THE VISUAL AESTHETICS OF PRIVACY IN AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS AND ITS TRANSATLANTIC INFLUENCE

Karsten Fitz

Introduction

When comparing German and American political culture, especially the culture of election campaigns, what strikes the observer is the much higher media interest in the private lives of American political candidates, especially their family lives. This holds particularly true for the president: In the United States, personal character traits are often taken as evidence of the candidates’ political qualities and, by extension, of their credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity. This context, in turn, automatically requires a display of the private life—including the marriage and immediate family—of the potential leader of the country in order to demonstrate their allegedly apolitical, but nevertheless politically relevant qualities. Since the majority of the American public sees a direct link between a candidate’s private life and his/her public office, the boundaries between the private and the public sphere in the highest office become blurred. In this sense, a candidate’s private life seems to serve as a form of authentication of his/her anticipated public virtue when in office. Such a high degree of interest in the private and public images of the president in the United States would not make for similarly appealing stories in Germany, however, because, unless a candidate is involved in criminal activities, the public majority considers the private lives of politicians as largely irrelevant to their political capabilities. Although there might be a slight change under way since Gerhard Schroeder’s chancellorship (Holtz-Bacha 2001), the private life of politicians remains of comparatively little interest and, thus, needs little staging. By contrast, because the private life is so highly relevant in US political culture, it requires careful staging.

In this article, I will address the following questions: What does the American public see reflected in the candidate’s private life? What do American voters gain—or presume to gain—by translating the candidate’s private life into the public sphere? Which deeply rooted values and convictions are these expectations and projections based on? How does this interest in the private lives of political leaders impact US-American political culture and the interaction of politics and the media? Finally, revisiting the opening remarks, how have these concerns influenced European political culture?
By mainly focusing on the visual dimension, i.e., largely photographic representations, I will discuss the strategies employed by American presidents and presidential candidates for the staging of privacy in what is actually a public sphere. While these images of privacy are undoubtedly staged/performed constructions, they still need to be appropriate for the particular needs of the time and transmit an air of authenticity and credibility (Cornog 2004, 68; Fitz 2015). Thus, images of staged privacy of American political leaders reveal much about American political culture and the dynamics between the private and public realms at the time of their production. In other words, they reflect a reciprocal rather than a dichotomous relationship between the private and the public.

Approaching this subject from a distant, transatlantic perspective, three aspects have to be kept in mind as set preconditions. First, while in Germany, as in many other European countries, the legal protection of the right to privacy traditionally supersedes other concerns, in the United States the interest of an informed public is often given priority over a politician’s right to exercise their right to privacy. This is, of course, particularly true in the case of celebrities; the public has a legitimately higher interest and claims a right to be informed in these instances. This aspect is particularly relevant for American politicians, most of all the American president (Schroeder 2004).

Second, in this context, the production of the public image of presidential candidates and of the president, in particular, serves, from its inception, to plot a narrative, to tell a well-crafted story (Cornog 2004, 68; Fitz 2015). Apart from long-established partisan affiliation, which lately has become a less firm basis for their voting behavior, voters base their final decision to support a presidential candidate or to elect a president for a second term extensively on this story.

Third, certain systemic aspects, which will not be commented on in depth here, help facilitate the uniquely American approach to political culture, which is sometimes referred to as the “imperial presidency” (Schlesinger 2004): a presidential system in which the head of state, chief executive, and commander-in-chief are concentrated in one person; a two-party structure with the single-member district plurality congressional electoral system; campaigns that can last for up to eighteen months; and, lastly, the fact that the United States is a world power, so the American president is usually considered to be the leader of the Western world.¹

The president as national symbol

Karlyn Campbell summarizes the issue of the First Family as national symbol as follows:

As head of state, symbol of the nation, a figurehead who represents the country at home and abroad, the presidency is idealized, and its occupants and their families become models or culture types. They are Mr. and Mrs. America, an ideal First Family expected to represent cherished U.S. values.

(Campbell 1996, 188)

Robert Denton similarly speaks of the president as the “embodiment of the nation” (Denton 1982, 49)—both domestically and to the outside world. Thus, in a sense, the president, according to Louis Brownlow, represents “what we are” as Americans (Brownlow 1969, 36). Only by identifying the president in these terms does it become clearer why his private life has such high significance. Similarly, these statements support why, within the American civil religion, the president is often referred to in quasi-religious terms.
For the President is king in the sense of being the symbolic and decisive focal point of national power and destiny. The President is prophet in the sense of being the chief interpreter of national self-understanding and defining future endeavors. He is priest in the sense of incarnating the nation’s value, aspirations, and expressing these through his behavior.

(Novak 1992, 50–52; Hart 2005)

Such a quasi-religious dimension can hardly be found in any other Western democracy. At the same time, however, and this certainly has a paradoxical connotation, the American public wants to see the president as “one of them”—that is, a fairly “common man.” Thus, he or she has to bridge the gap between being exceptional and common at the same time, as presidential historian Thomas Cronin describes this phenomenon:

We like to think that America is the land where the common sense of the common person reigns. We prize the common touch, the up-from-the-log-cabin “man of the people.” Yet few of us settle for anything but an uncommon performance from our presidents. […] It has been said that the American people crave to be governed by a president who is greater than anyone else but not better than anyone else. We are inconsistent; we want our president to be one of the folks but also something special. […] We cherish the myth that everyone can grow up to be president—that there are no barriers, no elite qualifications—but we don’t want a person who is too ordinary. Would-be presidents have to prove their special qualifications—their excellence, their stamina, their capacity for uncommon leadership. […] A president or would-be president must be bright but not too bright, warm and accessible but not too folksy, down to earth but not pedestrian. […] We persist […] in wanting an uncommon common man as president.

(Cronin 1975, 13–14)

Many commentators accused Barack Obama of coming across as too intellectual and, thus, too aloof to relate to for the average American (Zuckerman 2014), indicating that the contradiction mentioned by Cronin is deeply rooted in American political culture—and at the same time hard to avoid.

