

"WITH THE BARK OFF" THE INAGURUAL EXHIBITS AT THE LBJ
PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM

THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

“WITH THE BARK OFF”

On May 22, 1971, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum opened its doors to the public. The fourth and newest presidential library presented visitors with two floors of exhibits about the life and presidency of the thirty-sixth president, Lyndon Johnson. The travertine Great Hall in the middle of the exhibits offered visitors a window to forty million documents in the archive that recorded Johnson’s life and presidency. In his dedication speech, President Johnson notably remarked that his library and museum would preserve the history of his administration and its time “with the bark off.” Johnson wanted his library and the materials within to convey the “facts” of his administration, “both good and bad.”¹ However, President Johnson’s concern for how people would remember him betrayed a need at odds with the President’s forceful personality—the need to be liked.

President Johnson and Mrs. Johnson (who played an active role in library planning) began thinking about their library after the 1965 inauguration. The Board of Regents of the University of Texas approached

¹ Lyndon Baines Johnson, “Remarks at the Dedication of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library,” Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, May 22, 1971.

President Johnson in February of 1965 with an innovative proposal. The University offered to house the Presidential historical materials in a building they would pay for on the University campus. As was the precedent with previous presidential libraries, they would turn the operations, exhibits and collections inside the building over to the National Archives to maintain, but unlike other presidential libraries, the University offered to establish a school of politics and public affairs in the President's name and to build an adjacent and physically connected building to house the school. The President accepted the proposal. In a letter dated August 9, 1965, Johnson expressed his hopes for the future of the institution, saying, "I am particularly concerned that the generations that follow us should have the opportunity for detailed analysis of those historical records from which can be derived a full understanding of the momentous years through which we are passing."² Though President Johnson was likely referring to the archival material in his library and the research that the public affairs school would encourage and produce, these same hopes could apply to the exhibits of the library, which see a much larger audience than the papers ever will.

I became interested in the first exhibits of the library during an internship in the library's museum collection, which happened to coincide with the arrival of a new library director. As the new director began talking about re-designing the permanent exhibits, discussions about LBJ's

² Johnson, Lyndon Baines, Lyndon Baines Johnson to University of Texas Board of Regents, 9 August 1965. Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

presidency and public opinion soon followed. It seemed to be no coincidence that shifts in public opinion regarding LBJ and his presidency and redesigns of the permanent exhibits at the LBJ Library occurred every ten years or so. As the staff began discussing how to best present LBJ's administration to an audience that was growing more and more distant from the events of the administration, talk turned to legacy keeping. Members of the library staff and the LBJ Library Foundation, especially those directly involved in the creation and funding of the long-term, permanent exhibits, felt strongly about promoting the "legacy of LBJ." Initially, the idea of "legacy keeping" seemed directly at odds with the mission and purpose of a history museum. It implied, if not articulated an agenda on the part of those doing the keeping.

The concept of historical objectivity has to be considered when analyzing how exhibits are created and the process of selecting the stories they tell. Within the presidential library system, objectivity is further muddled by the ways in which exhibits are funded. The ratio of federal and private funding in presidential libraries varies from library to library. For the most part, the non-profit foundations associated with each separate library pay for museum exhibits and programming. At the LBJ Library, the University Of Texas Board Of Regents served as the first incarnation of the Foundation and were the ones to help produce the first exhibits. Because of their ongoing active role in the foundation, the first daughters continue to have a major voice in how their father is remembered and commemorated.

The fact that the federal government funds presidential libraries further complicates the roles of exhibits in those libraries as their association with the federal government makes the exhibits “official.” By examining the forms in which memory, civil religion and national identity are presented in public context, public historians have come to understand how the process by which selective commemoration creates a shared national identity.³ The role of a federal agency in the memorialization of both presidents and the office of president remains contentious because of the reputation the federal government has as creators and perpetrators of an incomplete, or sometimes even mythical, shared past.⁴

One of the primary mechanisms for communicating a shared past is the public exhibition. The question of the influence of presidential library exhibits led to two works that raised additional questions and would help define this research: Sharon Fawcett’s article, “A View from the Center,” and Benjamin Hufbauer’s *Presidential Temples*. Both works emphasized the role of presidential libraries in “civil religion”⁵ and memorialization, and argued that the exhibits were one-sided and imperial, raising the broader issues of memory and national identity. However, these works did not account for the era which created presidential libraries or account for who created them.

³ Kammen, xii.

⁴ Ibid, 532-534.

⁵ Hufbauer, 14.

The LBJ Library's origin, and the turbulent era in which Johnson was president, make it an interesting case study for the process of representation and memorialization in a presidential library setting. The time period is also ideal for examining the roles such exhibits play in reinforcing a national identity and strengthening the office of the President. As research on memory and national identity suggests, the Cold War era was especially conducive to creating a selective memory of an American past. I chose to study the first permanent exhibits at the LBJ Library because they were the most representative of this era.

Studying the first exhibit provided a window into the office and the man who served and approaching the exhibits as though analyzing an artifact creates a unique perspective. Much of the exhibit was planned before LBJ decided not to seek a second full term as president. The planning of inaugural exhibits during an administration and the brief time between the conclusion of a presidential term(s) of office and the exhibits' completion make objectivity impossible at any of the presidential libraries. Most of these institutions open within five years of the president leaving office. This abbreviated period counters the widely accepted thirty to forty years requisite to analyzing historical subjects.

This lack of objectivity is at the heart of much of the criticism regarding the libraries. However, these criticisms are not limited to the public history, museum or library exhibit functions. Since its opening, the

LBJ Library has drawn criticism for being a shrine to LBJ. Much of this criticism focuses on the library as a whole and the way in which, from its inception, the planners, decision makers, content and exhibits represented President Johnson and his administration.

In his article "The Museum a Temple or the Forum," Duncan Cameron argues that museums underwent an "identity crisis" at about the same time that the LBJ Library opened. According to Cameron, the museum shift from private collections to public institutions in the late 1800s and early 1900s eventually created public expectations that the "message" or interpretation of the objects would reflect the morals and social norms of that society. The institutionalization of museums created "temples" where "those responsible for organizing and structuring the collection were members of an academic, curatorial elite."⁶ The problem lies in the fact that "the value systems that determined not only the selections of material but also the priorities for its presentation tended to be the value systems of the middle class if not an upper-middle-class elite."⁷

Cameron argues that a museum "must be steadfast in its insistence on proved excellence, on the highest possible degree of objectivity in selection,

⁶ Cameron, Duncan. "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, Gail Anderson, ed. (Walnut Creek, California: Alta Mira Press, 2004) 66.

⁷ Ibid, 66.

organization and interpretation.”⁸ For Cameron, this created a second type of institutional identity for museums – that of forum, where society can “confront established values and institutions.”⁹ Cameron holds that the forum is accessible and inclusive to all members of society, providing an opportunity to criticize and reinvent perceptions about the past and the present. Both of Cameron’s models – the temple and the forum – can be applied to the LBJ Library.

The architecture of the library fits the “temple” motif in both appearance and symbology. Like many ancient temples, the building sits on a hill. Situated on the east side of the University of Texas campus, the open plaza in front of the library overlooks the rest of the University campus. The exterior walls are made of giant slabs of travertine marble. Visitors must cross an open, unprotected plaza where the daunting physical structure confronts them. Three reflecting pools were the only features of the empty plaza at the time of the library’s opening. Since its early days, critics and proponents alike have compared the library to a pharaoh’s tomb. The exterior of the LBJ Library reinforces the ideas of authority, power, knowledge and elitism.

This analysis begins with a discussion of the architecture and architect. It is impossible to consider the role of museum exhibits without considering the places that house them. Understanding the full impact of the first exhibit at the LBJ Library requires studying the creation of the building

⁸ Ibid, 67.

⁹ Ibid, 68.

as well as the creation of the exhibits. Since the opening of the library, critics have echoed the charge that the library serves as an uncritical memorial and much of that criticism focuses on the monolithic structure of the building.

President Johnson's larger-than-life personality made it easy to tie the building to his persona. One critic called the library "LBJ in Travertine."¹⁰ Despite the fact that many saw the building as a representation of LBJ, he actually had surprisingly little to do with the design or content beyond approving the work of others. In reality, three factions were involved in the process of creating the library: the architect and exhibit designer, the University Of Texas Board Of Regents, and Mrs. Johnson, who from the beginning represented LBJ's interests and would continue to act as caretaker for his legacy after his death.

