



**WHITE HOUSE
MILLENNIUM COUNCIL**

Honor the Past—Imagine the Future

MEMORANDUM

To: Vanessa Weaver, Presidential Personnel
David Goodfriend, Office of Staff Secretary
Michelle Balentine, Office of Chief of Staff
Bruce Reed, Domestic Policy Council
Shirley Sagawa, Office of the First Lady ✓
Dimitri Nionakis, Counsel to the President
Betty Monkman, White House Curator
Jeff Shesol, Presidential Speechwriting
Malcolm Richardson, White House Millennium Council

From: Ellen McCulloch Lovell
Deputy Assistant to the President and
Advisor to the First Lady on the Millennium

Date: 6-25-99

Re: Organization of American Historians – White House Meeting

I would like to remind you of the meeting that will take place on Tuesday, June 29, 1999 at 2:30pm, 100 OEOB. We will be discussing the request submitted to John Podesta and Ellen Lovell by the Organization of American Historians to have the President issue an Executive Order to establish historic offices in federal agencies that do not currently have them.

Enclosed you will find background materials for the meeting. I look forward to your important contributions to this discussion. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at 456-2411.

White House Millennium Council
708 Jackson Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503
Tel: 202-456-2000 Fax: 202-456-2008

e-mail: millennium@whitehouse.gov
<http://www.millennium.whitehouse.gov>

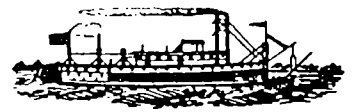
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS

Office of the Executive Director

112 North Bryan Avenue • Bloomington, Indiana 47408-4199

Tel: 812-855-7311 • Fax: 812-855-0696

oah@oah.org • <http://www.indiana.edu/~oah>



May 19, 1999

Ms. Ellen Lovell
The Millennium Program
708 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Ms. Lovell:

I am writing on behalf of the Organization of American Historians to let you know that our Executive Board has strongly endorsed the draft Executive Order on the establishment of historical offices in federal agencies that currently do not have one. As we look forward to the millennium, it is an appropriate time to encourage the preservation and interpretation of the nation's history as it is undertaken by federal agencies.

Federal historical offices not only heighten an awareness of the past but provide a context for imagining the future. Additionally historical offices can prove to be cost effective as they offer, for example, valuable assistance: to agency decision makers by providing comprehensive background material, to personnel offices in helping to orient new staff, and to records managements in identifying those records that should be discarded and those that should be retained.

While a number of agencies now have historical offices, the majority do not. The important work of preserving and documenting an agency's history, providing the expert historical knowledge essential to informed decision making, and producing a broad range of reference and historical materials is often neglected in many agencies.

Thank you again for your time last fall when you met with our delegation of historians to discuss this proposal. Your comments and encouragement have helped us move forward.

Enclosed are some background materials and a copy of the OAH Executive Board's resolution. Please contact me if we can provide additional information or if you would like for us to meet with you to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

John R. Dichtl
Assistant Executive Director, OAH

JRD/klh

Enclosures

DRAFT EXECUTIVE ORDER

"Resolved, that the Organization of American Historians strongly endorses and supports the draft Executive Order providing for the establishment of historical offices within each executive branch agency. The purpose of this Executive Order is to promote and preserve the documentary and historical record of the Federal Government by ensuring that professional historians and archivists oversee the preservation and documentation pertaining to an agency's history for future generations."

- Approved by unanimous vote of the OAH Executive Board at the OAH Annual Meeting, April 24, 1999

In accordance with the Executive Order establishing the White House Millennium Council, which states that the Federal Government "has a special responsibility to inspire the American people to reflect upon and commemorate the achievements of this country's past," it is hereby ordered that each executive branch agency without an official historical office shall establish such an office to promote preservation and interpretation of the nation's history for future generations.

Section 1. Policy.

Leadership of the country in the spirit of the Millennium observance requires professional historical expertise.

I. to "recognize the history and past accomplishments of America that reflect upon the present forces shaping society and that encourage thoughtful planning for the future";

II. to "produce informational and resource materials to educate the American people concerning our Nation's past and to inspire thought concerning the future";

III. and to provide expertise in identifying and evaluating "America's threatened cultural treasures," which include "significant documents, works of art, maps, journals, and historic structures that document and illuminate the history and culture of the United States."