These concerns suggest that certain elements of the moral role-model function of the American president go back to the Puritan roots in America. John Winthrop’s idea of the “city upon a hill” undoubtedly includes a claim to moral uprightness, which implies that the political leaders of the community, especially in a theocracy like early New England, are the brightest shining examples of moral integrity and a bulwark against the corruption of Old World decadence. I want to focus here on the claim to virtuousness as it emerged from the strongest source of this phenomenon of high moral standards: The American Revolution. As John Adams phrased it in 1776: “Public Virtue cannot exist in a Nation without private [virtue], and public Virtue is the only Foundation of Republics” (Adams 2014, 437). Adams directly goes on to explain that, by the same token, the private good has to be subordinated to the public good:

There must be a possitive [sic] Passion for the public good, the public Interest, Honour, Power, and Glory, established in the Minds of the People, or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real Liberty. And this public Passion must be Superiour to all private Passions. Men must be ready, they must pride themselves, and be happy to sacrifice their private Pleasures, Passions, and Interests, nay their
private Friendships and dearest Connections, when they Stand in Competition with the Rights of society.

(Adams 2014, 437)

It is precisely this revolutionary context and the value system of the Early Republic that facilitated the blurring of the private and public realms. In other words, if the private good was subordinated to the public good, then the political leaders in the newly founded nation also had to subordinate their private lives to the public good, and thus their private sphere to the public realm. In fact, this facilitates—even demands—to consider the private life of political leaders as the reflection of their larger virtues per se. As we know from such foundational texts as Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* and Thomas Jefferson’s *The Declaration of Independence*, King George III, the English king, was considered the embodiment of the moral decline of Britain in the same vein as George Washington was seen as the embodiment of virtue. Thus, Washington came to be perceived as model citizen and served as an ideal for future generations of political leaders in the newly founded Republic.

The most important concept in this context is the ideal of Republican Citizenship. It has served as a powerful cultural ideology in the United States since the emergence of American political culture during the American Revolution and it persists despite modernization. The fact that George Washington was frequently hailed—and is often represented—as American Cincinnatus during the revolutionary period and the Early Republic, demonstrates how closely the private and the public spheres have always been connected in American politics. Although the selflessly patriotic citizen-soldier as political leader has been replaced by various versions of the common man category in the meantime, the private lives of American presidents are still considered of immense importance in American political culture. Due to the fact that their private lives are expected to provide essential information regarding their capability to run the country, the American public takes for granted that the private sphere of political leaders is of public—i.e., media—interest. Against this background, it is not surprising that American politicians, presidents in particular, and their PR advisors have long taken over crafting the image of their private lives as it is presented to the public. In fact, such constructions can impact the success or failure of a political campaign.

As argued above, this image of George Washington as the American Cincinnatus was not only indirectly evoked but also explicitly expressed in art. This is the most important way of broadcasting ideas, because it is easily available for everybody. The statue created by Jean-Antoine Houdon, the most famous sculptor in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century, is the most evocative representation of George Washington as American Cincinnatus. A great number of especially French, English, and Italian sculptors were interested in manufacturing George Washington, who was by then an international celebrity. Through Thomas Jefferson’s recommendation in 1785, Jean-Antoine Houdon had been commissioned to create a marble statue of Washington for the rotunda of the new Virginia State Capitol in Richmond (Craven 1968, 166). There is common agreement that Houdon was gifted in achieving simplicity without becoming boring. This claim to commonness is also fulfilled in the statue of George Washington by depicting him as Cincinnatus. This is important for the motif because modesty (i.e., the relinquishing of power after the patriotic duty was done) and the simplicity of Cincinnatus—and hence of Washington—was regarded as part of the ideal virtue which both men embodied. Depicting Washington as a simple citizen is already expressed in the size of the statue. The challenge was to lift him to his proper level without elevating him above the people he represented, which is why the decision to make a life-sized statue was one of the first reached. This sculpture is the only statue Washington ever
posed for: When Houdon traveled to America, taking three assistants with him, he took measurements of Washington, modeled from his cast, and made himself familiar with Washington’s every physical aspect. When Houdon returned to Paris to work on the statue, he considered Washington’s opinion as well as contemporary tastes, and hence decided to dress Washington not in a toga but in his Revolutionary War uniform. Furthermore, they agreed not to depict him in a classical pose. So Houdon decided to create a Cincinnatus based on the common use of the motif (Wills 1984, 435–440; Fitz 2010, 101–110).

The statue shows Washington leaning on a column with his left arm and holding a cane in his right hand, showing the complex story of the retiring Cincinnatus in one frozen pose. Houdon catches the transformation from soldier to planter, from commander-in-chief of the Continental Army to “farmer”—in other words, from public figure to a private man. Thus, the selection of the paraphernalia surrounding Washington is also from both his civilian and military lives. He wears his uniform, which is an indicator of his service as commander-in-chief; however, he has already taken off his riding cloak and sword, which hang on the column. The cane George Washington is holding in his right hand is a reference to civilian life as a farmer because during that period, gentlemen farmers customarily carried them. It seems like he has just left the war, is on his way home, and is just taking a break to look after his farm. Symbolically, he is also just leaving behind his public duties by laying down the emblems of authoritative, civic power like the sword and parts of his uniform to return to his private life. However, if need be, so the statue suggests, Washington would be ready to use the sword again for the public good. The most obvious reference to Cincinnatus is the plow behind Washington, which suggests that cultivating the fields and returning to civilian life after doing one’s duty for the country is the foundation of a republican democracy, so that it is able to endure. This emphasizes the American conviction that the state and national stability are dependent upon the political authority of independent men of prosperity, whose wealth was rooted in the land (Bjelajac 2000, 145). The plow also helps Washington’s statue embody America’s agricultural self-sufficiency and the agrarian ideal, which Washington saw as a crucial element of America’s economic and political independence from Great Britain.

This pose of agrarian simplicity and sense of duty for the public good in the spirit of Cincinnatus was already articulated by Washington in his first inaugural address—the earliest and original official presidential statement on his motivation to accept the highest public office in the nation:

I was summoned by my country, whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love, from a retreat which I had chosen with the fondest predilection, and, in my flattering hopes, with an immutable decision, as the asylum of my declining years […] . On the other hand, the magnitude and difficulty of the trust to which the voice of my country called me, being sufficient to awaken in the wisest and most experienced of her citizens a distrustful scrutiny into his qualifications, could not but overwhelm with despondence one who (inheriting inferior endowments from nature and unpracticed in the duties of civil administration) ought to be peculiarly conscious of his own deficiencies.