If the outside of the building is the temple, then the inside of the building is the forum where public perceptions of Johnson continue to shape how he and his administration are remembered. Mrs. Johnson's displays sought to present visitors with more than a political portrait of her husband. Instead, the exhibits showed the many sides of LBJ, not just focusing on the five years he served as president. Because of the choice to present President Johnson in such unexpected complexity, the initial exhibits allowed visitors to access both the man and the office in ways that had not yet been explored at presidential libraries.

¹⁰Molly Ivins, "A Monumental Undertaking," *The New York Times*, 9 August 1971.

A close examination of the exhibits, how they were created and by whom follows the analysis of the architecture. Lady Bird Johnson took a lead rather than secondary role from the outset. While she appreciated the advice of advisors, she did not simply do as they suggested. She asked questions and she knew what she wanted. When she did not agree with something, she would try to persuade others to her side. When that did not work, she would ask the president to intervene on her behalf. This limited role summarizes President Johnson's involvement beyond a few preliminary discussions about how he would like to be remembered. A close examination of this process reveals aspects of all of those involved. The question then becomes what role did each play, what stories were they trying to tell or to hide and to what extent were the stories they told meant to create a consensus about the Johnson administration and President Johnson.

Recognizing the value of these institutions and their histories becomes more important as the future of the presidential library system becomes more uncertain. This research coincided with the passing of "The Presidential Historical Records Preservation Act of 2008." Section 6 of the Act addresses the continuing need for capital improvements to the Presidential libraries. This act addresses the rising costs of maintaining staffs and facilities at individual repositories for presidential records. Subsection 6 (C) of the act requires the Archivist of the United States, with the help of an advisory committee, recommend "one or more alternative models for presidential

archival depositories that –(1) reduce the financial burden on the Federal Government; (2) improve the preservation of presidential records; and (3) reduce the delay in public access to all presidential records.”¹¹ In September of 2009, the National Archives released a report that proposed four different models that would revise the administrative structure of the Presidential Library system. Two of the four models call for eliminating the community based libraries and replacing them with centralized repositories in Washington, D.C.¹²

Senate committee hearings regarding the presidential library system are still ongoing. Although the community-based libraries still function under the purview of the National Archives, current economic conditions make the future of presidential libraries even more uncertain. Despite the perceived lack of value implied by the Act, presidential library exhibits offer important insight into the lives of the presidents and the eras in which they served.

Ultimately, the LBJ Library works as both temple and forum. Even after forty years, the architecture more than lives up to visitors’ expectations of a temple to the larger-than-life President Johnson—a timeless memorial to LBJ and the Cold War era that found such civic displays a necessity to affirming a shared past. At the same time, within the solid walls, the

¹¹Senate, *The Presidential Historical Records Preservation Act of 2008*, S. 3477, 13 October 2008.

¹² National Archives and Records Administration, “Report on Alternative Models for Presidential Libraries,” 25 September 2009.

dynamic nature of the exhibits ensured a broad appeal to visitors. The dualistic nature of the LBJ Library makes it an important artifact in both the history of the president and the history of the era.

CHAPTER ONE

"FOR ALL TO REVIEW AND EVALUATE"

At the opening of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum on May 22, 1971, LBJ stood before a crowd of handpicked local, national and international dignitaries whom LBJ considered colleagues during his political careers, and said, "There is no record of a mistake, nothing critical, ugly, or unpleasant that is not included in the files here. We have papers from my forty years of public service in one place, for friend and foe to judge, to approve or to disapprove."¹³

Since that date, the LBJ Library has shared the administration of one of the most polarizing presidents in recent history. Public opinion regarding Lyndon Baines Johnson veers wildly between positive and negative in the years since he left office. Many blamed LBJ single-handedly for years of unnecessary conflict in Vietnam, the deaths of thousands of soldiers, the radical politics of the last decades of the twentieth century, and billions to trillions of dollars of national debt due to spending on his Great Society programs. LBJ recognized the fact that history would judge him, and openly expressed the hope that historians would achieve a middle ground amidst the many voices of criticism. Because both LBJ

¹³ University of Texas Press Release, May 22, 1971, "5/22/71, Remarks by Lyndon B. Johnson at the LBJ Library Dedication," Statements File, Box 300, LBJ Library, Austin, TX.

and Lady Bird Johnson were conscious of the controversial place in history LBJ and his administration would occupy, the general idea of “legacy keeping” was an integral part of the planning of the LBJ library and the work that would occupy Lady Bird for the last forty years of her life.¹⁴

The years of the Johnson administration, 1963-1968, remain one of the most controversial times of the twentieth century and the scholarship on this period remains an equally divisive topic for researchers. Johnson’s presidency is flanked on one side by his civil rights legislation that some have suggested ended the progressive liberalism made popular by Wilson and FDR; and the other side by the tragic career-ending legacy of the Vietnam war¹⁵. Millions of words have been written about both the man and his presidency, and with a presidential library of over 45 million archival holdings that is still releasing declassified information, the topic of Lyndon Johnson’s presidency will continue to be a popular one for scholars and popular writers alike.¹⁶

In a Summer 1997 article in *Political Science Quarterly*, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. addresses the history of ranking presidents and discusses a new poll given to “leading” historians asking them to rate the Presidents by ranking differing aspects of their personalities and how they did while in office. In the

¹⁴ Jan Jarboe Russell, *Lady Bird: A Biography of Mrs. Johnson*, (New York: Scribner, 1999) 302-315.

¹⁵ John Bullion, *Lyndon B. Johnson and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Pearson Longman Publishing, 2008) 133-136.

¹⁶ National Archives and Record Administration ‘Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum Homepage’ : <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/> [accessed 12/6/08]

introduction to the newest rankings, Schlesinger reflects on what traits make great presidents and ponders how the rankings change from decade to decade. He also outlines the various polls taken every decade or so since Arthur Schlesinger, Sr.'s first poll in 1948.

Specifically, Schlesinger addresses what he calls the issue of "disjunction," by which certain presidents "could be considered both failures *and* great or near great."¹⁷ Schlesinger argues that those presidents ranked highest and lowest remain at the top and bottom of the spectrum. However, those ranked in the middle, particularly LBJ and a few noted others, varied from decade to decade, usually depending on the ranking criteria and how the respondents were asked the questions. The lack of consensus among historians is magnified compared to public opinion, making consensus or middle ground impossible.

Despite the numerous works on both LBJ and his presidency, the real LBJ remains elusive. One of the main bodies of literature on the Johnson administration is biographies or memoirs of members of his administration, mostly written in the two decades following Johnson leaving office¹⁸. Robert A. Divine, as part of a literature review for his book *Exploring the Johnson Years*, argues that these books are often unreliable because of the amount of influence

¹⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr, "Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton," *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no 3 (Summer, 1997) 183.

¹⁸ Most notably, these works include books by George Reedy, Harry Middleton, Joseph Califano, and Doris Kearns Goodwin. There are legions of works on LBJ's life and presidency. The most notable are Caro's trilogy on LBJ's life, Robert Dallek's two-book series, *Lone Star Rising* and *Flawed Giant*, and most recently, Randall Woods' *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (which some would argue is the most balanced).

that Johnson held over those writing them. Divine colors the early literature as “one-sided” and “influenced” by Johnson, either positively or negatively.¹⁹ Biographies of the 1980s and 1990s are a counter to the personal memoirs of those directly involved with the administration. Works like Robert Caro’s three book series on LBJ and Robert Dallek’s *Flawed Giant* aim to shed light on the “character” of LBJ through primary source material that does not always reflect the multi-dimensional properties of LBJ’s personality. Divine reiterates the fact that liberal and conservative opponents equally denigrated Johnson. Most of these works portray Johnson as an ambitious man whose domestic policies represented his stubborn pursuit of issues of vital personal importance.

