

# The Evolving American Presidency

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Shannon Bow O'Brien

# Why Presidential Speech Locations Matter

Analyzing Speechmaking from Truman to Obama

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The idea for this project began in a bathtub around 2001. As I was drifting with my thoughts, I had a moment where I began to think about where presidents give speeches. At the time, there had not been much written on speechmaking below the national level and I believed there was a story to tell about these locations. That project became my dissertation which I completed at the University of Florida in 2007. My dissertation committee was supportive and believed in me and my ideas. In many ways, that belief has been one of the most important things in my academic career. I also made extremely good friends at Florida who have always been some of my best critics and champions. I also met and married my husband at Florida. He has been my best friend and academic counterpart for almost 20 years. While we research and work in completely unrelated fields, it has always been helpful to have a partner who understands the schedules, pressures, and demands of academia. I followed him to the University of Texas where we have worked since 2004. The project has grown and changed somewhat in that time, but the heart of it has always been the same. When I started this project, the George W. Bush administration made me question if I was observing a fundamental shift in speechmaking patterns. After Barack Obama, it was more apparent that Bush was simply unusual and more of an interesting blip than a change. With the conclusion of the Obama presidency, this book is better than it would have been even a couple of years ago. His administration, from my point of view, resembles many previous ones which gave me comfort that much presidential behavior was enduring across time.

I am appreciative and thankful for every person who has read ideas and pieces of this work at conferences over the years on panels, generally at the Midwest Political Science Conferences and the American Political Science Associations national conferences. I have been lucky enough to get great feedback and comments which have helped me work on these ideas more fully.

There have been several web sites that helped make this work possible. When I first started cataloging speeches, I did it all by hand out of the physical copies of the *Public Papers of the President* from the library. From 1992 onward, I was able to use the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents published online by the Government Publishing Office. It sped up my work and has been invaluable. The State Department also publishes online all the foreign travel of the president as well as official visits by foreign leaders. Both lists were extremely useful in the chapters about foreign speeches and vacation residences of the presidents. As I began to research the vacation locations, I discovered most of the presidential travel diaries were available online at their different archives. Each archive uses a different method to publish the material, but its existence and accessibility were vital. In particular, I would like to thank the libraries of Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton for publishing this material online. I would like to especially acknowledge the archivists at the George H. W. Bush library who provided me with the lists I needed when I contacted them about this material. They currently do not have the daily diaries online, but were extremely kind in sharing the necessary information. I could not have completed that section without their assistance. I also thank Freedom House for publishing their archival rankings on their Web site. I could not have completed the chapter without that information. Another Web site that has been critical for compiling this information is Dave Leip's Atlas of US Presidential Elections. His web site is a wonderful resource to double check elections and make sure I had all my swing states correct. I am truly grateful for all the trips to the library and hours he saved me over the years. His site is accurate, thorough, and contains a huge amount of information about each election going back to the founding.

There have been many people over these years that have been instrumental with advice, thoughts, and support. I know I will miss people if I even attempt a list, but in particular, I'd like to single out a few:

Larry Dodd, Peggy Conway, Beth Rosenson, Lynda Lee Kaid, Renee Johnson, Ken Wald, Phillip Williams, David Hedge, and the rest of the faculty at Florida who made me a better academic and person. The faculty at Texas have been wonderful and insightful colleagues who I have been honored to work with and share ideas.

As I was preparing this section, I learned the principal at my elementary school, Audubon Traditional in Louisville, Kentucky, passed away. It may seem silly, but when I think of many of the important lessons of life, I often think about the friends and teachers from my elementary, middle, and high schools. Shirley Shelton made all of us at Audubon feel special, wanted, and valuable as a person. Children value themselves when others make them understand they are important. I know those early interactions left their mark on my soul and her fundamental kindness surely impacted the way I view others. So, for that, I thank her and all my teachers at Audubon, JCTMS, and Male High for encouraging me to dream of bigger worlds and ideas.

I would also like to thank my parents, David and Jean Bow for their support and encouragement. Finally, I'd like to thank my husband, Bill O'Brien who I love and am grateful for every day. He encouraged me to thank Elly, our ever present and spoiled terrier who considers both of us her servants, food handlers, and comfort coordinators.

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