(Washington 2009, 2)

With regard to the Cincinnatus theme, it is of great importance that Washington was called by his fellow countrymen to be the first president of the United States—i.e., that he did not actively pursue the opportunity to satisfy his political ambitions. In this context it is also crucial to note that Washington, as he lets his listeners know, had already retreated to the private
realm in order to spend his remaining years as a private man in Mount Vernon; then came the call that made him sacrifice this private idyll for the patriotic duty of guiding the country in the newly established office of the presidency. This gesture of modesty, which can frequently be observed among the Founding Fathers, especially George Washington and John Adams, implies a man living a virtuous life in the private domain, disinterested in pursuing a public office, yet always ready to take over public responsibility if need be. In his study on Washington, Barry Schwartz has aptly summarized the reasons that generated the high moral expectations in the political leaders in the Early American Republic:

The Americans’ concept of power [...] cannot be disassociated from their concept of virtue. Americans never tired of celebrating the merits of justice, temperance, courage, honesty, sincerity, modesty, integrity, calmness, benevolence, sobriety, piety, and rationality. Although these were the classically valued virtues, the function Americans assigned to them was historically unique. Early Americans politicized the traditional Roman and Christian virtues, by defining them as the counterweight to man’s lust for power. [...] Virtue does not speak for itself, to be known, it must be formulated in vivid, heroic images. And not any image will do—only one conceived in a recognizable way. [...] From the Old Testament derived the notion of Washington as “American Moses”; from the classics derived the image of Washington as Pater Patriae (Father of his Country) and “Cincinnatus.”

(Schwartz 1987, 114–116)

Various famous examples in the visual record of American collective memory capture this sense of moral leadership that was expected to come with political leadership. Two of the best-known examples are Edward Savage’s The Washington Family (1789–1796), exhibited in the National Gallery on Washington Mall, and John Trumbull’s The Resignation of General Washington (1822–1824), displayed in the Rotunda of the Capitol. Such paintings have strongly contributed to idealize, commemorate, preserve, and perpetuate the expectations early American republican citizens had about the American president and the First Family.

Such expectations of the American public in the moral integrity of its political leaders as well as the reflection of these leaders’ virtues in their private lives still have an enormously high currency in American political culture. To this day, these expectations seem to be largely absent in European political culture. Furthermore, the fact that these public expectations in the moral integrity came into crisis as a result of Watergate, the Vietnam War, and, arguably, also “Monicagate,” has not lowered the necessity of presidential candidates to display high moral standards. Quite to the contrary, in order to eliminate the potential for further Watergates (and other political crises attributed with the suffix “…gate”), candidates are expected to reveal more about their private lives and to stage privacy even more explicitly. Such performances become a necessity, so that candidates do not offer their political opponent any potential weaknesses that could be attacked in a campaign.

In his autobiography Why not the Best, published very timely at the beginning of his presidential election campaign, Jimmy Carter, for instance, formulated these high moral claims as follows:

It is time for us to reaffirm and to strengthen our ethical and spiritual and political beliefs. There must be no lowering of these standards, no acceptance of mediocrity in any aspect of our private or public lives. It is obvious that the best way for our
leaders to restore their credibility is to be credible, and in order for us to be trusted we must be trustworthy!

(Carter 1975, 154)

By explicitly stressing the importance of the ethically immaculate private sphere in American political culture for the public realm—and thus for the public office—Carter not only recognizes the political value of privacy but also explicitly demands from voters to openly examine a politician’s credibility and trustworthiness based on their private life. Thus, Carter’s open call to cherish family—much like Ronald Reagan’s public demand to pray during his two-term presidency in a country constitutionally based on the separation of church and state—contributed to the blurring of the boundaries between private and public moral values. The family, since the American Revolution imagined as the sector where moral values and virtues are taught, as expressed in the concept of Republican Motherhood (Kerber 1980), can thus be considered a window into a morally intact world that reflects public virtue as well.

The president “in private”

Concepts such as the American Cincinnatus are no longer available. These days, in order to identify with the president, the candidate needs to be perceived as “one of us,” as a common (wo)man—as “the average Joe” or “plain Jane.” On a rhetorical level, this authentication of the politician is often undertaken at the national convention or in campaign rallies, for example, by those who have known them their whole lives, very often family members or childhood friends—at any rate, somebody who knows the candidate primarily or even exclusively as a private person. On the visual level, a certain number of images reserved for the pictorial record have a similarly humanizing function when constructing or familiarizing the candidate as “one of us.” Within this kind of logic, the private life of a presidential candidate then also becomes a yardstick for the integrity of the person: Thus, the family or individual family members rather than political fellow travelers are not only taken as moral authorities to testify to the integrity of the candidate per se. More than that, they are often used as “authentic” sources to validate the truthfulness of the larger political program, as the family life can be perceived as a credible and microcosmical reflection of this agenda.

Ever since the late 1970s, “family values” have been on top of the programmatic agenda of presidential candidates (Stone 1994, 68–69). There is no exact equivalent to the American concept of family values in different European cultures, but the concept refers to a philosophical-political-social-moral worldview in the sense of the German term Weltanschauung, which represents basic convictions and core values (Weiss 2008, 42; Miedzian 2008) and can be considered a model of life in the sense of a Lebensentwurf. In fact, there does not even seem to be agreement any longer on what family values are in the respective platforms of the Republican and Democratic parties. Suffice it to say here that social and religious conservatives commonly—and the media mostly—refer to traditional morality or Christian values when using this term. These basic convictions and core values are based in the family as a (conservative) institution, including clear positions on often contentious topics like the role of men and women in society, abortion, or same-sex-marriage.

To evoke the impression that “he is one of us” is of central importance. To stop at a diner on a campaign tour for breakfast or dinner, introducing oneself with a casual “Hi, my name is Barack” (or Bill, or George) belongs to this category as well. Similarly effective is the spouse’s attendance at the children’s or grandchildren’s sporting events and eating hamburgers or hotdogs at a public stand. The latter activity suggests that the candidate does not prefer
haute cuisine: rather, it implies that “we are average Americans—like you.” The “average Joe” or “plain Jane” is someone voters can identify with. Barbara Bush was an excellent example for many of these functions when she stressed at the National Republican Convention in 1992, for instance, the long and strenuous days her husband, George Bush the elder, would spend ever so often in the dusty fields of Texas (quoted in Weiss 2008, 105). It has to be noted in this context that the Bushs in the 1990s were not cattle farmers in Texas but millionaires in the oil business and counted among the richest families in the country. In the same campaign, Barbara Bush said:

So before I introduce you to my family, please think a moment about your own families: about your dreams for your children; about your concerns for your parents; about your hopes for the future. Well, because I know him better than anyone else, I’m here to tell you: George Bush knows because we have the same dreams for our children and grandchildren.

*(quoted in Weiss 2008, 106)*

The message evoked here is essentially the following: “I, Barbara Bush, married to this ‘average Joe’ for more than 45 years, can verify that he is like you, that he cares deeply, and that he knows your concerns and sorrows.”