The search for an authentic representation of the man and the President makes interpreting LBJ’s life complicated, even at his Presidential Library. The change in permanent exhibits at the LBJ Presidential Library each decade reflects the difficult nature of creating an exhibit that balances public opinion with relevant and factual information as the focus of each exhibit shifts to include or exclude more or less of LBJ’s foreign and domestic policy depending on what topics are popular. While the timing of the exhibit changes generally coincides with the shift in opinion of the Johnson presidency, it is also illustrates the increasing complexity of its subject. Mrs. Johnson and a crew of aides, designers

¹⁹ Robert Divine, ed. *Exploring the Johnson Years*. (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1981), 4. Robert Divine’s series, *Exploring the Johnson Years*, is a compendium of works on the administration gathered at a symposium hosted by the LBJ Library and the University of Texas in 1980. These works represent a first shift in the historiography of LBJ and his political career, but with only nineteen intervening years since the end of LBJ’s political career, it could be argued that they still lack any objectivity.

and university officials created much of the first exhibit in the final years of LBJ's presidency. The criticisms of this exhibit focused on the obvious lack of objectivity inherent in creating an exhibit around current events and current public figures. However, this lack of objectivity and the fact that the exhibit was created by those intimately involved in the events creates an interesting case study of both the process of creating a presidential library and its exhibits and for examining the ways in which the library museum exhibits shape memory and highlight the relationship between history and public history in memorialization.

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born on August 27, 1908 in a little house that his grandfather built on the banks of the Pedernales River in Blanco County, Texas. LBJ was the first of five children born to Sam Ealy Johnson, Jr and Rebekah Baines Johnson, and LBJ's childhood was typical of this time. Biographer Randall Woods describes LBJ's father as a "state politician" and notes that Sam Johnson's political career was a contentious issue between Johnson's parents since LBJ's mother felt that her husband should be more ambitious by running for a U.S. Congressional seat. LBJ's mother was a severe woman who used her affection as a means of manipulating those around her, and Kearns credits the need to win his mother's affection as a driving force behind LBJ's later ambitions.²⁰

²⁰Woods and Kearns both describe LBJ's relationship with his mother in some detail and both discuss the ways in which she pushed LBJ through emotional manipulation. Though the Kearns biography is useful because of Kearns' access to LBJ, the Woods biography is more thoroughly researched and considered the more balanced and scholarly of the two. I use the Kearns biography carefully for direct quotes from LBJ about his life.

LBJ grew up in the small town of Johnson City, Texas, a few miles away from the small house in which he was born. The Johnson household was boisterous and was often a center of activity for local town's people. Rebekah Johnson, whose father and grandfather were both ministers, held elocution lessons on her front porch and stressed the importance of a good education to her children. Johnson's father, who served five terms in the Texas legislature, often came and went with a crowd of people. LBJ recounted the excitement of accompanying his father to one of the legislative sessions in nearby Austin, Texas, saying, "I loved going with my father to the Legislature. I would sit in the gallery for hours watching all the activity on the floor and then would wander around the halls trying to figure out what was going on."²¹ A member of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, LBJ's father could also be credited for his son's Democratic political leanings.

In 1926, LBJ moved to San Marcos, Texas to attend Southwest Texas State Teachers College, which served as a testing ground for LBJ's future political career. At the college, LBJ served as editor of the school paper and was heavily involved in school politics. He quickly ingratiated himself with the president of the college by gaining the position of the president's secretary. LBJ used this position as both a means of courting favor with the leaders of the college and as a way of gaining political advantage amongst other students.²²

²¹ Kearns, 36.

LBJ's first real political battle would occur at Southwest Texas State Teacher's College when he decided that the student athletes and their fraternity, the Black Stars, had too much political power. Deciding to cast themselves as the good guys, LBJ and several friends formed their own organization, the White Stars, and picked a candidate to run against the Black Stars in the student body president election. LBJ spent weeks campaigning for his candidate and perfecting the maneuvering and machinations necessary to run a campaign. The lessons learned here would serve him well in the years to come.²³

During his sophomore year at Southwest Texas State Teachers College, LBJ left to serve as principal of the Wellhausen Elementary Ward School in Cotulla, Texas and later taught at Sam Houston High School in Houston.²⁴ These experiences provided LBJ with empathy for the plight of the poor and stressed the important role of education. In his presidential memoir, *The Vantage Point*, LBJ articulates the need for education, saying, "I believed a program that eliminated poverty – or even reduced it – would strengthen the moral and economic fiber of the entire country."²⁵ More personally, LBJ's compassion and caring for his disadvantaged students is obvious in a letter he wrote to his

²² Woods, 52-65.

²³ Ibid, 52-65.

²⁴ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 88.

²⁵ Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston (New York: 1971).

mother from Cotulla, asking her to send toothbrushes for every member of his class because they could not afford them²⁶. LBJ eventually returned to Texas State Teacher's College where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in August of 1930.²⁷

LBJ's professional political career began when he took the position of legislative secretary to Congressman Richard Kleberg in 1930. In Washington D.C., LBJ became president of the "Little Congress," a semi-official social organization of Congressional aides, lobbyists and newspaper reporters. Through the Little Congress LBJ formed some of the political alliances that would serve him through his bid for president, including a close, personal friendship with House Speaker Sam Rayburn, who LBJ considered a second father.

Through his close association with Texans Sam Rayburn and Vice President John Nance Garner, LBJ became head of the Texas National Youth Administration in 1935. The National Youth Administration, a New Deal program administered through the Works Programs Administration, gave both young men and women part-time employment that also provided on-the-job training. Like many other experiences LBJ had in his early career, the National Youth Administration reinforced the idea that education was an essential part of defeating poverty. This influenced later programs created by LBJ like The

²⁶Lyndon Baines Johnson to Rebekah Johnson, LBJ Papers, Family Correspondence Box 1, LBJ Library, Austin, TX.

²⁷ Woods, 65.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which established the Head Start program and the Higher Education Act of 1965 that provided federal funds to universities to help make college more affordable to lower income families.²⁸

It was also during this time that LBJ met and married Claudia Alta “Lady Bird” Taylor. Lady Bird grew up in Karnac, a small town in East Texas, where her father owned several businesses. Her mother passed away when she was young, and Lady Bird spent some of her childhood at an aunt’s house in Alabama. After graduating from high school, Lady Bird attended the University of Texas, where she graduated with honors, studying both history and journalism. The two began a whirlwind romance and married on November 17, 1934 in San Antonio just ten weeks after meeting. Like many of his relationships, LBJ’s relationship with Lady Bird was complicated. Mrs. Johnson told biographer Jan Jarboe Russell, “There is no way to separate us and our roles in each other’s lives.”²⁹ Despite the very public nature of their relationship, Lady Bird Johnson strove to protect both their privacy and the reputation of her husband even after his death.³⁰

In 1937, LBJ ran for and won his first elected office to the House of Representatives from Texas’ Tenth Congressional District. LBJ would serve as Congressman until he won a Senate seat in 1949. During his time in the House,

²⁸ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 123.

²⁹ Jan Jarboe Russell, 13.

³⁰ Notably, Russell mentions that Lady Bird Johnson refused to answer any further questions for the biography after Russell asked about LBJ’s infidelities.

LBJ developed a close relationship with President Franklin Roosevelt. LBJ spent most of his time in the House serving on committees, including the Naval Affairs committee. Fellow Congressman, John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, noted, "His interest in committee work on the floor of the House clearly marked him out as one who was destined for greater responsibility and higher honors."³¹

LBJ served as an officer in the Navy during World War II. According to Dallek, LBJ never trained for the officer commission that he received in 1940. However, because of his position on the House Naval Affairs Committee, the Navy sent him to the Under Secretary's office to assist with "manpower and production problems."³² LBJ eventually saw combat when he went on a month-long assignment in the Pacific in 1942. Johnson visited MacArthur in Melbourne, Australia and was in a B-26 firefight that earned him a silver star.³³

In 1949, after a second attempt, LBJ finally defeated W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel for a Senate seat.³⁴ O'Daniel alienated his political base prior to the 1949 election, leaving the race wide open. Dallek contends that Johnson, one of several early candidates, debated about whether or not to run because the race would cost him his seat in the house and a defeat meant a return to Texas and

³¹ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 164.

³² *Ibid*, 231.

³³ *Ibid*, 239-240. LBJ's Silver Star is a point of contention among historians as official documents and his diary do not re-tell the same circumstances. Many, including Dallek believe that LBJ's Silver Star was more about politics than bravery.

