New Research Topics at the GHI

“Politics in the German-American Relationship Since 1945.”

Robert Gerald Livingston, senior visiting fellow at the Institute since January 1997, is working on a book that will deal with the politics on both sides of the German-American relationship from 1945–90. Cast in a narrative form and aimed at a general as well as an academic readership, Livingston’s survey will be constructed around a dozen or so episodes that characterized the countries’ relationship and determined the course of events during that period. It will focus on political leaders and explore their personal interactions as well as the politics in each country that drew them together and occasionally divided them.

As presently envisioned, Livingston’s book will treat the Berlin Blockade and German currency reform for the 1940s, highlighting the roles of Lucius Clay, Ernst Reuter, and Ludwig Erhard; for the 1950s, Germany’s rearmament and adherence to NATO will be discussed, concentrating on Konrad Adenauer and John Foster Dulles; for the 1960s, the tensions with the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union that culminated with the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 will be the focus, along with Adenauer, Willy Brandt, and John F. Kennedy; for the later 1960s, the Dollar-DM Pressures and the American effort to draw Germany into a Vietnam commitment will be treated, concentrating on Erhard and Lyndon B. Johnson; for the early 1970s, American detente and German Ostpolitik will be discussed, highlighting Brandt and Henry Kissinger; for the later 1970s, the European Monetary System, the neutron bomb, and, later, the intermediate-range missile crisis will be discussed, centering on Jimmy Carter and Helmut Schmidt; for the 1980s, the Bitburg visit of 1985 will be treated, with Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan in the foreground; and for 1989–90, the process of German reunification will be discussed, with Kohl and George Bush as the central figures.
Livingston is basing his narrative mainly on secondary literature, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies, supplemented in the cases of Bitburg, Ostpolitik-détente, and German reunification by interviews with some of the principals.

_Gerald Livingston_

“Turning Toward the West: The United States, West Germany, and the Westernization of German Political Culture After 1945.”

One of the most profound changes of the twentieth century was West Germany’s successful democratization and Westernization after 1945. Only four years after the end of World War II, the former enemy started to become one of the closest allies of the United States and an important member of the Western community of values (westliche Wertegemeinschaft). Today, Germany’s deep political and ideological roots in the West are an essential feature of the Federal Republic’s identity. However, in contrast to Germany’s economic, military, political, and cultural incorporation into the West, the ideological paradigm shift that accompanied these developments has remained largely unexplained.

This research project aims at exploring the process of the ideological Westernization of Germany through a comparison of German and American political cultures and an analysis of their interaction during the development of West German democracy from the end of World War II through the Adenauer era. The results should provide insights into the emergence of a German democratic political culture from conflicting authoritarian and liberal traditions and a clearer understanding of the West as an ideological entity during the Cold War.

In West Germany’s political self-conception, the apparent break with authoritarian and antidemocratic political and social traditions after 1945 and 1949 and the sudden appreciation of a liberal democratic order are largely taken for granted. The existence of long-term authoritarian ideological continuities as important elements of West Germany’s political culture is generally ignored or denied. During the last twenty years German historiography has recognized