

IS AN OLD AMERICA  
A POOR AMERICA?

CAN UNIVERSAL BROADBAND  
ACCESS REALLY BE ACHIEVED?

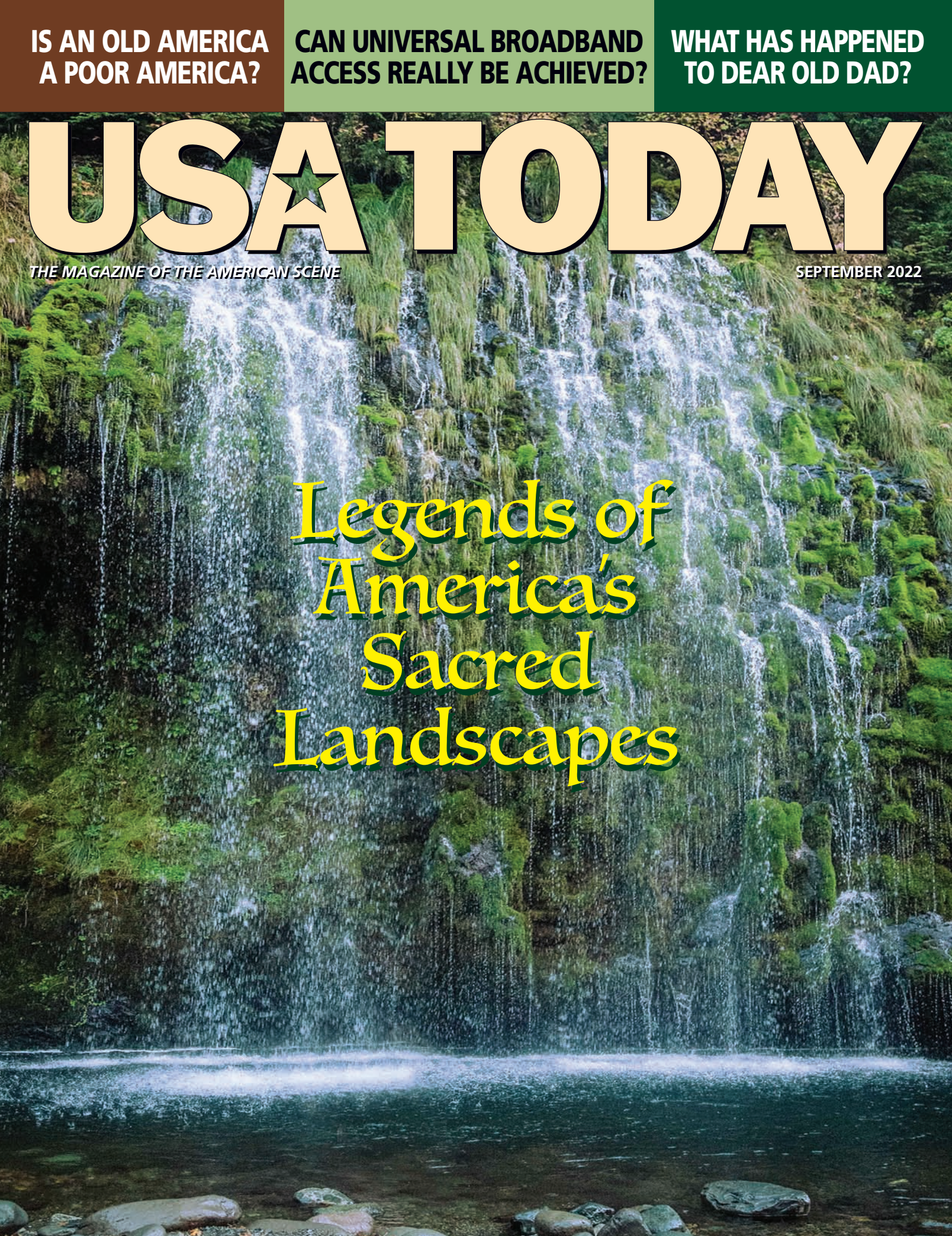
WHAT HAS HAPPENED  
TO DEAR OLD DAD?

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## Legends of America's Sacred Landscapes





# An Extraordinary Partnership

BY CLAUDIA CLARK

*"If [Chancellor Angela] Merkel had been offended that [Pres. Barack] Obama failed to visit Berlin, she did not let on publicly. By now, she recognized the President's enormous popularity in Germany, and she seized the opportunity to welcome him back."*

**T**HE DAY immediately after Pres. Barack Obama's 2009 speech in Cairo, he made a sojourn to Germany. As part of his broader goal of visiting historic World War II landmarks on this anniversary trip, he opted to visit the city of Dresden, followed by a tour of the former concentration camp of Buchenwald. In the years that followed World War II, Dresden had become famous for the gruesome bombing campaign led by the British and American armies, a multiday military offensive that ultimately resulted in the deaths of between 18,000 and 25,000 Germans.