³⁴ Woods, 138-157.

the end of his political career. LBJ's opponent in the race, Coke Stevenson contested LBJ's eventual win against him, insisting that LBJ's campaign manipulated the final returns of the election in the southern counties of Texas. After a lengthy court battle, Johnson was named Senator. Dallek credits President Truman's intervention on LBJ's behalf as the deciding factor.³⁵

Woods describes LBJ's rise to success in the Senate as meteoric.³⁶ In the ten years between 1950 and 1960, LBJ served as the Majority Whip, the Minority Leader and the Majority Leader, developing a reputation for getting things done at any cost. Robert Caro branded LBJ "Master of the Senate."³⁷ Though Caro's nickname was censorious, it evokes the way in which LBJ was able to achieve his goals during such a short period³⁸.

LBJ decided to run for the presidency in 1960, but instead of securing the Democratic nomination for President, he became President John F. Kennedy's Vice President. LBJ's candidacy was a Democratic strategy to get Kennedy elected. The Democrats selected LBJ because he could help them win the South, Texas and a large number of electoral votes. Johnson's relationship with the

³⁵ Dallek, 295-348.

³⁶ Woods, 249-273.

³⁷ Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon B. Johnson* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

³⁸ These goals included pushing a progressive agenda. LBJ served on several committees including the Senate Armed Services Committee. Some of the most notable LBJ-backed legislation included space exploration funding, rural electrification for Texas and the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

Kennedy family was infamous. While JFK appeared to tolerate LBJ, then Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy openly ridiculed him.³⁹

LBJ found the office of Vice President frustrating, telling biographer Kearns, "I detested every minute of it."⁴⁰ According to both Kearns and Woods, Johnson's frustration stemmed from Kennedy's refusal to use Johnson where he would be most effective, in Congress. Instead, as Vice President, LBJ spent his time on diplomatic trips and special projects like civil rights (via the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity) and space. After the 1960 election, Kennedy named Johnson Chairman of the Space Council, with the hopes of somehow beating the Soviets in the space race. Johnson used this position to secure better funding for NASA.⁴¹

Robert Dallek calls LBJ "the legislative father of NASA."⁴² Dallek argues that Kennedy gave Johnson the role of "political lightning rod," placing Johnson in the position of taking the blame if the program failed, but if the program was a success, Kennedy could take the credit.⁴³ According to Dallek, Johnson used his time as Vice President for "building a national consensus for a space program"

³⁹ Woods, 379.

⁴⁰ Kearns, 164.

⁴¹ Woods, 375-414. For Johnson's role in space program, see pages 392-393. For his role in CEEQ, see pages 393-399.

⁴² Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 11.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 11.

that both he and Kennedy believed was necessary to “determine which system of society and government [would] dominate the future.”⁴⁴

Johnson used his position on the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (CEEO) to push the Kennedy administration on civil rights. Wood’s notes, “[Johnson’s work’s] significance lay not in the concrete achievements of the committee, which were substantial, but in the dramatic rapprochement between LBJ and the black community that occurred as a result of it.”⁴⁵ It is easy to imagine how a man who was used to a direct approach and results became frustrated with the type of long-term returns associated with his work as Vice President.

After Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas, Johnson appeared reluctant to do anything that seemed like a grab for power. Instead, he concentrated on keeping a grieving country together and passing civil rights legislation that he considered a tribute to Kennedy’s legacy. However, in 1964, Johnson decided to run for President, and with Hubert Humphrey as his running mate defeated Barry Goldwater by a landslide. Johnson viewed this victory as approval and immediately began using his political capital to push his “Great Society” legislation through Congress. Johnson spelled out his plan for a Great Society in a commencement address in Ann Arbor, Michigan on May 22, 1964. He viewed this plan as a successor to FDR’s New Deal, and much of it focused on education,

⁴⁴ Ibid, 21-22.

⁴⁵ Woods, 393.

the elimination of poverty, and civil rights. Domestic legislation through the rest of Johnson's administration focused on Great Society issues and had lasting impact on the twentieth century, and this is where Johnson's "legacy keepers" like to maintain focus.

Unfortunately, LBJ's foreign policy, and specifically the escalation of the Vietnam Conflict, remains one of the most controversial policies of any president of the last sixty years. According to biographer John Bullion, LBJ's problems in Vietnam began on the "eve" of his election in November of 1964.⁴⁶ Dallek argues that LBJ "chartered his own course" in the Vietnam conflict, but was guided by his fears of "losing Vietnam" and "seeming yellow" to other communist nations.⁴⁷ According to Dallek, LBJ applied his "Can-Do" attitude to Vietnam, which meant further escalation.⁴⁸

Among the many things Johnson hoped to accomplish as President was the building of a presidential library – a project he left to Lady Bird Johnson. During the next three years (1965 through 1968) as President Johnson struggled over domestic and foreign policy decisions, Mrs. Johnson struggled over the image her husband's administration would carry into the future. The First Lady identified building the library as one of her top three priorities, and immediately began a series of architectural tours in order to gain some perspective on what

⁴⁶ Bullion, 107.

⁴⁷ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 99.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 105.

she and LBJ wanted in their own presidential library. The tours included the three extant presidential libraries of — Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower — along with several college campuses where Mrs. Johnson could see the work of contemporary architects. Mrs. Johnson was well versed in architecture and was opinionated about what she wanted in the library building. According to Mrs. Johnson's diary, she wanted to "attach some great and lustrous name to the Library so it will 'sell for what it's worth' in the eyes of the world."⁴⁹ After years of planning both building and exhibits and two and half years after LBJ left the White House, the LBJ Library and Museum opened its doors to the public in August of 1971 in Austin, Texas on the campus of the University of Texas.

In the last six years, presidential libraries have gained wider attention from museum professionals and public historians. In December of 2004, Princeton University's Center for Arts and Cultural Policy released a report, "Presidential Libraries: A Background Paper on their Museums and their Public Programs." The report mainly focused on the museum aspect of the libraries and the ways in which they engaged the public through programming and education. The report questioned the relationship between the federal government and the individual non-profit entities associated with each museum. Designed and paid for by a non-profit foundation and friends of the subjects they

⁴⁹ Hufbauer, 77 (From CTJ diary 10/20/1965). Hufbauer includes a lengthy discussion on Mrs. Johnson's site visits and the selection of an architect in his chapter on the LBJ Library.

memorialize, the presidents turn over the libraries they have built to the National Archives after the curation and installation of the first permanent exhibits. At many of these institutions, the curators are handpicked and work closely with the president to create an image of the presidency completely lacking in objectivity. The report also illustrated the need for further evaluation of the presidential library system and its place within the interpretation of presidential history and commemoration.⁵⁰

Historians like Benjamin Hufbauer dismiss presidential libraries as celebratory and mythologizing, and rarely credit the exhibits with any real historical value. His book, *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*, followed the Princeton Report and credits presidential libraries as monuments to an imperial, civil religion that highlight the powers of the presidency. Hufbauer argues, "Presidential libraries try to create the sense that their subjects, if not immortal, are still relevant, and that visitors can acquire through a tourist experience, living memory of the dead." He believes, "One of the most important goals of a presidential library, using documents, displays, audio, film, educational role-playing, and interactive video, is to transform presidential labor into myth, giving it seemingly transcendent value."⁵¹

However, Hufbauer never clearly defines what this transcendent value consists

⁵⁰Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, "Presidential Libraries: A Background Paper on their Museums and their Public Programs," <http://www.princeton.edu/culturalpolicy/mpl>, 3 March 2010.

⁵¹Hufbauer, 198.

of or how to measure it within the greater realms of museum exhibition or public history.

Hufbauer believes that presidential libraries are “pilgrimage sites” of a “civil religion,” and argues that they highlight the strengthening of power of the executive branch of the federal government. While he does not associate this power with any one president, most of his argument lies in the chapter about the LBJ Library, which he titles “Symbolic Power and the Imperial Presidency.” he contends that libraries glamorize the work of the president for an adoring public who has come to “worship.” Hufbauer defines imperialism as the exclusive expansion of executive power (versus an expansion of all federal power) and argues that the libraries and presidential memorials are physical manifestations of the increased role of the executive branch in American political culture. However, he fails to acknowledge how the libraries might actually de-glamorize the presidency by highlighting the everyday aspects of the presidents’ lives.⁵²

The Summer 2006 edition of *The Public Historian* attempts to address the issues of the presidential library system and more clearly define the libraries' roles within the practice of public history. In his introduction, Editor Larry J. Hackman lists two aspects of presidential libraries that warrant further research: the “histories of the libraries...based on research on their creation, operation, and condition” and “analysis of the place of the presidential libraries within the

⁵² Ibid, 2-9.

overall priorities, policies and resources of the National Archives.”⁵³ Hackman acknowledges that Hufbauer’s work raises interesting questions, but calls for a closer inspection before condemning the presidential library system outright.