By recognizing this expertise in existing historical offices within Executive Branch agencies and by establishing historical offices in those agencies without historical offices, the Federal Government can best realize the "unprecedented opportunity" offered by the Millennium observance "to energize and unite the Nation with a renewed sense of optimism in the accomplishments and promise of America" and to assure the continuance of that opportunity for the long term.

Section 2. Executive branch historical offices.

THE CASE FOR HISTORICAL OFFICES

Federal departments and independent agencies that have maintained historical offices—staffed with trained historians and tasked to engage in professional historical work—have realized significant advantages worth many times the costs of such programs.

Federal historical offices can:

1. Provide institutional memory. As new departmental secretaries, agency heads, and senior staff take up their duties, the historical office can provide them with a broad perspective on the past that is essential to understanding the programs and commitments they are inheriting.
2. Assist records managers and archivists in appraising the historical value of records. Prompt and accurate appraisal can speed the destruction of non-record materials, a vital consideration in light of recent court requirements for agencies to review and rewrite current records schedules pertaining to paper and electronic records, while preserving the critical historical documentation.
3. Provide retrospective policy studies that inform officials so they may avoid the mistakes of the past.
4. Draft historical studies, such as institutional and program histories, to promote public understanding of a department or agency.
5. Assure the preservation of essential records. While most senior officials are rightly concerned with the records of the moment, the historical office can make certain that crucial documentation is collected, organized, and preserved.
6. Quickly retrieve essential records when needed for current operations.
7. Provide expert review of key public documents to assure historical accuracy.
8. Provide historical material for policy statements, congressional testimony, and key speeches and pronouncements by senior officials.
9. Provide quick response to public and congressional inquiries relating to past events and issues, including Freedom of Information Act requests.
10. Prepare special agency documentation and analysis including oral histories, historical sections of Environmental Impact Statements, and cultural resource management studies of federal properties under departmental or agency stewardship.

FEDERAL HISTORY IN THE MILLENNIUM

- As we approach the Millennium, the documentation of our Federal history is at risk.
- Trained historians are best equipped to respond to this crisis.
- An Executive Order establishing history offices in Federal departments and agencies is a critical first step in guarding and preserving our nation's heritage.
- Such a policy would be cost effective and would ensure that the goal of the Millennium Project to preserve America's treasures will be realized in the new century.

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WHITE HOUSE HISTORY PROGRAM

A Proposal

OBJECTIVE: To establish within the White House a professionally staffed program capable of providing decision makers with timely, accurate, and appropriate information on the institutional history of the presidency.

PURPOSE: President Clinton is in a unique position to shape the way that the institution of the presidency, now and for generations to come, can benefit from the application of historical perspective and skills to its ongoing operations. As the presidency enters its third century, there could be no better way to serve this institution than to create, within the White House, a small, permanent, professional history program. Presidential scholars and government historians for many years have strongly endorsed the establishment of such a White House-based activity. The chaotic process of transition between administrations underscores the value of historical continuity to the presidency.

Establishing a history program would satisfy several vital White

House needs. Most important, it would provide the basic institutional memory now so sadly lacking. Professional historians, who have been trained to gather documentation, evaluate its content, and present essential information in readable form, and *whose tenure would not be confined to a single administration*, would be in a unique position to promote continuity between consecutive presidencies. A new administration would not have to waste time trying to locate internal information detailing earlier operational decisions on particular issues. The experience of incoming administrations provides powerful evidence of the need to establish such an office.

Officials from the Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations have complained that, when they entered the White House, it was an empty shell: Not a single piece of paper was left to inform the newly elected president of the commitments made by the former president.

A White House history program would help to alleviate this problem by having prepared throughout the course of the previous administration analyses of key White House actions in the major areas of presidential responsibility. Moreover, a history staff could also provide policy-related research support, advice on records management and records retention, and an oral history program for administration policy makers. In addition, as a

singularly rich source of institutional history on the presidency, this staff would provide reference service on historical questions, acting as a vital information center for White House staff.

