



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the opening of the Thomas Mann House
in Pacific Palisades, U.S.
on 19 June 2018**

This is a wonderful moment for many of you here who have worked so hard for this day and with so much passion and personal dedication. It is also a wonderful moment for my wife and me personally, as well as for many of those who arrived late last night with us on our plane from Germany. And I firmly believe that it is also a wonderful moment for the time-honoured bond between our two countries!

This evening, the attention of our transatlantic community is on a different "White House". And indeed, this house was not only a family home, a place of thinking and writing, a centre of "Weimar on the Pacific", a hub of literature, music and art. No, it was also a political "White House", and Thomas Mann's study was, in many ways, the Oval Office of the émigré opposition to Hitler's reign of terror in Berlin.

Frido Mann told me about one of his earliest childhood memories, and this image really stuck with me. Standing in the sunlit house shortly before his fourth birthday, the little boy was feeling anxious because of the frantic telephone calls, hushed visitors and general sense of agitation all around him. It was 21 July 1944. The attempt on Hitler's life had failed. But as news of the previous day trickled in, the family did not feel disappointment or resignation, but rather a new-found hope that this must finally be the beginning of the end of the detested dictator.

I am grateful to you, Frido and Christine Mann, for giving us a memorable tour of this house on this wonderful occasion.

And, most importantly, I am grateful to the many, many friends and partners here in this garden who have made this wonderful moment come true: dedicated Members of the German Bundestag; passionate supporters in the Federal Foreign Office; the German Consulate General here in Los Angeles, and, of course, the whole Villa

Aurora team; and the generous contributors in the Berthold Leibinger Stiftung, the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung. Friends, thank you all very much!

I would also like to mention the neighbours. If there are any neighbours among us tonight, as President of the Federal Republic of Germany, I officially apologise for the construction noise. But in return, I promise that you are about to get some rather interesting new neighbours.

So let me welcome the inaugural Thomas Mann Fellows: Jutta Allmendinger, Yiannos Manoli, Burghart Klaußner and Heinrich Detering! Welcome to San Remo Drive!

I also want to remember a friend of ours and a friend of the transatlantic relationship, who was set to be among the inaugural fellows and who tragically died last fall. We all miss Sylke Tempel.

To all of the new fellows, I want to say that your work here will be important. You are going on this transatlantic journey at a time of political turbulence on both sides of the Atlantic, but also of turbulence between the two sides.

When I was preparing for this trip, I found a story from the post-war years in Thomas Mann's letters. In 1951, shortly before his second period of exile in Switzerland, Thomas Mann found himself caught between a United States descending into the paranoia of McCarthyism and a Europe that had been left physically and morally devastated by war. He shared his worries with another exiled writer, Erich von Kahler, who, in his reply to Mann, sounded similarly distressed but could not resist telling his friend the following caustic but rather funny story: "Two friends are crossing the Atlantic by ship, but in opposite directions – one from the US to Germany, the other from Germany to the US. Their ships happen to meet right in the middle of the ocean. As they pass each other, the two friends stand by the railing and shout at one another simultaneously: 'Are you mad?'"

I happen to know that one of our Thomas Mann Fellows actually did make his way to California by boat – but I don't know, Burghart Klaußner, if you met anybody at sea who was heading the other way. And of course, I can't say if anything would have been shouted.

Yes, these are turbulent times. But this makes your work as fellows even more important. To set the horizon for this important work, let me quote Thomas Mann's timeless words one last time and, for that, allow me to switch briefly to the original language: "Sofern es [...] um die Anpassung der menschlichen Gesellschaft an die Erfordernisse der Weltstunde geht, ist gewiss mit Konferenzbeschlüssen, technischen Maßnahmen, juristischen Institutionen wenig getan. Notwendig zunächst ist eine Wandlung des

geistigen Klimas, ein neues Gefühl für die Schwierigkeit und den Adel des Menschseins.“

My dear friends, I ask you to consider what other form of society would be more suited to this “difficulty and nobility” and the challenge and adventure of humanity than ours – a free and democratic society. The struggle for democracy and for a free and open society is what will continue to unite us, the United States and Germany.

That is why we acquired this house. And that is why we have made it so beautiful, comfortable and inviting. May the Fellows fill this house with the spirit of democracy and debates that build bridges between our continents. I will say more about these topics in my speech tomorrow. But for me, the main aim of this historic location and these new fellowships should be to transform the intellectual climate and foster a new spirit in which democracy will thrive. I am certain that Thomas Mann would be proud that his beloved home on San Remo Drive has a transatlantic future.

Thank you.