

## VISITING PRESIDENTIAL AND CHANCELLOR MUSEUMS: AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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).

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