Reflecting Obama's tremendous popularity among the German people, the local citizens held a two-day welcoming party on the city's historical market square in anticipation of his visit. Mayor Helma Orosz saw the President's visit as "an important event" in the city's history.

While the citizens of Dresden were happy about the President's visit, his decision to go there in lieu of the traditional official state visit to Berlin caused controversy in both countries. Some Germans viewed the decision as a slight to Chancellor Angela Merkel, while her foreign policy critics went so far as to blame Merkel for what they saw as a deteriorating relationship between the U.S. and Germany since Obama had taken office. On the other side of the Atlantic, one of Obama's critics, the con-

servative blog Power Line, ran the headline, "Dresden: Next Stop on Apology Tour?" and implied that the President's decision demonstrated an expression of regret for America's wartime behavior.

Despite the criticism on both fronts, Obama and Merkel made valuable use of the President's time in Germany, which included a visit to a historic church and a trip to the former concentration camp of Buchenwald in between Obama's meeting and press conference with Merkel. The two began with a tour of Frauenkirche Dresden, the city's "Church of Our Lady," which had been rebuilt after World War II firebombing destroyed it. Their stopover at the church provided the two world leaders with an opportunity to spend time together in an informal yet educational capacity. At this point, the two were still strangers, but this visit allowed them to get to know one another without the challenges of the formality that accompanied traditional state visits.

The pair then held a bilateral meeting and hosted a joint press conference, which followed the usual format: opening remarks by both leaders, followed by questions from the press corps. Apparently unbothered by the speculation around Obama's alleged refusal to visit Berlin, Merkel publicly welcomed Obama to Dresden and thanked him for his visit: "It is so important that the American president, Barack Obama, makes his first stop here in

Dresden. This is a highly symbolic city [that was] almost completely destroyed during the Second World War, [and] then rebuilt after Germany [sic] unification. [President Obama, this visit] shows that you also pay tribute to the tremendous efforts they made in those 20 years after the fall of the [Berlin] Wall."

If Merkel had been offended that Obama failed to visit Berlin, she did not let on publicly. By now, she recognized the President's enormous popularity in Germany, and she seized the opportunity to welcome him back. She refused to engage in the petty arguments of the media and instead saw the visit as an opportunity to show Obama the progress her country had made since World War II—progress that had occurred, in large part, because of the relationship between the U.S. and Germany.

In response to a question about Obama's next stop on that trip—Buchenwald concentration camp—the President explained that, as part of his trip to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Normandy landings, he felt he should visit a concentration camp, especially since he never had before. He added that he specifically chose Buchenwald because his grandmother's brother had been among the troops that liberated the camp. Many politicians would have resisted a visiting leader's request to witness such a horrific part of their nation's history, but Merkel, not known for avoiding responsibility, encouraged the Presi-





dent's visit and in fact seemed to view it as an honor: "[T]his is for me deeply moving to see an American president, in this case President Barack Obama, as a visitor in Buchenwald, and he talked about his personal background as regards this question. Look at Buchenwald . . . one example of these horrible concentration camps, liberated by American troops."

Merkel's remarks illustrated that she understood the importance of Obama's visit to Buchenwald, not only for the President personally but for the diplomatic relationship between their two nations. The two leaders ended the press conference with a cordial handshake and smiles—and appeared significantly more relaxed than at the beginning of the meeting 40 minutes earlier. Merkel had not yet gone so far as to refer to Obama as a friend, but for the first time, she had openly admitted her respect for the new President.

Immediately after their joint press conference, Merkel joined Obama for the 120-mile trip from Dresden to the Buchenwald Memorial, but not before she changed her clothes from the vibrant yellow she had worn earlier to an all-black outfit that visibly demonstrated the darkness of the site they were about to visit. For this appearance, two former camp detainees, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel and Buchenwald Committee chairman Bertrand Herz joined the pair. Obama was the first U.S. president to visit the former concentration

camp, making it a historic event, and yet he had a personal connection with it. The president also wanted to witness firsthand the horror stories he had personally heard from his great-uncle Charles Payne, a young soldier who helped to liberate the Buchenwald sub-camp Ohrdruf in April 1945.

