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From the 'Archive of Horrors' to the 'Shop Window of Democracy': The International Tracing Service and the Transatlantic Politics of the Past in the Cold War Era

I am interested in how archives shape historical processes and my dissertation takes as its starting point the recently opened records of the International Tracing Service (ITS), which England and the United States established in 1944 to locate persons displaced during World War Two. Amid the escalating Cold War, however, the mandate underwent a significant transformation. I consequently examine how the United States and West German governments used the organization and its so-called archive of horror to promote and legitimize their political and cultural agendas between 1950 and 1956. Control over the ITS had immense practical and symbolic significance for both nations, and my research reveals its surprisingly influential role in the development of the Cold War; postwar relations among the West; and the early politics of memory in West Germany.

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