Similarly, Tipper Gore, in the 2000 presidential campaign, emphasized this “average Joe” theme by stressing that her husband, Democratic candidate Al Gore, visited every single one of his son’s football games in spite of the immense stress on the campaign trail: “Every one of them! I don’t really want to share that with everybody—it’s personal. But it matters that you know about this person’s character. It matters that he puts his family first. He will put your family first!” (quoted in Weiss 2008:106). By sharing this “personal” insight, the candidate Al Gore, always considered intellectually aloof, rather stiff, “humorless and pedantic” (Seifert 2012, 178), and merely a career politician, is presented by his wife as an everyman who not only “knows,” but “will put your family first”—much like Barbara Bush suggested about her husband eight years earlier. In other words, he will treat the nation like his own family.

Another instance of staging the “private” life of the Gores in order to make Al Gore appear more human was the somewhat clumsy and awkward kiss at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles in 2000. Though this attempt thoroughly backfired by rather confirming than disproving Gore’s stiffness and “robotic image” (James 2000), it does, after all, approve the need to perform a sense of privacy in the public sphere. The reason for going awry is not that “the kiss” happened, but how it was done or performed, which testifies to the importance of another aspect: the performed act must be credible in order to be perceived as authentic.

Altogether it is more likely that the voter perceives the voice of a family member as a less staged and more authentic source regarding the “real” values of a candidate than other sources, because these family members have known the person long before they became a politician. In the wake of such acts of authentication, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that some of the (prospective) First Ladies have presented themselves as much more traditional, if not conservative, with regard to their ideas of family values than they really are.

The First Family

Against this background of the family as an “authentic” mirror of a candidate’s values and agendas, images of the family and, where available, especially of the candidate’s children,
serve the important purpose of portraying the political leader “in private.” Although this kind of visual narrative, as many others, goes back to the portrayal of the private life of George Washington as particularly evidenced in Edward Savage’s eighteenth-century painting *The Washington Family*, it goes without saying that the practice of extensively portraying the president with his children was introduced during the Kennedy presidency. Of course, such an initiative requires a candidate young enough to still have small children living with him, which automatically excludes the vast majority of office holders. The fact that the tenure of the Kennedys in the White House, following the extremely conservative 1950s under Dwight D. Eisenhower, which also included the sad years of the communist witch hunt under Senator Joseph McCarthy, seemed to call for an age of change that coincided with television taking over a large part of the visual presidential narrative and thus opened the door into the private life of the First Family. As Christine Weiss points out, after the Kennedy years the role of the family in electoral campaigns changed for good, and it became not just an option but also a necessity to deliver details about the candidate’s family life (Weiss 2008, 23). With the exception of the Obama era, at no point in history would the family life of a president or a presidential candidate be so much at the center of attention. At a time when the job of the White House photographer was not yet as institutionalized as it is today, it was photojournalist Alan Stanley Tretick’s work for *Look* magazine, in particular, that brought the images of a young, happy, and harmonious family home to millions of Americans. As Louis Liebovich puts it, “[t]hey seemed to be the perfect family, the husband and wife everyone in the country wanted to be” (Liebovich 2001, 24). One of the most widely circulated of these Tretick images is the photograph of the president at work at his desk in the Oval Office with John, Jr., hiding inside the desk.

As curator Philip Brookman of the Corcoran Gallery of Art has put it, Tretick’s photographs of the Kennedys, “published in *Look* from 1961 to 1964, helped define the American family of the early sixties and lent Kennedy an endearing credibility that greatly contributed to his popularity.” It has become common knowledge that the Kennedys’ marriage was anything but perfect. However, this does not diminish the values the American (and, in fact, global) public projected on to the private lives of the Kennedys as First Family. Not only had the children now become part of the political narrative of the office holder, the newly established visual repertoire was also supposed to stay. As Pete Souza’s photograph of Sasha Obama hiding in the Oval Office shows, the Kennedy formula still works today.

In fact, even though the publicly displayed, happy, and harmonious family life of the Obamas seemed to be quite credible and authentic, this glimpse into the private life of the candidate was nevertheless strategically crafted as a promotional asset ever since Pete Souza took over the “making” of the visual Obama narrative. The image of Barack Obama as a caring and loving husband and father had thus already been well established before the first African American First Family would enter the White House. As is displayed by the comparison of the two photographs of children playing in the Oval Office, due to taking the Kennedys as a model, the script had already existed and only needed to be adapted.

Where the Kennedy children Caroline and John, Jr., had their pony Macaroni, the Obamas, just another average American family according to the public story, had their dog Bo. Such gestures, indicative of the average American family, abounded with the Obamas, and glimpses into their private lives seemed to confirm the public’s desire to see the First Family as “one of us.” For instance, already on June 16, 2008, the magazine *Us Weekly* introduced Michelle Obama, wife of then Senator and presidential candidate
Barack Obama, as their cover story. With the couple hugging each other and obviously deeply in love, the headline reads “Michelle Obama: Why Barack Loves Her,” only to explain in the subtitle how average they “really” are: “She shops at Target, loved Sex and the City and never misses the girls’ recitals. The untold romance between a down-to-earth mom and the man who calls her ‘my rock.’” The down-to-earthness that is stressed here as the couple’s main attribute and with which a larger public can easily identify, was stressed again a few months later in the same magazine, after the Obamas had actually moved into the White House. The February 9, 2009 issue came with the cover page titled “Secrets of a White House Mom,” firmly rooting the formerly high profile lawyer, who made almost twice as much money with the law firm Sidley Austin as her husband did as senator, in the domestic realm. Once again, the subtitle makes clear that Michelle Obama is just a common woman: “Michelle Obama’s keeping it real: Pottery Barn decor, no nanny, J. Crew fashion, romantic dinners. Inside the First Lady’s private world.” Michelle Obama is certainly anything but an average woman, yet it is important for the larger national public to be perceived as such.

From farmer to cowboy: The American president as common man

When it comes to evoking the image of the common man and a sense of connectedness with ordinary Americans, the following links can be drawn: What the image of the yeoman farmer did for George Washington and the Early Republic, and the image of the frontiersman achieved in the mid-nineteenth century (especially for Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln), the cowboy image certainly managed to accomplish in the twentieth century. As an exhibit on “Cowboys and Presidents” at the Autry National Center has shown, many presidents and presidential candidates have employed the cowboy image, most prominently Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, Lyndon B. Johnson, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush. However, no one has used the cowboy image more effectively than President Reagan (see Figures 20.1 and 20.2). First of all, as an actor, Reagan was best remembered for his cowboy roles before he would enter politics despite the fact that he only starred as the iconic cowboy figure in less than ten B-westerns and TV-series episodes. As governor of California (1967–1975), he manifested this cowboy image as promoter of small government, maximum individual freedom, welfare cuts, harsh treatment of the student protesters in Berkeley, a staunch pro-life stance, and capital punishment.

