability. The reason why comparatively few biographies are written by German historians lies, according to Schwarz, in the thirty-year rule regarding archival materials and in the lack of interest on the side of potential readers. Popular interest focuses on only a few lives, with Hitler still leading the list. Federal presidents are not the biographer's first choice—their role is too representative, and they have too little an impact on "real" politics. Chancellors make for better objects of study. The biographies of Adenauer, Brandt, Schmidt, and now Kohl will most likely be rewritten for many years to come. These four statesmen are "powerful competitors" to the historian: They published their memoirs and hand-picked their first biographer, and thus set the tone for how and for what they want to be remembered. Yet Schwarz predicted a bright future for German biographers. With the current chancellor and his foreign minister, two colorful political and private lives await the hunter.

The third panel moved to one of the driving forces behind the development of the Presidential Library system: the question of access to presidential papers. The contested issue of access is also a sore point in some German cases. In opening the session, the director of the newly opened Clinton Library in Little Rock, Arkansas, David E. Alsobrook, drew attention to what has become and will remain the main problem for NARA in the future: the dramatically increased quantity of material.

After the transfer of his files from the White House to Arkansas, Bill Clinton's first question to Alsobrook was, "How much stuff do I have? Is it more than LBJ's?" In fact it was: The Clinton Administration left 80 million pages of documents, approximately 20 million email messages, and 2 million photographs, amounting to 35,686 cubic feet of records. This makes Clinton's library the biggest thus far, revealing one of the major headaches for the library's custodians: processing the material.

Nancy Smith elaborated on this theme and discussed various problems relating to the release of documents to the public. One major hurdle lies in determining whether material was public or private in nature. White House tapes of the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, pose a special problem because political discussions might be interspersed with a private comment, only to lead back into official business. Unlike paper, text on tapes cannot simply be blacked out. By law, presidents themselves have a say over their papers. So far, every president has chosen to postpone the release of confidential material from presidential advisors.

When it comes to leading politicians' papers, the German Bundesarchiv has a different set of problems. Its president Hartmut Weber regrets the unclear meaning of the Federal Archives Law in this regard. When leaving office, politicians often hand their papers over to the private archives of the party foundations, regardless of whether the material addressed official or private matters. For official state papers, however, the Bundesarchiv is the legally designated repository. The federal government finally addressed the issue in a cabinet resolution in July 2001, ordering the heads of ministries not to remove original papers and to distinguish between party business and official business. Whether this resolution will be adequately honored remains to be seen.

Michael Naumann, publisher of the German weekly DIE ZEIT and former State Minister for Cultural and Media Affairs, returned to this issue in his keynote address that evening. He shared his views about the loss of files and data at the Federal Chancery in Berlin upon the change of government in 1998, with Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl and his close aids moving out, and Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder moving in. Upon taking over his own office, for instance, Naumann found the computer hard drives wiped clean. What he alternately called an "adventure story" or "a tale of transition" led into a discussion of the scandals of the outgoing Kohl administration over party finances, sales of government property, and various connections between the two. Naumann speculated about the true motives for the truncated parliamentary and judiciary investigation of the events, and the agenda of those officials involved. The lively and controversial debate over Naumann's paper drove home the point that the story was part of recent history and that the last word had yet to be spoken.

Martin Sabrow delivered 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 situation that ran counter to historical scholarship and the right to know. 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 worsening access situation on two factors. First, the CDU party finance scandal increased the interest in the Stasi tapes of Kohl’s telephone conversations. Second, there was the personality factor, i.e. 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 rulings on the case further increased the web of restrictions already in place, thereby finally grinding to a halt the revolutionary and cathartic act of throwing open the files of an oppressive secret service.

Thomas S. Blanton moved the discussion to current issues of access to presidential papers. The National Security Archive was founded in 1985, and is simultaneously a research institute on international affairs, a library and archive of declassified U.S. documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), a public interest law firm defending and expanding public access to government information through FOIA, and an indexer and publisher of the documents. By constantly applying FOIA to pry loose governmental documentation, the Archive is the natural enemy of any attempts at government secrecy. Blanton discussed one of the Archive’s most famous cases, the litigation over White House email referring 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 email survived, thanks to a six-year lawsuit brought by the National Security Archive. Henceforth, White House emails would be considered part of presidential records, covered by the respective legal provisions for their preservation.

Bruce Craig discussed recent attempts of the Bush administration to redefine the Presidential Records Act (PRA) of 1978. In November 2001, President George W. Bush issued Executive Order (EO) 13233 that purported to “further implement” the PRA. The EO gives former presidents the right to prevent the release of presidential papers and allows a sitting president to block the release of a predecessor’s records, even after that former president has signaled his approval. Because of concerns stemming from the Bush administration’s effort to delay the release of some of Reagan’s records, a coalition of scholars, historical and archival associa-

tions, and organizations seeking more transparency in government filed suit in federal court holding that the EO was an impermissible exercise of executive power. The implications of EO 13233 have been widely covered in the national press because the EO so clearly smacks of an agenda that tries to undo the post-Watergate legislation that was crafted to safeguard presidential papers and to reconfirm the public's democratic right to know. The EO, Craig held, violates the spirit of the PRA. NARA's General Counsel Gary Stern countered these positions by pointing out that the Reagan documents that were the subject of litigation had meanwhile been released, with the exception of only eleven documents totaling seventy-four pages. While EO 13233 might have slowed down the process of release, it did not fundamentally change the PRA's implementation.