As *Der Spiegel* reported on the day of their tour, "It's March weather in June"—a scene appropriately melancholy for a visit to a place with such a bleak history. As they began their tour, Obama, Merkel, Wiesel, and Herz paused to place a white rose on the plaque to honor the 50,000-plus people who had perished there. Afterwards, Merkel, Obama, and Wiesel each spoke about the horror and historical importance of Buchenwald.

An emotional Merkel explained that Germans have a duty and responsibility to work toward a world free of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, and right-wing extremism to ensure nothing like the atrocities of World War II ever happen again. Then, just as Obama had taken responsibility for the fiscal crisis at the London G20 Summit, Merkel took ownership for the brutality and atrocities of World War II: "This appeal of the survivors defines the very special responsibility we Germans have to shoulder with regard to our history." Merkel concluded by expressing gratitude to the U.S. for its help over the years, and to Obama in particular for his visit:

"It gives me an opportunity to align [sic] yet again that we Germans shall never forget, and we owe the fact we were given the opportunity after the war to start anew, to enjoy peace and freedom, to the resolve, the strenuous efforts, and indeed to a sacrifice made in blood of the United States of America and of all those who stood by [America's] side as allies or fighters in resistance."

A visibly emotional Obama uncharacteristically stumbled over his words as he began to speak to the audience, and he proclaimed, "These sites have not lost their horror with the passage of time." He further argued that memorials such as Buchenwald remind people that they must "reject the false comfort that others' suffering is not our problem and commit ourselves to resisting those who would subjugate others to serve their own interests." As Merkel stood next to Obama and listened to him speak, her body language demonstrated her obvious discomfort. She shifted her weight uncomfortably from side to side and moved her hands and arms restlessly, but one thing remained constant—the tears in her eyes.

Obama emphasized the prisoners' resilience and, as he addressed the audience, he pointed out that those who had suffered on those grounds all those years ago had no way of knowing that someday a museum and memorials would be there for future generations to see, including a tower clock set permanently to



# You've Got a Friend

On June 9, 2011, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made her third visit to Washington, D.C., during Barack Obama's presidency—this time to accept the Presidential Medal of Freedom award, making her the second German, after former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, to be so honored. However, just before Merkel's visit, her government cast an extremely controversial vote when it abstained on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorized military intervention in Libya. For the first time in modern history, Germany had voted against the West, including France, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.

Because of this questionable move, the press on both sides of the Atlantic debated the sincerity of the upcoming ceremony. The issue quickly became politicized when media outlets with different political leanings placed their own spin on the ceremony. Conservative blogger Russell Berman stated: "When German Chancellor Angela Merkel meets with President Obama this week in Washington, symbols will outweigh substance, even more than they usually do in international politics. The rationale for the visit is explicitly symbolic: the president will bestow the Medal of Freedom on the chancellor."

On the other side of the Atlantic, European news outlets viewed the U.S.'s gesture with suspicion as well. The weekly German newspaper *Die Zeit* claimed, "Sometimes praise is harder to bear than criticism. Those who give praise expect something in return."

Similarly, the financial German daily *Handelsblatt* argued that "the excessive American hospitality this week comes with a crystal-clear agenda. The U.S. wants Germany to take responsibility on a number of points—as financier of reconstruction in the Arab world, as an anchor of stability in the euro turbulence, and as a political heavy lifter in the Middle East."

The crisis in Libya was only one of the pressing issues on which Merkel and Obama disagreed—another, which the two leaders would inevitably address, involved the deepening financial crisis that Greece faced. Obama had urged European countries and their creditors to come together and prevent disaster in Greece, promising U.S. support in heading off the country's debt woes. With U.S. unemployment still high at 9.1%, Obama blamed outside forces—including rising fuel prices, the recent earthquake in Japan, and the Eurozone crisis—for impeding the economy. Meanwhile, the EU was in the middle of finalizing

the details for a Greek bailout package worth the enormous sum of somewhere between €80,000,000,000 and €100,000,000,000 over a three-year period, a deal Merkel had trouble justifying to the German citizens, Bundestag, and even the German courts.

Despite the disagreements and dubious press on the conservative side, the liberal newspapers saw Merkel's visit as the honor it was intended to be. The left-leaning papers viewed the relationship between the President and the Chancellor with higher regard and less suspicion than the more conservative news outlets, and as such were less skeptical of the President's mo-



**Pres. Barack Obama presenting German Chancellor Angela Merkel with the Medal of Freedom.**

tives. Media outlets like the center-left *Süddeutsche Zeitung* claimed that in today's world, friendships arise as a result of open communications and deliverable actions based on said conversations, rather than the traditional friendships that resulted mainly out of loyalty to alliances.