When he and his wife Nancy bought the Rancho Del Cielo near Santa Barbara in 1974, it was already decided that Reagan would not run for a third term as California governor. Rather, much like George Washington, who retreated into his private life as a simple gentleman farmer at Mount Vernon after his career as commander-in-chief during the American Revolution, Reagan retreated to his farm. However, the latter did so in order to prepare the next step of his political career: to run for president. During his two terms as president, Reagan would offer many iconic cowboy images (e.g. on horseback, like Pete Souza’s shot of the president on his favourite steed; Figure 20.1); however, the most widely circulated “private” image of Reagan, Michael Evans’ photograph depicting him wearing his cowboy hat (Figure 20.2), originates from his time of political interlude between retiring as California governor and being elected president of the United States. It also served as cover of Time magazine’s “Commemorative Issue” of June 14, 2004, published after Reagan’s death on June 5, 2004, implying that this is how future generations are supposed to remember this icon of conservative politics.
Sexual integrity as moral integrity

An entirely different aspect of the media focus on the private lives of presidents or presidential candidates, which emerges as a direct consequence of the public’s desire to imagine the First Family as the representative American family, is to equate sexual integrity with the candidate’s moral integrity. This kind of projection of the moral model-function includes the most intimate relations between the president and his wife, which cannot be found in a similar way in other Western democracies. Absolute faithfulness is expected from politicians running for public office, and the higher the office, it seems, the higher the expectations. As The New York Times put it succinctly in July 1980 in the context of denouncing Ted Kennedy’s earlier affairs:

A candidate’s sex life, in particular, is regarded not as a source of prurient interest but as a crucial indicator of his attitudes toward issues affecting women and families. If he neglects his wife, if he has affairs with other women [...] his behavior is considered not a private but a public concern

(quoted in Weiss 2008, 90)
That having an affair is considered a matter of public concern for political leaders, especially presidents, can be observed in several case studies, the most prominent of which are Bill and Hillary Clinton. It has been theorized that after Watergate even higher morality standards were applied to American presidents, which is also evidenced in the fact that, in the early 1960s, John F. Kennedy still got away with his unfaithfulness towards his wife Jackie. However, already a few years later (still before Watergate and the Vietnam War), in 1964, the favored Republican candidate for the presidential nomination, Nelson Rockefeller, was discredited because of an extramarital affair, as was Ted Kennedy in the 1970s and 1980s. A more severe example can be found in Gary Hart, who served as a Democratic senator representing Colorado (1975–1987) and ran in the Democratic primaries in 1984 and again in 1988. He was considered the most prospective frontrunner for the Democratic nomination until various news organizations reported that he had once had an extramarital affair. He practically dropped out of higher politics entirely after the disclosure of his unfaithfulness. Interestingly, the revelation of his affair came at a point when he had just been quoted in several newspapers that there is nothing interesting to be found in his private life. He withdrew his nomination after losing 15% in his support rate just before the important primary in New Hampshire (Weiss 2008, 100).

No doubt, the most prominent case in this context is the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. It emerged in 1998 from a sexual relationship between President Bill Clinton and the 22-year-old White House intern Monica Lewinsky. News coverage of this extramarital affair and the resulting investigation eventually led to the impeachment of President Clinton in 1998 by the House of Representatives and his subsequent acquittal on all impeachment charges of perjury and obstruction of justice in a 21-day Senate trial. Clearly, the media footage and the oppositional Republicans put “Monicagate” almost on the same level as Watergate, as the name indicates. However, the president’s job approval ratings remained stable on a rather high level, since the voters were generally satisfied with Clinton as a president. It is fair to assume, first of all, that it makes a big difference whether someone is running for the presidency or is already in office (see the “fall” of Gary Hart [Bai 2014]). Secondly, and equally important, commentators agree that Bill and Hillary Clinton teamed up for an extraordinarily successful image and scandal management. Thirdly, Clinton was and still is an extremely charismatic personality who knows how to handle the public. What might additionally have played a role for Clinton to get away with unfaithfulness at that particular point in time could be that, by the 1990s, the divorce rate in the United States was alarmingly high (at 50%). Divorce was frequently called “the plague” of the 1990s, and the fact that Hillary Clinton stood by her husband and her forgiveness might have been seen as a sign to counter that larger trend. As the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal also shows, in these cases of unfaithfulness in office, the First Lady can serve as a surrogate model for the public virtue of the president. More generally, however, the public frowns upon a barely working marriage in the White House; instead, they expect an ideally romantic one. In this context, the Obamas, for instance, certainly scored very high which is, once again, documented in many of Pete Souza’s photographs.

**A view from abroad: The Americanization of the private sphere in European politics**

In his seminal study on the changing nature of public culture and urban society in the modern world, *The Fall of Public Man*, Richard Sennett has written about the significance of the private life in the realm of politics:
Suicide in modern politics lies in insisting that “you need to know nothing about my private life; all you need to know is what I believe and the programs I’ll enact.”

To avoid suicide, one must surmount the disability to have a purely political will. (Sennett 1992, 270)

Knowing about a political candidate’s private life is arguably even more crucial in the age of social media and the digital revolution. However, this desire to invade a public person’s privacy is by no means merely a sign of modernity. As I have shown above, the tendency to establish an important interconnection between the private and public lives of political leaders has a rather long tradition in the United States. In fact, the tradition is as old as the nation itself; it goes back at least to the American Revolution and is certainly not a trend emerging only with the arrival of the media age. With the abundance of American trends and fashions traveling abroad in the age of globalization, the question arises how this tendency towards privatizing the public sphere has influenced European political culture. Christina Holtz-Bacha argued almost two decades ago that the more recent focus on the private sphere in politics is just another sign of the Americanization of the European political and media landscape. As Holtz-Bacha pointed out:

While, according to the Anglo-American understanding of the freedom of press, any regulation of the press, even where generally considered legitimate, is denied and the protection of individual privacy is subordinated to the need to inform the public, in Germany (and other European countries) the right to privacy is given priority over the right of the public to be informed.