BACKGROUND: Congress, the Judiciary, and many Executive Branch departments and agencies maintain well-respected history offices that could serve as models for a presidential program. In these government-wide programs, professional historians routinely apply their analytical skills and historical perspective to explore and enrich their agencies' institutional memories. They assist in determining where institutional change is desirable and possible, and where it is likely to meet with resistance. They also aid in identifying the uniqueness of specific situations and the appropriateness of suggested historical analogies. A White House history program, working in cooperation with the Office of the White House Curator and the White House Library, would provide successive administrations with information on significant events, dates, precedents, and historical comparisons of current and past presidential activities.

PROPOSAL: We recommend that the President assemble an informal advisory group that includes one or more prominent presidential scholars and senior government historians, as well as the White House Curator and a senior administration official. The advisory panel would make specific recommendations as to the history program's mission, structure, and staffing. The advisory committee would subsequently provide overall guidance during the program's initial period of operation.

Richard A. Baker, Director, *U. S. Senate Historical Office*
(202 224-6900)

Maeva Marcus, Director, *Documentary History of the Supreme Court of the United States*
(202 502-1040)

Summary of Services

- o provide policy-related research support for White House officials
- o document the institutional development of the presidency
- o participate in staff orientation and training
- o prepare analyses of key White House actions of previous administrations
in the major areas of presidential responsibility
- o assist the National Archives and White House records managers in
ensuring continuity of documentation between administrations
- o conduct an oral history program for administration policy makers
- o respond to reference requests for factual information from White House
staff, the media, and the public
- o maintain a comprehensive bibliography of books and substantive
articles about the presidency and individual presidents
- o issue publications, including narrative histories and reference guides,
associated with the above-described functions

U.S. GOVERNMENT HISTORY PROGRAMS

A Selected List of Major History Offices

Legislative Branch

- o Senate
- o General Accounting Office

Judicial Branch

- o Federal Judicial Center

Executive Branch: Cabinet Departments

- o Agriculture Department
- o Census Bureau, Commerce Department
- o Defense Department (All Services)
- o Energy Department
- o Food and Drug Administration, Health and Human Services
- o National Institutes of Health, Health and Human Services
- o Bureau of Indian Affairs, Interior
- o National Park Service, Interior
- o Marshals Service, Justice
- o Immigration and Naturalization Service, Justice
- o State Department
- o Comptroller of the Currency, Treasury
- o Internal Revenue Service, Treasury
- o Federal Aviation Administration, Transportation
- o Coast Guard, Transportation

Executive Branch: Independent Agencies

- o Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- o Central Intelligence Agency
- o National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- o National Science Foundation
- o Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- o Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
- o Postal Service

WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL OFFICE

--Chronology--

- 1942: President **Franklin Roosevelt** issues presidential memorandum directing establishment of historical programs within the military to write "accurate and objective" accounts of their World War II operations.
- 1951: President **Harry Truman** issues directive mandating that federal agencies record their experiences related to the conduct of the Korean War.
- 1987: (January 14) **Stuart Eizenstat**, former chief domestic policy adviser for President Jimmy Carter writes *New York Times*' op-ed piece lamenting lack of formal structure to promote White House institutional historical memory.
- 1992: (June 4): **Archivist of the United States** writes to President George Bush recommending creation of a professionally staffed White House Historical program.
- 1992: (June): Presidential staff secretary **Phillip Brady** delivered the Archivist's letter to President Bush at Camp David. The president indicated he would consider the proposal after the November election.
- 1992: (December 11): At the request of **Boyden Gray**, meeting with **Gene Schaerr**, White House Associate Counsel, who agreed that "There is certainly a need to have some kind of institutional memory around." He noted that many of the permanent offices within the White House bureaucracy have "historical interests," but he agreed that those interests were secondary to their main mission. He supported the proposal as a means of helping to "protect the power of the institution of the presidency."
- 1993: (February 19): Meeting with **Lloyd Cutler**, who agreed that the proposal was a good idea, but badly timed as the White House was dealing with a 25 % staff reduction.
- 1993: (September 21): Meeting with **Jan Piercy**, deputy director of White House personnel. Piercy expressed hope that future transitions would run more smoothly than did that of January 1993 and suggested appointment of a non-civil service historian of the president's choosing to direct the office and a deputy who would be a career civil servant. She interviewed a qualified candidate, who subsequently withdrew his name from further consideration.
- 1996: (August 7): Meeting with **William E. Curry, Jr.**, counselor to the president. Agreed to assemble a small inside working group to elaborate on the basic proposal. Also agreed to contact nationally known authorities on the presidency to gain their support.