Despite early reports of a troublesome relationship between Obama and Merkel, the rumors of discord proved to be unfounded—if for no other reason than the two leaders were more alike than even they wanted to accept. Nevertheless, the relationship transformed as Obama discovered that having a reliable ally whom he trusted proved to be more beneficial than having one who simply admired him, and Merkel proved to be that person.

In his own book, *A Promised Land*, Obama

acknowledged the traits he saw in Merkel and described why he appreciated them when he stated, "... Her stolid appearance reflected her no-nonsense, analytical sensibility. She was famously suspicious of emotional outbursts or overblown rhetoric." From the very origins of their working relationship, the media and political analysts had argued that both Obama and Merkel had reservations about one another. However, Obama continued, "... Her team would later confess that she'd been initially skeptical of me precisely because of my oratorical skills. I took no offense, figuring that in a German leader, an aversion to possible demagoguery was probably a healthy thing." Obama's own admission illustrates that he held no ill feelings toward Merkel—despite the reports. On the contrary, she held skills that he found beneficial. Moreover, he liked the idea that Merkel had not been one of his biggest fans initially but proved to be someone with whom he could share the work and responsibility.

The press conference that afternoon set the tone for the ceremony later that evening, during a formal state dinner in the Rose Garden. The guest list comprised 208 dignitaries, including Eric Schmidt of Google, Bob McDonald of Procter & Gamble, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, and orchestra conductor Christoph Eschenbach. Merkel's husband, Prof. Joachim Sauer, typically avoided his wife's public appearances. Nevertheless, understanding the importance of this event, Germany's "Phantom of the Opera" made yet another public appearance with his wife at an event with Obama.

Michelle Obama sat next to Merkel's husband. At one point during the course of dinner, Michelle, who normally steered clear of foreign affairs, made a point of telling Merkel, "He really treasures you, Angela," referring to Obama's respect for the chancellor. Like Prof. Sauer's attendance at the evening's festivities, the first lady's decision to intervene where she normally remained silent speaks volumes about the significance of the event.

Prior to the presentation of the award, Obama explained that the Presidential Medal of Freedom is "the highest honor a president can bestow on a civilian"—and that by receiving this honor, Merkel joined the ranks of only a handful of other non-Americans, including Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II, and her fellow German, former Chancellor Helmut Kohl. He also took the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of Merkel and her achievements: "We want

3:15, the moment of liberation. He continued to claim that people "could not have known how the nation of Israel would rise out of the destruction of the Holocaust and the strong, enduring bonds between that great nation and my own, and they could not have known that one day an American president would visit this place and speak of them, and that he would do so standing side by side with the German chancellor, in a Germany that is now a vibrant democracy and a valued American ally."

Obama's firm but uncharacteristically emo-

tional demeanor illustrated his gratitude for being in a position where he could stand in solidarity next to the leader of a nation that was formerly an adversary. Obama shared Merkel's sentiment that it was the obligation of the living and future generations to ensure nothing so inhumane and unthinkable ever happened again: "It is now up to us, the living, in our work, wherever we are, to resist injustice and intolerance and indifference ... and ensure that those who were lost here did not go in vain. It is up to us to redeem that faith. It is up to us to bear wit-

ness ... to remember all those who survived and all those who perished, and to remember them not as victims, but also as individuals who hoped and loved and dreamed just like us."

Then he thanked Merkel for her ownership of one of the darkest periods in modern history, adding, "I want to express particular thanks to Chancellor Merkel and the German people, because it is not easy to look into the past in this way and acknowledge it and make something of it, make a determination that they will stand guard against acts like this happening again."

to pay tribute to an extraordinary leader who embodies these values and who's inspired millions around the world—including me—and that's my friend, Chancellor Merkel."

Obama then described Merkel's first political experience as a young child who saw her country divided the day the Soviet government built the Berlin Wall, and emphasized the integrity she displayed when she refused to spy for the Stasi. He declared that the intent of the evening's festivities was to focus on Merkel's achievements once she had obtained her freedom, adding, "Determined to finally have her say, she entered politics—rising to become the first East German to lead a united Germany, the first woman chancellor in German history, and an eloquent voice for human rights and dignity around the world."