(Holtz-Bacha 2001, 21; my translation)

In Germany, a particular protection is additionally guaranteed in the realm of the intimate private sphere. Holtz-Bacha mentions four main aspects that have assumed the function of putting the private life of politicians more center stage since the chancellorship of Gerhard Schroeder (1998–2005), who was first to openly stage his private life for political profit. These aspects, broadly speaking, serve a humanizing, a simplifying, and an emotionalizing function, and they contribute to a kind of brand awareness connected to the candidate (Holtz-Bacha 2001, 23–24). In other words, the long-time standstill agreement between the German press and the political leadership continues to be abrogated since the late 1990s. However, the level of attention paid to political leaders’ private lives is certainly highly diversified in different European countries: To this day, it is high in France, moderate in Germany, and almost non-existent in Russia. In 2014, the French media, for instance, were eager to report about President François Hollande’s separation from his partner, journalist Valérie Trierweiler, and his new relationship with actress Julie Gayet. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder’s four marriages (and three divorces) were not targets of extensive media coverage, and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s divorce from his wife Ljudmilla after 30 years of marriage went almost uncommented upon by the state-run media. His new relationship has neither been made official nor covered by the media. However, even though public interest in the private lives of the political establishment in France might be significantly higher than elsewhere in Europe, a connection between the private life and the political and moral values as practiced in the United States cannot be asserted for either Germany or France, as evidenced by many examples.
The European politician who has most obviously and very consciously cast himself in the fashion of American political culture was certainly former French President Nicolas Sarkozy. More concretely, there is no denying—as frequent comparisons by journalists have shown (Lechevallier 2006; Louis 2013; Meiler 2012)—that already early in his political career Sarkozy, as Secretary of the Interior, tried to copy John F. Kennedy’s style. Sarkozy, who “likes to think of himself as a great connoisseur of the media […] and well skilled at handling reporters assigned to follow his trail” (Lechevallier 2006), has remained faithful to this strategy ever since.

Most famously, Sarkozy’s portrait in the Paris Match edition of May 23, 2002 leaves no doubt as to whom the French president was mimicking (Figure 20.3): The image reveals obvious parallels between a photograph of John F. Kennedy and his son, John-John, published in Look magazine in October 1963, and the French magazine’s portrayal of an up-and-coming politician 40 years later. The caption in the French magazine even explicitly emphasises that the photo is a replica of the famous Kennedy picture (Paris Match 2002). Sarkozy’s self-promotional strategy of imitating Kennedy seems to have come full circle through the marriage to his third wife, Carla Bruni, in February 2008. The cover page of Vanity Fair of September of that same year, featuring a photograph of Bruni shot by Annie Leibovitz, assumes this connection by headlining the title story with the question: “Carla Bruni: The New Jackie O.?”. In a similar act of appropriating someone else’s iconic image, the presidential candidate Sarkozy, on the back of a white horse in the Camargue region during his first presidential campaign in the spring of 2007 (Figure 20.4), bears a strong resemblance to Ronald Reagan’s iconic image on his white steed on his ranch in California (see Figure 20.1).

Figure 20.3 (left) Nicolas Sarkozy as French Secretary of the Interior and “political celebrity du jour” (Lechevallier 2006) in May 2002 in a cover story of the French weekly magazine Paris Match (with his second wife Cecelia and their son Louis) Photo: Jacques Lange, Getty Images.

Figure 20.4 (right) Sarkozy in the spring of 2007, when he was presidential candidate for the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), as he visits a ranch in the Camargue region on the last day of campaigning Photo: Christophe Ena, AP.
Emmanuel Macron’s most recent political success in France as the newly elected French president was also immediately connected to the popularity and iconicity of two American presidents: John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama. In a contribution to the new social media platform Ze.tt, recently launched by the German national weekly Die Zeit, Nora Jacobs compares the personalities, the radiance, the willingness to promote change, the brilliance as speakers, and the social media campaigns of Macron and Obama. Most strikingly, the visual aesthetics of depicting Macron as a savior figure strongly resemble Obama’s depiction as savior, Jesus figure, or angel, often with a halo or halo-like illumination that has frequently been dismissed as mere coincidence (Scarry 2015) during his first presidential campaign and the beginning of his first administration. While this motif, as many other of the iconic Obama images, goes back to the work of Pete Souza, a sheer flood of images of Obama with this theme has emerged ever since. One of the much-discussed images of this kind was produced by EPA photographer Michael Reynolds (Figure 20.6).

While on the textual level the label “savior” is transferred from Obama to Macron, on the visual level a number of photographs of President Macron feature a halo that emerges in the form of one of the stars on the EU-flag (Figure 20.5), indicating the values of unity,

Figure 20.5 (left) President Macron with one of the stars of the EU flag in the background. The image was originally published with the following caption: “At any rate, the halo is properly in place” (Högele 2017)
Photo: Ludovic Marin (AFP).

Figure 20.6 (right) President Obama during a press conference in the White House, 11 March 2011
Photo: Michael Reynolds (EPA).
solidarity, and harmony between the nations of the European Union. Thus, Macron surfaces as much as savior of the European Union as did Obama as the great unifier aiming to bridge the deep gap between democrats and republicans, liberals and conservatives, at his surprise victory in 2008.

Even though there is much less evidence that Emmanuel Macron has consciously used John F. Kennedy as model to orchestrate his own career as there is, for instance, in the case of Nicholas Sarkozy, the parallels drawn by the international press are strikingly visible. French (Geais 2016), Spanish (Valderrama 2016), and German (Böhmer 2017; Handelsblatt 2017; Killy 2017; Link 2010) newspapers and magazines repeatedly draw this analogy, comparing the French president with the “golden boy” Kennedy and the Macrons as a political and private “team” with Jack and Jackie (Böhmer 2017), or relating the reform program of Macron to Kennedy’s “New Frontier”-campaign and likening the charm, intellect, charisma, mundane life style, and “picturesque boyishness” (my translation) of the French newcomer to the young JFK (Böhmer 2017). While many of these deliberations seem exaggerated, one of the leading German business newspapers, the Handelsblatt, makes a convincing observation about Macron’s appeal to his fellow citizens to “ask themselves every single morning what they can do for their country” (my translation). This plea bears a striking resemblance to John F. Kennedy’s iconic inaugural speech: “ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” It is likely that this phrase was borrowed, and not a mere coincidence.

