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Benjamin Hufbauer. *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005. x + 270 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1422-6.

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Hallowed Halls of Hagiography

America, too, has its Valley of the Kings. Not unlike the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt who erected pyramids and magnificent tombs to honor their memory, so too have American presidents since the end of the Second World War under the guise of presidential memorials and libraries. Benjamin Hufbauer offers readers a glimpse into this civil religion of the United States in his engaging and provocative book, *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory.*

Arguing that the twentieth century spawned the era of the imperial presidency, Hufbauer contends that the presidential libraries erected after the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt reflect the growth of the power of the executive branch as well as that of the public perception of the American presidency. Hufbauer's trim and highly readable analysis of this singular American phenomenon makes a significant contribution to the ever-growing genre of literature of public memory in the United States. It ranks alongside Edward T. Linenthal's *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* and Thomas Desjardin's *These Honored Dead: How Gettysburg Shaped American Memory.*

Based on the premise that these libraries are centered on the concept of valorization, Hufbauer crafts a skillful narrative that explores how presidential libraries were born, what they reflect at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and what direction future libraries might take. *Presidential Temples* is both an anthropological study and a historical narrative. In part this makes the book unique. The central theme that the author presents is that presidential libraries are often a one-sided construct focusing on "the higher purposes, meanings, and accomplishments of a particular presidency" while downplaying the more difficult or controversial aspects of that particular president's legacy. Within this context, family members, curators, boards of trustees, and other boosters of said president, as well as the Chief Executive himself, play a significant role in what artifacts are displayed, how those artifacts are displayed, and in many cases what archival material is available for researchers and scholars. In these venues history is not contested ground.

Offering case studies of the Roosevelt, Truman, and Johnson Libraries, Hufbauer builds an argument that these facilities not only mirror America's political and cultural self-image but also reflect the changes that shaped the scope of the presidency in the second half of the twentieth century as well as the expansion of presidential authority. As the presidency expanded so too did presidential self-commemoration.

Take the LBJ Library in Austin, Texas for example. The sheer size and architecture of the building parallel that of the man: big, expansive, and domineering. In this hallowed hall one cannot only see through LBJ's prism the history he believed he created but an allusion to democratic access as demonstrated in the stunning visual of the archival repository of documents in the Great Hall of Achievement complete with ceremonial staircase. Quite often Americans take comfort in the view that somehow our culture, our collective narrative, our ways of commemoration are more humble or more "democratic" than other cultures in human history. This could be no further from the truth. The civil religion to which we espouse demands that we build temples, memorials, and structures that reinforce the values we cherish. Presidential libraries as relics of American hubris play very much to this demand. Americans prefer to dwell on the optimistic highlights of the American ex-

perience and so too, do our Presidents. Hufbauer is not light on any president or facility.

To Hufbauer there is hope. Like the old proverb, "truth is the daughter of time," as we distance ourselves in time and space from these different presidents a more balanced narrative and construct will be developed. Taking a lead is the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. While visitors still initially encounter painter Thomas Hart Benton's *Independence and the Opening of the West*–in and of itself a particular illustrative construct that frames the entrance to the replica of the Truman Oval Office–unlike when it first opened visitors now encounter a more balanced interpretation of the Truman years within a broader scope of American and world history. In its particular reinvention visitors now wrestle in a thoughtful and tech-savvy way with issues such as Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb to end World War II, the role of civil rights, the cold war, the recognition of Israel, and other key topics germane to his presidency. Rather than left with one pat answer, people are challenged to think about not only the role of one president, but rather about the complexities of the job. Now that the cold war is over, we can place Truman's story within the parameters of history rather than selective memory, something which the original exhibit designers could not do. These topics are also addressed within the context of the opposition of the times. To help tell the still unfolding story, guests are encouraged to leave their reflections on the man and the exhibits in large bound flip books. Many do. The gem here is that future interpretation of Truman can be, in part, based on the impressions of countless visitors. In the end the Truman Library has discovered the value of a genuine public history, real education and not sanctimonious pabulum. Hufbauer believes that other facilities should follow the Truman's lead, noting in stark contrast the stories told at the Nixon and Reagan Libraries relative to Watergate and Iran-Contra. As a more educated public visits these libraries and museums more can be expected from the visitors than in previous generations. As such it is incumbent on presidential libraries and museums to foster serious critical thinking.

Even the role of the first ladies receives treatment by Hufbauer. In the charming chapter, "Celebrity and Power" Hufbauer examines the roles of the first lady with regard to commemoration. Here we find a careful study of the gender politics of Smithsonian's First Ladies Display, centered on various gowns, from its conception early in the twentieth century to its current place in American consciousness. As interpretation of American history broadened so too did the Smithsonian's offing, reflecting the changes within institutional structures by forces not necessarily within their control. As Hufbauer explains, "Displaying first ladies' dresses, without also displaying their accomplishments and power, risked reducing women to ciphers of vanity and narcissism that portrayed women bodily but neglected their minds, their power, and their continuing and increasing participation in political life" (p. 107). Like the Truman Library, visitor's today will find a far more complex exhibit on the first ladies, set within a social history context that asks viewers to consider the role of the first lady well beyond formal opulent settings and clothing.

Presidential Temples has opened the door to serious consideration of the roles of what heretofore Hufbauer aptly calls "a happy meal version of presidential history" (p. 173). It is well for the profession and the general public at large that the author raises difficult questions while challenging the status quo of such institutions.

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