The President concluded with a practice that had become common over the course of their working relationship: revisiting their counterpart's important declarations of the past, as if to reiterate the value of those statements. This time, Obama repeated the words Merkel had spoken at her speech before Congress in 2009, saying that those words "spoke not only to the dreams of that young girl in the East, but to the dreams of all who still yearn for their rights and dignity today: to freedom, which 'must be struggled for, and then defended anew, every day of our lives.'"

When Merkel addressed the guests, she began with the greeting: "Mr. President, dear Barack." She emotionally described the impact the building of the Berlin Wall had had on her as a young child: "Seeing the grownups around me, even my parents, so stunned that they actually broke out in tears, was something that shook me to the core." Merkel also expressed humility as a recipient of the Medal of Freedom: "... Imagining that I would one day stand in the Rose Garden of the White House and receive the Medal of Freedom from an American president was certainly beyond even my wildest dreams—and believe me, receiving this prestigious award moves me deeply. ... My thanks go to the American people, first and foremost, for this extraordinary honor, knowing full well how much you have done for us Germans—and I thank you personally, Mr. President, because you are a man of strong convictions. You touch people with your passion and your visions for a good future for these people, also in Germany."

Those sentiments are important because they indicated the profound respect Merkel had developed for Obama. To the public, it appeared the two had gotten off to a difficult start in their relationship because Merkel thought that Obama was all talk and no substance; she had been reluctant to embrace the charisma and vi-

sion that her fellow citizens had seen in him. After more than two years of working with the President, however, she saw for herself that Obama held true to his words and his actions.

Merkel exhibited the grace of a true leader and acknowledged that the award granted to her also was being granted, in effect, to the rest of the German people and to everyone who still fought for freedom. With these remarks, she demonstrated passion and conviction with respect to standing up for the fundamental principles of freedom: "Also today, the yearning for freedom may well make totalitarian regimes tremble and fall. Freedom is indivisible. Each and everyone has the same right to freedom,

kel would face obstacles that would force her to remember and even question this conviction. One can only wonder whether these words or this medal entered her mind as she made the challenging decisions.

Author Stefan Kornelius points out that "the finale to such occasions is traditionally provided by a big name from American show business or pop music"—in this case, James Taylor, "the most American of American singer-songwriters." According to Kornelius, Taylor "later declared that the White House had specifically requested his song, 'You've Got a Friend.'"

Despite all of the ceremonial activities of the visit, the festivities ended fairly anticlimactically,



James Taylor singing "You've Got a Friend" for guests at the White House state dinner.

be it in North Africa or Belarus, in Myanmar or Iran. We see that living in freedom and defending freedom are two sides of one and the same coin, for the precious gift of freedom doesn't come naturally, but has to be fought for, nurtured, and defended time and time again."

Then, for the second time in the course of her visit, she addressed the guests in English, predicting that this prestigious award would encourage her in facing ongoing dilemmas: "Neither the chains of dictatorship nor the fetters of oppression can keep down the forces of freedom for long. This is my firm conviction that shall continue to guide me. In this, the Presidential Medal of Freedom shall serve to spur me on and to encourage me."

In the later years of her chancellorship, Mer-

kel, after all, had her straitlaced and stern reputation to uphold. She already had let her guard down when she referred to Obama as "*lieber* [dear] Barack." If she had shown any more emotion, she might have damaged her "poker face" reputation that had taken her so long to acquire.

Obama staffers had specifically requested James Taylor perform at the state dinner because of the highly symbolic nature of his song "You've Got a Friend." The sentiments certainly had not been lost on the night of the award ceremony, but never would the lyrics be truer than when Obama and Merkel would meet again, later that year in Cannes, France, to discuss the global economy, most notably the Greece situation, at the G20 summit.

Touring a former concentration camp may not have been as exciting as the traditional state visit to Berlin, but it proved to be equally educational—if not more so—for the two leaders. On a personal note, Obama finally witnessed firsthand the place that caused his great-uncle such horror all those years ago. On a professional level, Obama saw a more human side of Merkel, who let down her guard and showed an emotional aspect of her normally reserved character. Moreover, Obama had an opportunity to see in action some of the

traits he admired in Merkel—namely, her honesty and her willingness to take responsibility.

Just as Obama had taken responsibility for the Great Recession at the London summit, Merkel took ownership of the atrocities of the Holocaust. The experience may have been eye-opening for Merkel as well. Many of her early reservations about the new American President came from a concern that he was all talk and no action. However, Obama's insistence on touring Buchenwald indicated that he was, in fact, a man of action as well as

words. If anything, this visit demonstrated that alliances can be reaffirmed, policy can be discussed, and partnerships can be fortified in the absence of more traditional state visits. ★

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