In the German context, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, member of the Christian Social Union (CSU), emerges as a significant case of consciously crafting his career in the image of John F. Kennedy and simultaneously—and very deliberately—including the private realm in this construction. Between 2009 and 2011, zu Guttenberg, in many ways a model career politician, was persistently polled the most popular German politician. A member of the German Bundestag since 2002, he moved from Secretary General of the CSU (2008–2009) to Secretary of Trade (2009) and, finally, to Secretary of Defense (2009–2011) in a quick succession of promotions. As such, and until his fall from grace in March of 2011 due to the revelation by the media that he had plagiarized his dissertation, he was hailed the most prospective conservative candidate to succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor.

As the popular journalist and author Hajo Schumacher has pointed out in a contribution to the German daily newspaper Die Welt titled “Unsere Guttenbergs, die fränkischen Kennedys” (“Our Guttenbergs, the Frankonian Kennedys”), for a while Karl-Theodor and Stephanie zu Guttenberg took over the role of surrogate monarchs in the German public perception. As the new “dream couple” (Schumacher 2010; Wagner 2011) or “glamor couple” (Ridderbusch 2011), molded in the image of John F. Kennedy and his wife Jackie some 50 years earlier (Figure 20.7), the zu Guttenbergs “appealed to the perfect-world nostalgia of an estimated 80% of the German population” (Schumacher 2010; my translation). Katja Ridderbusch has termed this very phenomenon accompanying the zu Guttenbergs the “Kennedy-factor.” To cater to these desires, it might have helped that Stephanie zu Guttenberg is a great-great-granddaughter of Otto von Bismarck, founder of the German nation-state. It is important to note the symbiotic relationship at work here between an image-prone media industry creating and simultaneously hunting such Kennedy-like images, on the one hand, and the zu Guttenbergs only too willingly providing such images on the other. With a keen sense for the importance of the image in contemporary political
culture, according to Schumacher, “almost every single photo of the [then] Secretary of the Defense is a work of art representing the modern aesthetics of political power” (Schumacher 2010, my translation). This comparison to Kennedy goes so far that American politicians have drawn the same analogies. For instance, William Delahunt, a former U.S. Representative for Massachusetts and member of the Democratic Party, who worked with Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, stated in a 2011 interview with the Deutschlandfunk, a German public broadcasting radio station, distributing national
news and current affairs similar to NPR: “[Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg] has a wonderful wife and a successful career. He possesses many of the qualities that people attributed to Kennedy. I am sure that Secretary zu Guttenberg will have a great political future in Germany” (quoted in Ridderbusch 2011).

Stephanie accompanied Karl-Theodor to many official appointments, semi-official events (like the Oktoberfest in Munich or the Bayreuth Festival [“Bayreuther Festspiele”] in honor of the nineteenth-century German composer Richard Wagner), and TV shows. The couple was always extensively covered by the media images depicting them with their two daughters, staging them as the perfect modern family everyone wanted to emulate. Very much in the tradition of John and Jackie Kennedy with John-John and Caroline or, for that matter, more recently, Barack and Michelle Obama with Sasha and Malia, the zu Guttenbergs were projected as a model family in otherwise rather confusing and disorienting times.

**Conclusion**

As I have shown, the practice of “storying” and staging a narrative to establish an important interconnection between the private and the public lives of political leaders, especially of presidential candidates and their families, has a long tradition in the United States. In spite of the fact that “new media and new modes of storytelling make possible new ways of imagining” (Smith 2009, 280), the core elements implemented in more than 200 years of the American presidential story seem to be quite stable. Neither has the “power of the story” as such been diminished, nor have, by and large, decisively new plot elements or innovative stock characters been created. Consequently, new media or new modes of telling the narrative are not required to change the plot structure or to modify the repertoire of available characters. Rather, it seems that the principal ingredients of scripts needed to draft the presidential narrative have stayed pretty much the same. To this day, the private life of American political leaders has been used as a mirror reflecting core political values and ideologies.

At the same time, the French and German examples sketched out above show that American political culture continues to travel across the Atlantic and influences the political culture in the “Old World” as part of an Americanization of the European media landscape, as Holtz-Bacha suggests. Theorizations of the process of Americanization, such as those suggested by Winfried Fluck, repeatedly reminding us that “cultural material is never simply absorbed as a model of behavior but is reappropriated in different contexts for different needs and purposes” (Fluck 2004, 21). As such, the Americanization of European political culture, as Americanization per se, is not a one-way street. To be more precise, it is doubtful whether the values connected to such traveling images transporting political culture and, especially, the significance of the private sphere as part of that very political culture, have journeyed along with these images. What remains clear is that French and German political cultures are based on their own sets of historically grown and politically rooted values. Insofar, European politicians must continue to craft their individual images carefully in order not to be accused of political mimicry or even simulation, i.e., of imitation just symbolically employed without a genuine connection to the political or individual European context, running the risk of both blurring the political message and undermining the agenda of authenticity.
Notes

1 On a more anecdotal note, when I stayed in the United States for a year during the Gerhard Schroeder administration, I was frequently asked how Germans, an otherwise rather rational people, could possibly vote for someone who was divorced three times and was in his fourth marriage back then.

2 For instance, when Howard Dean ran for president in the Democratic nomination campaign of 2004, his wife announced that she would continue in her profession rather than touring in his campaign. This caused a major public uproar and setback for Dean’s candidacy, because this was not considered proper behavior for a prospective First Family.

3 These aspects alone, however, would not adequately explain the high degree of inquiry into the president’s private life. Suffice it to say here that several of these systemic aspects hold true for some Latin American countries as well, yet the presidents’ private lives play no significant role at all in these cases.

4 The function of the head of state as model of morality was first discussed by the English philosopher Lord Bolingbroke (1678–1751) in his work *Idea of a Patriot King* from 1738. Much lesser known as an important influence on the American Revolution than the philosophical works by John Locke and Charles de Montesquieu, Lord Bolingbroke saw the enlightened and impartial leader of the people, who guides through example in virtuousness and paternal authority, as an ideal (Weiss 2008, 93).

5 On the level of the average American during the American Revolution, the Cincinnatus-image could best be connected to the generic figure of the American yeoman farmer as Minuteman (Fitz 2010, 75–110).

6 Constantino Brumidi’s fresco *The Apotheosis of Washington* (1865), which is visible through the oculus of the dome in the rotunda of the United States Capitol Building, is the ultimate symbol of Washington’s moral impeccability.

7 This had its climax in the Republican counter-program to the first presidential campaign of Bill Clinton in 1992, never to vanish as a core political issue ever since.

