

David Gergen: Learning from the past and giving hope to the future

By Kyle Jackola
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An informed and intelligent discussion about politics is an increasingly rare colloquial art in the 21st century. Even more rare is the opportunity to have that discussion with a former Senior White House Advisor.

The Transylvania Country Library Foundation and Brevard College partnered together to bring CNN political analyst and former White House Advisor David Gergen to speak at the Porter Center as part of the 2013 J.R. McDowell Speaker Series on Thursday. Gergen's lecture "Eyewitness to Power: Leadership in America" allegorized stories from past campaigns and administrations to give audience members a sense of where the current political scene in America has come from, as well as the direction it is headed.

Gergen's political background as a White House Advisor and political commentator spans backwards over four decades when he began as a staff researcher for the Nixon Administration, and served in several other senior advisory positions under both Republican and Democratic administrations including former Presidents Ford, Reagan, and Clinton.

In his lecture to the public, Gergen recounted

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personal experiences with and inspiring stories about other past Presidents, many of whom he admired for their dedication to strong leadership and education. "I remember traveling to Missouri to visit the Harry S. Truman Library," said Gergen. "Truman was the only president of the 20th century who didn't have a college education...but he had a wonderful library growing up."



David Gergen, a CNN political analyst and former advisor to four U.S. presidents, spoke with around 30 Brevard College students, staff and faculty Thursday afternoon in MG 125. Gergen was on campus to deliver a lecture that evening in the Porter Center titled "Eyewitness to Power: Leadership in America." John Padgett

He told the story of Truman being advised by his foreign policy team about whether or not to recognize Israel as an independent nation during the late 1940s. After hearing arguments from both sides, Truman interjected and gave them a two-hour lecture, from memory, on the entire history of the Middle-East and its political structures. Gergen said a leader is more than a just a person who surrounds his or herself with educated people; leaders need to have a passion for education as well.

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Gergen spoke highly of America's mid-twentieth century leaders. His eloquent descriptions detailed the leadership of presidents who served in both World Wars, and painted a picture of intelligent men who cared deeply for the well-being country above their own political agendas and party platforms.

"There was something bigger about their person," said Gergen. "They were certainly

strong Republicans and Democrats, but they all thought of themselves as strong Americans first."

While visiting former President Nixon right before he passed away, Gergen recalled something Nixon said that summed up the analogous attitudes of the WWII generation Presidents. "When the chips are down, as Americans we stand up together," said Nixon. Gergen echoed the sentiment, saying their willingness to defy bipartisan boundaries and stand up for America and her people helped shape an era of strong effective leaders, and rightly earned them the moniker "The Greatest Generation."

While Gergen had criticisms for his generation of politicians, the ones in office over the last two decades, he said he remains a short-term pessimist, but an overall long-term optimist.

"The baby-boomer generation, which I am a part of, had great moments to be sure, but