The presidential library system serves as a unique function of the National Archives and Record Administration. Currently, there are twelve Presidential Libraries within the National Archives system, with a thirteenth in the planning stage. Each library is closely associated with a non-profit foundation, with each foundation playing a unique role in the operation of the library. The federal government operates the libraries as federal agencies, but the library foundations own and operate the buildings in which they are housed.

The libraries began with Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s donation of his home in Hyde Park, New York, along with his personal collections to the General Service Administration (or GSA – the original parent agency of the National Archives), as a gift to the American public. When President Truman decided to donate his presidential belongings, Congress passed the Presidential Libraries Act of 1955, the first legislation regarding the Presidential Libraries. The Act allowed the GSA to “accept...land, buildings and equipment offered as a gift to the United States for the purposes of creating a Presidential archival depository.”⁵⁴ According to the Truman Library’s website, “The core of the

⁵³ Larry Hackman, “Presidential Libraries: Programs, Policies and the Public Interest,” *The Public Historian*, 28, no. 3 (Summer 2006), 10.

⁵⁴ Senate, *Presidential Libraries Act of 1955*, 44 U.S.C. 2112, 1955.

Library's research holdings and the principal reason for its existence is its collection of the papers of Harry S. Truman."⁵⁵ Unlike the FDR Library, the Truman library's museum displays focused on the presidency and was the first to include a replica of the Oval Office, thus bringing the role of the president out from behind the façade of the White House. This acts to "localize" the presidency and by doing so, refutes Hufbauer's argument of the transcendent value of presidential labor.⁵⁶

The presidential library tradition continued through President Truman's legislation with the Dwight Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas. Unlike the Truman Library, the Eisenhower library included a complex of buildings, including Eisenhower's boyhood home. The Johnson library followed, opening before the Kennedy Library due to land issues at the original Kennedy site selected on the Harvard University campus. The LBJ Library thus officially became the first Presidential Library to open on a university campus, approximately seven years after the official planning for the library began.

The LBJ library has garnered both positive and negative attention directed at its size and scope. In arguing that presidential libraries play a major role in the commemoration of a national American identity by helping to

⁵⁵ Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, "About," <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/libhist.htm>, (Accessed February 20, 2011).

⁵⁶ Hufbauer, 198. The passive exhibition of Oval Office models at most of the libraries could support Hufbauer's argument that these are merely places for reverent observation by visitors. However, newer exhibits, like the Reagan Library's Annenberg Presidential Learning Center, offer more accessible models for visitors, which let them "try" the presidency for themselves. Though the current programming of the Reagan Library's model is questionable, the principal behind the model is an exciting new imagining for presidential library exhibition.

commemorate the imperial power of the executive office, Hufbauer likens presidential libraries to state-sanctioned propaganda. "Presidential libraries, in contrast, often fit better with a reading of civil religion that sees it as having ties to state propaganda. Presidential libraries, for the most part, are temples that promote the best possible place for their subjects within civil religion while promoting the imperial presidency."⁵⁷

This allusion to a dark, sinister purpose fails to acknowledge or contextualize the era in which the presidential library system was first conceptualized. Created during a period that historian Michael Kammen describes as "a time when concerns about national security, swift social change and a profound sense of historical discontinuity troubled people deeply," the LBJ Library highlights the authority of the executive office, but does so in very subtle ways not always apparent to visitors. Obvious examples would be the head of state gifts on display that highlight the camaraderie and influence of a "world leader" and the Life in the White House exhibit that highlights the historical "traditions" of the presidency. A more subtle example would be the Great Society legislation, which illustrates a way in which the executive branch

⁵⁷Benjamin Hufbauer, "Spotlights and Shadows: Presidents and Their Administrations in Presidential Museum Exhibits," *Public Historian* 28, no. 3 (Summer, 2006) 119-120. Hufbauer relies heavily on Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Imperial Presidency* and Robert Bellah's "Civil Religion in America." Schlesinger defines the "Imperial Presidency" as the gradual expansion of presidential power beginning with Wilson and steadily increasing throughout the twentieth century, directly tying this expansion with the U.S.'s increasing influence in world politics. Bellah defines "civil religion" as the merging of the spiritual and the political in American culture. Bellah's work first appeared in 1967, and is more contemporary than historical, focusing mainly on the 1950s and 1960s.

triumphed over that of the legislative branch by successfully promoting its own agenda.

The library structure serves to aggrandize both the man and the office, but on a larger scale, it also functions as an example of a Cold War memorialization of what Kammen calls "American traditions."⁵⁸ In his study of tradition and memory in American culture, Kammen characterizes the era after World War II as one in which, "the wartime frame of mind helped to enhance an almost reverential regard for the history of the United States."⁵⁹ He attributes the "international threat of totalitarianism," to creating an "age of anxiety" after the war.⁶⁰ This anxiety translated into a "Heritage Imperative," as Americans responded by becoming nostalgic about an imagined or selective past. Kammen catalogs the many forms this nostalgia took in American popular culture in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, including the 1947 Freedom Train, Colonial Williamsburg, and the proliferation of museums and historical sites developed during this period, including the presidential libraries. Kammen also observes that this period was one in which "all three branches of the federal government assumed considerably more responsibility for preserving and protecting the nation's past."⁶¹ It is notable that a large part of this legislation came out of the

⁵⁸ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, Knopf, (New York, 1991).

⁵⁹ Ibid, 532.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 531.

Johnson administration, including the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established the National Register of Historic Places and the Section 106 process.⁶² Though the Johnson administration did not pass legislation specific to Presidential Libraries, LBJ shaped and influenced them in his own way.

This time also represents a time of change for museums. The LBJ Library opened in 1971, the same year that Duncan F. Cameron decried, "Our museums are in desperate need of psychotherapy," in his article, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum."⁶³ Cameron notes that the changing roles of museums during this period caused an identity crisis, as many museums struggled with what their missions were. Through centuries, the common factor of all museums is the collection and to gather meaning through the "arrangement and rearrangement of objects."⁶⁴ Museums' identity crisis occurred with the "democratization" of museum that happened roughly in the later part of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Museums evolved into "temples," and Cameron urged that they should consider

⁶¹ Ibid, 610.

⁶² U.S. Senate, "National Historic Preservation Act," 16 U.S.C. 470 et seq. (1966). It is also notable that much of this legislation was heavily influenced by Mrs. Johnson and her work on *With a Heritage So Rich* (see U.S. Council of Mayors in bibliography). According to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation website, "Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties, and afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment."

⁶³ Duncan Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, Gail Anderson, ed. (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2004) 62. This article was originally published in 1971 in *Curator: The Museum Journal*.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 64.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 65-66.

their constituencies as they began to reconsider their purposes. Cameron believed that the logical function for museums was that of “forum” where visitors could take an active role in shaping the meaning of exhibits.

The LBJ Library and its inaugural exhibits represent a unique moment within the larger history of museums, functioning as both temple and forum. No matter how one feels about LBJ or his presidency, his administration’s legacy is one of change. Historians tout the final year of his presidency, 1968, as one of the most pivotal years of twentieth century American history.⁶⁶ A characteristic the LBJ Library & Museum shares with the man it memorializes is its ability to set precedents. Since its opening, the LBJ Library has changed everything about presidential libraries, from the location and scale of structures, to the role interpreting and presenting a President’s administration, to the number of annual visitors to the associated school of Public Affairs.

Most analysis of presidential libraries is wide-sweeping evaluations of the system and their possible roles in a broad American political culture. A more detailed look at the creation of a single presidential library offers a more nuanced observation of both the time and process that created it. A close examination of the LBJ Library gives public historians a moment in which LBJ and those closest to him carefully examined his administration and his years in public service. Examining two key elements of the library – the architecture and the initial

⁶⁶ Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Ballantine, 2004).

exhibits—reveals how the LBJ Presidential Library was uniquely a temple and a forum.