The fourth panel took a closer look at how the general public comes into contact with the Presidential Libraries and the German memorial foundations. In the United States, it is the attached museums that get the most attention from the non-scholarly public, with more than 1.5 million annual visitors to the exhibitions. As part of this conference, the exhibitions underwent an unusual assessment: An associate 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 exhibitions.

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, 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 simply by emphasizing the latter. The museum locations contribute heavily to this through their connection to the biographies exhibited inside. Roosevelt in Hyde Park, Kennedy in Boston, Johnson in Austin—the presidents are remembered far away from the site of their political power in Washington and reembedded into their local points of origin.

John Powers visited all the German foundations and found them to contribute substantially to political education. The exhibitions strive to combine the biography of the statesman with the political background of his 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* into the Federal Republic. However, Powers found that party politics receives too much attention at the expense of a more private view of the exhibited statesman. Also, some

major historical occurrences have not yet been incorporated into the exhibitions, such as the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, the political change after 1990, and long-term processes like migration. He recommended including more interactive and audio-visual elements and moving away from printed text in order to make the exhibitions livelier.

Michael J. Devine, director of the Truman Library, introduced the conference participants to the broad outreach program of the Truman Presidential Library that seeks to involve high school and college students as well as their teachers. One prominent outreach feature is the White House Decision Center. In this experiential program, students take on the roles of President Truman and his advisors as they face real-life historical decisions. Another cornerstone is the library's website with more than 30,000 pages, visited by more than 250,000 users every month.

The last panel focused on the interaction of cultures of memory and the political culture in Germany and the United States. Barry Schwartz examined the history of the public holiday Presidents' Day, observed on the third Monday of February. Presidents' Day replaced the celebration of Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays in February, which had been gradually marginalized by the more popular Valentine's Day on February 14. The decision in 1971 to make Presidents' Day a federal holiday stemmed less out of a desire to show reverence to the presidents than an attempt to unify a divergent practice of observing the various February holidays. Schwartz doubted whether every president deserved to be remembered by a federal holiday, and saw the introduction of such a holiday as being at odds with the overall waning respect for the office of the president since the mid-1960s.

Konrad H. Jarausch connected the remembrance of Germany's leading statesmen with the country's dense memory culture that shoulders the double burden of two dictatorships and their respective crimes. After years of denial and evasion, Holocaust memory became an integral part of West German memory culture. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 added the task of researching the causes, history, and impact of the East German dictatorship and remembering its many injustices. While these two elements of German history will not diminish in importance, Jarausch pointed out that there are hardly any positive points of reference in German memory culture to commemorate democracy and freedom in Germany.

The section closed with three case studies that examined the shifting image of a statesman over time. Andreas von Seggern outlined the history of public remembrance of Otto von Bismarck. Already during his lifetime, Bismarck became the subject of popular adulation, a sentiment that took on mythical dimensions after his death, as evidenced by the many Bismarck memorials in Germany. A radical new assessment of the

“Iron Chancellor” came after World War II, when nationalistic approaches to German history were finally delegitimized. It was only in 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. The Bismarck Foundation itself was founded only after unification, with major backing from Chancellor Kohl. The foundation relates to Bismarck only as a subject of historical inquiry, and steers clear of older strands of personal reverence.

David Greenberg discussed “Richard Nixon in American Memory.” Many people speculated about the real Nixon, already controversial during his lifetime. Two recent interpretations try to reinvent Nixon: one as the experienced elder statesman in his conduct of international affairs, the other as a foreign policy advisor to Bill Clinton. Similarly, they try to paint him as a liberal in domestic policies. Greenberg rejected both these interpretations as attempts to distract from the defining event of Nixon’s presidency, the Watergate crisis, and to replace the image of Nixon as crook. In domestic policies, Nixon did not generate a progressive agenda, but only reacted to the dominant, liberal political climate in the country. Greenberg predicted that the image of “tricky Dick” will prevail in the future, despite the recent revisionist attempts. Nixon’s negative, manipulative personality weighs too strongly in the public memory.

Walter Mühlhausen concluded the case studies with an analysis of perceptions of Friedrich Ebert. Even in his own party, Ebert became controversial due to his role during the revolution of 1918–1919. The Weimar Republic never developed much of a loyalty toward its first president, either. Ebert himself did not work to polish his image or popular perception. His 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 pilgrimage site. Once the National Socialists were in power, public remembrance of Ebert came to a halt, with only Social Democrats in exile trying to keep the flame burning. The GDR viewed Ebert as a traitor of his class, while in the Federal Republic, the left wing of the SPD grew critical of him during the 1960s for having missed the chance of 1918–1919. Only after unification in 1990 did Ebert join the ranks of those considered to be the leading German statesmen, and he was honored with a memorial foundation.

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