

Honoring an obligation to history at the Nixon Library

In his farewell remarks to White House staff on August 9, 1974, just hours before his resignation as the nation's 37th President took effect, Richard Nixon alluded to his long career in public life, with its historic victories and humiliating defeats. "Only if you have been in the deepest valley," he said, "can you ever know how magnificent it is to be on the highest mountain."

Nixon was in both places, on numerous occasions, over the course of his half-century in public life. His legacy has already been well researched and will continue to be studied as more of the documents of his life and his White House tenure are opened.

Those records will now be opened under NARA auspices. On July 11 of this year, NARA accepted, on behalf of the Federal Government, the privately run library and museum in Yorba Linda, CA, built by Nixon's supporters and friends.

The Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum will be administered by NARA's nonpartisan professional archivists and other staff working for the library director I appointed, historian **Timothy Naftali**. The new team will work to open formerly closed and unprocessed records and to create a nonpartisan, interactive museum that will provide a resource for all Americans interested in Nixon's life and career, the Presidency as an institution, and American history itself.

The transfer of control of the Yorba Linda facility ends a story that began more than three decades ago in 1974, when Nixon, facing impeachment proceedings in Congress, resigned amid the Watergate scandal and subsequently fought an unsuccessful legal battle for custody of his papers and access to them.

The establishment of the library as a Federal entity and the eventual consolidation in one institution of the records of Nixon's career is important, whether you are a Nixon admirer or a Nixon detractor (or both), since it will provide a single setting to study the most documented Presidential administration in American history.

Although the Watergate scandal brought the Nixon Presidency to an end, the Nixon years were notable also for significant changes in the nation's social, political, and economic structure. Historic breakthroughs in foreign



affairs—with the Chinese and the Soviets and in the Mideast—were high points of the Nixon years even as the Vietnam War continued. His records also contain a long list of domestic

policy initiatives that have had enormous impact—in the areas of health, safety, the environment, and antidiscrimination—brought about by Nixon's Republican administration and a heavily Democratic Congress.

With this historic transfer, it is appropriate to place the Nixon Library not only in historical context but in the context of the mission of the National Archives.

At NARA, we are in the business of preserving records and providing access to them without regard to the impact of their revelations. The exception here, of course, are those national security records considered too vital to our defense to be made public until at least 25 years after they are created, often longer.

This "let the chips fall where they may" approach, of course, means that both positive and negative information about our former Presidents will be revealed. President Lyndon Johnson, for example, wanted visitors to his library to see the record of his Presidency "with the bark off," and not everything in the archives of NARA's Presidential libraries is necessarily complimentary to the men whose names are on the buildings.

President Nixon's allusion to the "deepest valley" and the "highest mountain" in his farewell speech also has relevance here. As we assume the stewardship now of *all* the Nixon records, it is our intention at the National Archives to preserve and make accessible to everyone the entire record of Richard Nixon's professional life—his time in the deep valleys as well as his high points.

This is in keeping with the major mission of the National Archives—access. To fulfill that mission, we send a special message across time to those who fought to preserve our liberties centuries ago and to those who

will, in the near and far future, look to our holdings for the history of our times.

That special message is:

We will continue to safeguard these records every moment of every day, and we will honor our obligation to make them accessible to the maximum extent possible—without exception, evasion, or excision.

The responsibility to provide an accurate, complete, and unvarnished record of our history is too great for us not to live up to our mission statement. I thank the Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation for agreeing to transfer the library and museum to NARA, allowing it to become a part of our system of Federal Presidential libraries. We look forward to working with the foundation and all those interested in the entire career of Richard Nixon.

Historians will need what we preserve for them, and with these records they will make the judgments of history, including those on Richard Nixon, in the fullness of time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Weinstein".

ALLEN WEINSTEIN
Archivist of the United States

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