CHAPTER TWO

“A REAL CENTER FOR LEARNING ABOUT OUR GOVERNMENT”

Just a few months after the LBJ Library and Museum opened its doors, the New York Times published a review of the library titled, “A Monumental Undertaking.” In the review, Texas humorist and political commentator Molly Ivins called the library, “BIG, as in monumental, gargantuan, grandiose. What this library does is, it takes you and hits you over the head with Lyndon Baines Johnson—with his words, his face, his ideas, his travails, his accomplishments.” Ivins’ criticism echoes many reactions to the new presidential library, the first of its size and magnitude. At ten stories high and over 100,000 square feet, the building is one of the largest of the presidential libraries and deserving of the term, “BIG.”⁶⁷ Though Ivins’ criticism of the library is not limited to the exterior, she does remark, “This building is Lyndon Baines Johnson in travertine marble.” The charge that the building is a physical manifestation of the larger-than-life personality of LBJ resonates through years of commentary, and a study of the LBJ Library easily becomes a study of the library, the man and the role of architecture in museums and memorialization.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ivins.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

From the earliest stages of planning, the planners intended for the LBJ Library to be grand. The architecture design firm, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill touted, "The building should express through monumentality the importance of the historical treasures protected and preserved. The building should evidence from without and within that it is truly a treasury of important documents."⁶⁹ The idea of a "treasury" and the protecting of treasures reinforces the idea of "temple." The museum temple is a place to house those objects declared important by the elite. It is within the temple that the objects are arranged to become an uncontested story.

Despite the formally stated intention, the LBJ Library and its role as memorial cannot be interpreted quite so easily. For many critics, including Molly Ivins, the Library's large scale and overbearing presence have direct correlations to LBJ and his administration. Benjamin Hufbauer's *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory* uses the expansion of presidential power as a central theme, arguing that the Presidential Libraries create pilgrimage sites for the American civil religion. Hufbauer posits that, "The Johnson Library was the culmination of the presidential library's memorialization of the imperial presidency up to that time."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, "Re: Lyndon Baines Johnson Library," Architecture Reference File, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Hufbauer, *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*, (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 2005) 68.

A close examination of the design process of the building and those involved suggests that the relationship between the physical structure that is the LBJ Library and President Johnson may not be so straightforward. The University of Texas Board of Regents, along with President Johnson and a few of his aides, deliberately selected architect Gordon Bunshaft for his ability to design a “masculine” building, which they all felt should be a representation of the president’s personality. While Hufbauer might be correct in his allegation that, “the Johnson Library reveals aspects of President Johnson’s overbearing personality in the architecture,”⁷¹ this portrayal was deliberate; and although the architecture of the library “reflected” President Johnson’s personality, it is also very much a reflection of architect Gordon Bunshaft.

The idea of a memorial to LBJ’s career began taking shape years before he took over the presidency in 1963. Rebekah Johnson, LBJ’s mother, talked about an archive early in LBJ’s career. An avid genealogist who produced individual family histories for each of her children, she imagined turning the Johnson home in Johnson City into a small library that would house the Johnson family personal papers and function as a community center for the small population of Johnson City, Texas. According to Dorothy Territo, a long-time Johnson aide, “She [Rebekah Johnson] hoped that people in Johnson City would gather and use it... for recreation or just to feel comfortable there.”⁷² Rebekah Johnson wanted a

⁷¹ Ibid, 2

center to honor the entire Johnson family and their contribution to the surrounding communities.

Dorothy Territo also played an important role in the development of the library. During his senate career, LBJ recognized the need for archiving and collecting the papers and material culture of his public career. Territo was a long-time Johnson aide who took a leave of absence from the Library of Congress in the spring of 1958 in order to work on a mail project in Senator Johnson's office. During this project, Territo started a classification system that included identifying items of possible historical significance. Territo created systems to record head of state gifts, to classify and copy speeches according to subject, and to organize a photo archive while working for Vice President Johnson.⁷³ Territo referred to the system as a "paperwork management program...established...for the purpose of analyzing, identifying and organizing records that would facilitate any possible archival process that might be 'initiated at some future date.'" ⁷⁴ Johnson recognized the important role Territo was filling on his staff and quickly hired her full time. Territo, who remained employed by the Johnsons until well after LBJ's death in 1973, became the unofficial archivist of

⁷² Dorothy Territo. Oral History Interview I, 1 November 1983, by Claudia Anderson, Electronic Copy, LBJ Library, 20.

⁷³ Territo, 2-19.

⁷⁴ Chronology, Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

the Johnson family's public career, and played an integral part in both the collection and presentation of the first library exhibit.

The election of LBJ to the presidency in 1964 formalized library plans and Lady Bird Johnson immediately made it a priority. LBJ asked Lady Bird Johnson to spearhead the library project, and in January 1965, she named it one of her three top priorities as first lady.⁷⁵ Lady Bird Johnson describes the idea of the library as "that phantom that I want to clothe with flesh,"⁷⁶ Her involvement in the planning of the building included site visits to other libraries on the east coast and a tour of both the Truman and Roosevelt Presidential libraries⁷⁷.

According to Territo, the University of Texas approached Senator Johnson as early as 1956 about donating his papers to the University.⁷⁸ However, they did not make a formal proposal for the library until 1965. After LBJ's 1964 election to the Presidency, the University of Texas Board of Regents initially approached Lady Bird Johnson, a University of Texas alum.⁷⁹ Then Chairman of the Board of Regents, W.W. (Bill) Heath, was a friend of the Johnsons and personally made the proposal on February 12, 1965.⁸⁰ Lady Bird Johnson first

⁷⁵ Hufbauer, 78.

⁷⁶ Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2007) 243.

⁷⁷ Hufbauer, 76.

⁷⁸ Territo, 14.

⁷⁹ Lady Bird Johnson, 242

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 242.

mentions the library in her book, *A White House Diary*, on this date when she held a meeting with Bill Heath and Clark Clifford, another member of the Board of Regents. She says that "Bill [Heath] presented us with a proposal that is almost too great to comprehend!"⁸¹ President Johnson did not personally attend the meeting, but when she mentioned it to him later that evening, he had Heath over for dinner in order to discuss further the plans.⁸²

The University formally outlined their intentions in a letter to the President dated August 6, 1965. LBJ accepted the proposal in a response dated August 9, 1965, in which he also expressed his hopes for the future of the institution, saying, "I am particularly concerned that the generations that follow us should have the opportunity for detailed analysis of those historical records from which can be derived a full understanding of the momentous years through which we are passing."⁸³ The Board of Regents' proposal included fourteen acres on which they would "design, construct, furnish and equip" a "not less

⁸¹ Ibid, 242.

⁸² Ibid, 242. The University of Texas Board of Regents is the governing body of the University of Texas system. The Board consists of nine members appointed by the Governor of the State of Texas and approved by the Texas Senate. The Chairman of the Board of Regents, Bill Heath, served on the board until 1966, and was succeeded by Frank C. Erwin, who continued to oversee the completion of the library. From *The Former Regents of the University of Texas System*, http://www.utsystem.edu/bor/former_regents/homepage.htm, (Accessed June 28, 2010).

⁸³ Johnson, Lyndon Baines, Lyndon Baines Johnson to University of Texas Board of Regents, 9 August 1965. Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

than 100,000 square foot building.”⁸⁴ The University agreed to turn over the building for the U.S. federal government to use for housing the Presidential records and collections.

The University also agreed to include a School of Public Affairs to address LBJ’s concerns about the generations that followed. Lady Bird Johnson describes President Johnson’s enthusiasm for the library and school in her diary entry on the day the University approached the Johnsons. President Johnson was not only excited about his papers being held in a community he considered a home, but also about the possibility of creating a world-renowned research center, a “training ground” for future politicians. Lady Bird Johnson says, “We really got caught up in his [President Johnson’s] enthusiasm for this Texas training ground, for bringing others to it from all over the world.”⁸⁵ President Johnson wanted to share his passions for public life and service with generations of people within his community and state.

The proposal also addressed the active role the Board of Regents would play in the design process of the library. Specifically, the University was responsible for the “selection for the architect, or architects and the design concept of the facility.”⁸⁶ The Board of Regents, especially Bill Heath and Frank

⁸⁴ University of Texas Board of Regents, “Letter of Intent from University of Texas For the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Archival Depository,” Reference File, LBJ Library, Austin Texas.