8 Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher, better known by his nickname “Joe the Plumber,” gained national attention as model “average Joe” during the 2008 US presidential election campaign. During a videotaped campaign stop in Ohio by Senator and then–Democratic nominee Barack Obama, Wurzelbacher asked the senator about the tax policy regarding his small plumbing business. Obama’s response included the following statement: “When you spread the wealth around, it’s good for everybody.” Obama’s response was attacked by the conservative media as well as by his rival, Republican nominee Senator John McCain, as an indication that Obama was primarily interested in the redistribution of wealth and, thus, had a socialist agenda. Since he expressed to Senator Obama that he was interested in purchasing a small plumbing business, Wurzelbacher was given the moniker “Joe the Plumber” by the McCain–Palin campaign. The campaign subsequently took him to make several appearances in campaign events in Ohio, and McCain often referenced “Joe the Plumber” in campaign speeches and in the final presidential debate as a metaphor for middle-class Americans (Cox 2010, 87–89).

9 As Cornog points out, Gore was also perceived as being born for the presidency: “One reason Al Gore was such an unsympathetic character is that his life held so little drama—he was elected to the House at age 28, to Senate at 36, and to the vice presidency at 44. The very fact that he seemed to be (and to feel himself to be) destined for the White House is probably one of the major reasons he did not make it” (Cornog 2004, 26).

10 Public opinion consultant Erica Seifert has commented on “the kiss” as follows:

The character of Al Gore as wooden was so widespread, and the campaign’s attempt to dispel that image so well known, that when the candidate and his wife enjoyed a long and passionate kiss at the convention, the ensuing media frenzy focused only on its authenticity—they cared less about the kiss than whether it was scripted. In the days following the convention, the candidate and his campaign operatives made the early show rounds, defending the Gores’ spontaneity [...] Rather than examining the acceptance speech, the poll numbers, or the post-convention campaign trip, the media scrutinized the convention footage and demanded to know whether Gore’s advisors had mandated a timed practice rub with the candidate’s wife. For Gore, who had learned to joke about himself, this provided an opportunity to discuss his family and his image with the likes of some of the country’s most influential opinion-makers: talk show hosts.

(Seifert 2012, 178)
The visual aesthetics of privacy

11 The very fact that Michelle and Barack Obama were frequently portrayed in kissing poses (and other brief moments of intimacy), without being criticized for them, shows that the American public does not disapprove of the act of kissing as such, but rather its lack of credibility and authenticity.

12 In the presidential campaigns of their husbands, successful business women like Hillary Clinton, Tipper Gore, Teresa Heinz Kerry, and Michelle Obama stressed much more their motherly rather than their professional sides. This arguably suggests that feminist movements have bypassed the office of the First Lady.

13 Only with the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson did the access to the Oval Office become almost exclusively limited to the official photographers of the White House Photo Office (Bredar 2010, 14, 85–89).

14 See also the French politicians Nicolas Sarkozy and Emmanuel Macron as well as the German politician Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg in this context.

15 Pete Souza is an American photojournalist and was the Chief Official White House photographer for President Barack Obama as well as Director of the White House Photography Office. He was already a member of the White House Photo Office during President Ronald Reagan’s second term in the 1980s. Before his current occupation, he was a photographer with the Chicago Tribune (Washington bureau) from 1998–2007, during which he also followed the path of Senator Obama to the presidency, which he documented in The Rise of Barack Obama (2008).

16 On Ted Kennedy’s frequent affairs and his potential to run for president, The New York Times asked in July 1980: “A man who has a pattern of brief affairs is a child with an unending, babyish need to puff up his ego with adoration from new women. Is a person like that mature enough to govern the country?” (quoted in Weiss 2008, 99).

17 In January 2014, Hollande officially announced his separation from Trierweiler after the tabloid magazine Closer revealed his affair with actress Julie Gayet. At a press conference Hollande claimed that “private matters should be respectfully treated and remain private” (Süddeutsche Zeitung; my translation). Such a statement seems necessary since, as Anne-Sophie Lechevallier puts it, “this ‘celebritization’ of politicians and intense fascination with the private lives of public figures is commonplace among the French media.”

18 In April 2014, the Kremlin confirmed Vladimir Putin’s divorce. He has two adult daughters with his ex-wife Ljudmilla, who have never been officially introduced to the public. Well-informed circles have spread the news that his eldest daughter has recently had a son, which constitutes Putin as a grandfather. While the private life of the president in Russia is considered taboo, which means that it is not covered by the media at all, at his annual press conference in December 2014 Putin admitted to being romantically involved again, without mentioning his partner’s name. It is most likely though that the new lover is the former Olympic gold medal winner in rhythmic gymnastics and fellow politician Alina Kabajewa (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2014).

19 Again, former President François Hollande might serve as an example here. For over thirty years, his partner was fellow Socialist politician Ségolène Royal, with whom he has four children. They broke up in 2007, shortly before a French website published details of a relationship between Hollande and Valérie Trierweiler. After Trierweiler confirmed and openly discussed her relationship with Hollande in an interview with the French weekly Télé 7 Jours, she remained a reporter for the magazine Paris Match, but stopped working on political stories. Trierweiler moved into the Élysée Palace with Hollande as First Lady when he became president and started to accompany him on official travel. Neither of the two women, Royal or Trierweiler, has ever been married to François Hollande.

20 The caption to the photograph reads “la famille Sarkozy joue un remake des Kennedy. Comme John-John Kennedy jouait sous le bureau de JFK à la Maison-Blanche, Louis Sarkozy chahute avec le labrador Indi sous celui de Nicolas” (Paris Match 2002, 61). (The Sarkozy family plays or performs a “remake” of the Kennedys. As John-John Kennedy once played under the desk of JFK in the White House, Louis Sarkozy distracts his father Nicolas with the Labrador Indi [my translation].)

21 Accordingly, on June 17, 2017, The Economist released an issue with Emmanuel Macron on the cover walking on water and the title story “Europe’s Saviour.”

22 Already in Souza’s The Rise of Obama there appears a photograph of the then senator with the caption “The senator speaks at a town hall rally in Keene, N.H.” (Souza 2008, 140–141) with a halo-like light around his head.

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In March of 2011, zu Guttenberg resigned over the controversy related to his doctoral dissertation. Accusations of his doctoral thesis, “Verfassung und Verfassungsvertrag” (“Constitution and Constitutional Treaty”; University of Bayreuth, 2007), being plagiarized were initially denied by him. When it was found out that zu Guttenberg had used the Bundestag’s research services for the work on his doctoral thesis, he eventually stepped down, shortly after the University of Bayreuth withdrew his doctoral title.

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