⁸⁵ Lady Bird Johnson, 244.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 2.

Erwin, worked closely with Lady Bird Johnson in selecting the architect and design concept for the library. The Board of Regents hired a local firm, Brooks, Barr, Graeber & White, to oversee the project and the selection of the architect.

Lady Bird Johnson's tours with various members of the Board of Regents produced a list of possible architects for the project that Austin architect Max Brooks helped to narrow down. Eventually, LBJ aides, Lady Bird Johnson and the UT Board of Regents presented LBJ with a short list of potential architects for the library.⁸⁷ The list consisted of three names: Phillip Johnson, Minnoru Yamasaki, and Gordon Bunshaft.⁸⁸ Heath and Johnson's aides manipulated LBJ's perception of the architectural finalists by portraying Phillip Johnson and Yamasaki as homosexual and foreign respectively⁸⁹ This left Bunshaft as the forerunner.

LBJ and representatives from the University of Texas approached Bunshaft in the fall of 1965, when Heath and President Johnson invited him to have lunch in Austin. The trip turned into an all-day visit to the ranch, including the requisite car ride around the property to see the cattle. Bunshaft later said, "I have a feeling he was trying to figure out whether I was some goddamned

⁸⁷ Hufbauer, 75-80. Hufbauer outlines this process in his chapter on the LBJ library, calling them "Lady Bird Johnson's architectural tours," possibly as a way of acknowledging Mrs. Johnson pivotal role in the creation of the library

⁸⁸ Ibid, 78 Phillip Johnson was an American architect know for his modern designs including the Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut, and the Seagram Building in New York, New York. Minnoru Yamasaki, also an American architect designed the World Trade Center.

⁸⁹Ibid, 78. Hufbauer refers to this as "the worst impulses of racism, sexism and homophobia that existed in each of them."

decorator or a man...He listened, but he didn't say anything. And he did all the things such as stopping and talking about cattle and whatnot."⁹⁰

Perhaps because Bunshaft was conscious of the fact that his selection was based on his "manliness," the idea of an architecturally masculine building became an integral part of his approach to the library design. These included a structure that was large, imposing, and dominant with clearly defined visual lines. Both LBJ's aides and the Board of Regents of the University of Texas felt it was important for the architect's style to match the President's personality. Bunshaft credited his own masculine qualities in helping to ensure his selection as architect. According to Bunshaft, he was chosen over one of the architects because the other architect's building was "decoratorish," a derogatory term Bunshaft used to mean feminine.⁹¹

A graduate of MIT, Gordon Bunshaft was head partner at the New York office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. His architectural designs were characterized as modern and powerful and he was noted for numerous 1950's era skyscrapers, including Lever House and the Pepsi-Cola buildings in New York City. Although Bunshaft is primarily renowned as an architect of corporate spaces, according to a New York Times article, he "wanted to be remembered for

⁹⁰ Gordon Bunshaft, Oral History Interview I, 25 June 1969, by Paige E. Mullholan, Electronic Copy, LBJ Library, 8.

⁹¹ Bunshaft, 10.

his monuments.”⁹² In 1963, President Kennedy appointed Bunshaft to the Commission of Fine Arts, where he briefly met LBJ within a month or so of LBJ taking office as Vice President, but believes this was completely unrelated to his selection. Bunshaft credits his name being on the list of potential architects because of Max Brooks, an undergraduate friend at MIT, who was also a close friend of both the Johnsons and the Heaths, and whose Austin-based architectural firm worked closely on the library project.

Throughout the building process, the outside of the building would continue to serve as a metaphor for masculinity while the inside of the building became feminine. Bunshaft said that “masculine” was the most important aspect of the design, “I thought the President was really a virile man, a strong man with nothing sweet or sentimental or small about him, and he ought to have a vigorous, male building. And we’ve got a vigorous, male building...I think this building is kind of powerful, and he’s kind of a powerful guy. There’s nothing delicate about him.”⁹³ The Johnsons act out this metaphor in the design process with President Johnson only taking an active, participatory role in the design of the outside of his building while Lady Bird Johnson, Dorothy Territo and Juanita

⁹² “Gordon Bunshaft, Architect, Dies at 81,” New York Times, 8 August 1990.

⁹³ Ibid, 27.

Roberts became the driving forces for the inside of the building and the exhibit designs.⁹⁴

In his oral history interview, Bunshaft makes it clear that he realized the University Board of Regents and the Johnsons selected him because his works were masculine. Bunshaft was also conscious of the fact that Johnson was not fond of the East Coast establishment or the Ivy League of which Bunshaft was a part. Because of this, Bunshaft appeared to try to distance himself from this background by being the type of man's man to whom LBJ could relate.

President Johnson's attitude toward the building and its design continued throughout the building process, with him offering detailed ideas for building materials, but only large concepts and themes for the inside and the "decorating" — exhibit design.⁹⁵ Bunshaft remained incredibly protective of the design throughout the building process, and as much as all involved in the project knew that it was LBJ's library, the building remained Bunshaft's. Bunshaft's protectiveness resonates throughout his oral history. In one particular passage, Bunshaft notes, "We want to make sure that the bad taste of various people won't affect the building."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ President Johnson got final approval of the design concept, but his role in even this was limited at best. Juanita Roberts was President Johnson's personal secretary. She was one of several of President Johnson's aides that played an active role in the design of the library.

⁹⁵ LBJ and Bunshaft discussed what the building should be made of in some detail, with the President going as far as taking Bunshaft to show him a building in Washington, D.C. made out of a marble that LBJ liked. The two eventually decided on travertine marble.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 24. In this particular passage, Bunshaft is talking about using the travertine on the Great Hall to prevent anyone in the future from changing his designs.

Bunshaft presented his initial design concept to Lady Bird Johnson and the Board of Regents at the White House on May 12, 1966. According to the meeting minutes, Bunshaft presented both sketches and two scale models to Lady Bird Johnson and various members of the UT Board of Regents, explaining both the interior of the building and the outside.⁹⁷ The meeting started at 1:30 in the afternoon, but President Johnson did not join the group until well after 4:00, with the President only staying for about thirty minutes. Bunshaft was a little taken-aback by President Johnson's absence during the first two hours of the meeting and was concerned that the President would not understand the complexity of his design. ⁹⁸

Bunshaft maintains that President Johnson did not give specific instructions for the building design. Instead, Bunshaft relates that President Johnson seemed more concerned about the exhibits and the stories they would tell. The vision of the exhibits that LBJ articulated to Bunshaft at an early meeting would remain the same throughout the exhibit design process, becoming Lady Bird Johnson's vision for the library. In a September 6, 1966 meeting, Bunshaft presented an architectural model that included alterations for a new site location. After his presentation, President Johnson "began speaking of

⁹⁷ Minutes, Meeting with CTJ, Gordon Bunshaft, Sherwood Smith, Dr. Harry Ransom, et. al. 6 September 1966, Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library, Austin Texas, 1.

⁹⁸ Bunshaft, 12.

his achievements through the years.”⁹⁹ The “subjects he considered worthy of development,” included, “Science, Conservation, Health, Human Relations—Civil Rights,, Education, Space, Atomic Energy, International Affairs, and Poverty.”¹⁰⁰

Despite their shared vision for the exhibits, President and Lady Bird Johnson did not agree entirely on the look of the outside of the building. The only dissenting opinion about the structure Bunshaft presented belonged to Lady Bird Johnson who felt the building was “monolithic, massive, unrelieved and forbidding.”¹⁰¹ Though Lady Bird Johnson eventually relented to the President’s opinion, the battle between the outside, masculine aspects of the library and the inside, feminine aspects continued throughout the building and design process. Lady Bird Johnson also expressed concern about the amount of space the Great Hall would encompass. Despite her objections, President Johnson agreed to Bunshaft’s design model in less than a week. While Bunshaft was amazed that the President was able to comprehend his design so quickly, he was even more amazed that the President agreed with the design without requesting changes.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Minutes, Meeting with CTJ, Gordon Bunshaft, Sherwood Smith, Dr. Harry Ransom, et. al. 6 September 1966, Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library, Austin Texas, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 1.

¹⁰¹ Minutes, Meeting with CTJ, Clark Clifford, Bill Heath, Gordon Bunshaft et.al, 12 February 1965, Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas, 1.

¹⁰² Bunshaft, 11-13.

A series of letters between Bill Heath and the White House attempted to finalize site design and location by September 1966. The LBJ Library complex (including the LBJ School of Public Affairs) dominates the northeastern edge of the University of Texas campus, and its location across from the football field is a place of honor. The building location in relation to the campus was a deliberate choice and represents one of many contentious decisions made by the planners. A memo dated February 26, 1965, outlines a telephone conversation between Lady Bird Johnson, Bill Heath and two White House Press Secretaries, Liz Carpenter and Bill Moyers. In it, they discuss withholding any press releases about the library's location until the University of Texas could secure the selected location. According to the memo, sixty-eight owners had to agree to a "condemnation suit," twelve were holding out, and the Board of Regents was attempting to "get them out of the way."¹⁰³ Though the location problem was resolved, the less than open manner in which the planners operated reinforce the ideas of imperialism associated with the LBJ Library. The "temple" architecture of the building also reinforces this idea of imperialism by presenting visitors with a building that aggrandizes the president and presidency.

The travertine marble that lines a majority of the exterior and interior walls characterizes the LBJ Library, as do the descriptive terms "unbroken lines"

¹⁰³ Mrs. Johnson, W.W. Heath, et al., "Telephone Conversation Thursday, February 25, 1966" LBJ Library Reference File, Austin, Texas. The University used immanent domain to acquire the land where the LBJ Library was built. According to Bunshaft, the original spot proposed was where the historic Littlefield Mansion sits. However, when the planners decided against that spot, sixty-eight properties were purchased using immanent domain. Many of these properties were student housing.

and “cantilevered.” The east and west library walls are solid sheets of travertine stretching 200 feet high. The top two floors of the library are larger than the previous eight and cantilever over the walls. The north and south walls are only relieved by two balconies on the fourth floor that are accessible to exhibit visitors and overlook the plaza area entrance and a large fountain. All of these features evoke a monumental setting. However, the travertine marble is more reminiscent of the man who designed the building than of the man for whom he built it.¹⁰⁴

The accessibility of the building is in direct contrast to its imperial monumentality. The building site allows for easy access to a busy interstate highway, and as part of the initial agreement with the University, LBJ ensured that there would always be free parking for visitors. The plaza area outside the building is a massive open space that overlooks a picturesque fountain and hill and offers a post-card view of the campus. The Great Hall mirrors the openness of the entrance, whose ceiling stretches open four floors evoking both the monumentality of the subject and the democratic façade of the exhibits.¹⁰⁵

Several of Bunshaft’s buildings of the time are very similar in style to the LBJ Library. The Beinecke Library at Yale University and the Hirshorn Museum

¹⁰⁴ “Architectural Report: Lyndon Baines Johnson Library & Museum,” Architecture Reference File, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas. The Library building is also a departure from the usual architecture of the University of Texas campus, which up until this point, housed mainly limestone buildings with Spanish tile roofs.

¹⁰⁵ The democratic façade is discussed further in Chapter 3.

in Washington DC are of similar materials and stylistically akin to the LBJ Library.¹⁰⁶ In Bunshaft's 1999 obituary, Pulitzer-prize winning architecture critic Paul Goldberg notes, "Gordon Bunshaft shaped postwar New York with sleekly elegant structures...he created a body of buildings that both define the architectures of a time and transcend it." The modern, glass skyscrapers like Leever House are the types of buildings that Bunshaft became famous for designing and the clunky, marble boxes like the LBJ Library, the Beinecke Library and the Hirshorn represent a departure from Bunshaft's usual style.

Goldberg, who regularly writes for *The New Yorker*, comments directly on the LBJ Library in Bunshaft's obituary, calling the building an "overbearing mass of travertine," and questions who the building is more a representation of, when he asks, "Was [it] a sly comment on Johnson's imperial predilections or the sad result of Mr. Bunshaft's own?"¹⁰⁷ Goldberg, notes that these buildings were part of "memorial" phase that Bunshaft went through, saying, "But for all he shaped the corporate skyline, Mr. Bunshaft also wanted to be remembered as an architect of monuments."¹⁰⁸

Ultimately, Goldberg answers his own question when he writes, "Mr. Bunshaft was never comfortable taking his cues from the cityscape; he did not

¹⁰⁶ The three buildings were built within years of each other. The Beinecke Library was completed in 1963, the LBJ Library in 1971 and the Hirshorn Museum in 1974.

¹⁰⁷ Goldberg,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

want anyone to think that he had in any way deferred to any force other than his own creative sensibility and the need of his clients. To let a building's shape emerge from accommodation to the buildings around it would have seemed a sign of weakness."¹⁰⁹ Even Bunshaft's obituary taps into the power associated with Bunshaft and his designs. The planning notes for the library demonstrate Bunshaft's commitment to his design by illustrating how adamant he was to building a monument.

The architecture of the LBJ Library effectively captures the public and political aspects of LBJ's personality. It is a big and a forceful building, and while the Great Hall reflects the monumentality of the outside, the exhibits themselves are more of a reflection of those who were closer to LBJ — Lady Bird and his aides. It is within the walls of the temple that the objects become the story and while the story of LBJ's life is constructed by the elite — as represented by Mrs. Johnson and the University of Texas Board of Regents — it is done in such a way that takes into account the contentious aspects of the Johnson administration. This creates a dialogue for the library's constituency, and transforms the temple into a forum.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

"FOR FRIEND AND FOE TO JUDGE, TO APPROVE OR TO DISAPPROVE"

In her *New York Times* review of the opening of the LBJ Library, Texas political satirist Molly Ivins observed, "It's as though Lyndon Johnson were trying to pick up those five years in the White House with his bare hands and squeeze them into a shape that will make history stand back in awe."¹¹⁰ Ivins concludes that everything about the library displays, from the "overwhelming" amount of archival boxes on display in the Great Hall to "his deeds recorded in plastic display cases" was a deliberate, skewed editorial of LBJ's presidency. Critics at its opening and through the years since have echoed these concerns with claims that presidential libraries in general represent memorialization at its worst because of the editorialized perspective they offer.

The very nature of the process of planning and executing the initial exhibits of a presidential library prevent an objective telling of an administration. A non-profit Foundation closely associated with the president plans and executes the first exhibits. There were three groups involved with the planning of the LBJ Library exhibits: the exhibit designer and architect, the University of Texas Board of Regents, Lady Bird Johnson and the first daughters, and staff who

¹¹⁰ Molly Ivins, "A Monumental Undertaking," *The New York Times*, 9 August 1971

directly represented the interests of the president. In the case of the LBJ Library, the University of Texas Board of Regents replaced the non-profit foundation, paying for the property, building and first exhibits in the library. Lady Bird Johnson became the intermediary and guide for the three groups. She had very specific ideas, and while there were only a few notable areas of contention, she was able to clearly articulate her (and possibly the president's) vision for the library and exhibits.

The charge that the first exhibits at the LBJ Library lack objectivity is well founded and fits within the larger concerns of the time. The early 1970s marked a period of museum critique and self-reflection wherein the field acknowledged that public expectations were for the "message" or interpretation of the objects to reflect the morals and social norms of a broader cross-section of society. The historical problem was that exhibits usually reflected the values and norms of the elite¹¹¹. Cameron and others ultimately argue that a museum "must be steadfast in its insistence on proved excellence, on the highest possible degree of objectivity in selection, organization and interpretation."¹¹² This marked a period of increasingly contested debate over the value of and possibility for achieving objectivity in public interpretation. At the center of this debate was the issue of public trust – getting it and keeping it. Both the International Council of Museums (ICOM—the international body for museum professionals) and the

¹¹¹ Cameron, 67.

¹¹² Ibid, 67.

American Association of Museums (AAM—the professional association for U.S. museums) list the idea of public trust as a core value and make the public trust a guiding part of their codes of ethics.¹¹³

Issues of perspective and objectivity grew in intensity throughout the last decades of the 20th century, and further analysis explored the ways in which museums reinforced rather than illuminated structures of power and control. Within this context, Roger Kennedy, in his article “Some Thoughts about National Museums at the End of the Century,” listed ten prototypes for museum practice that coexist and inform each other.¹¹⁴ The names of Kennedy’s prototypes certainly match the motif of temples, with many of them named for architectural archetypes of worship spaces. Kennedy lists “*The Basilica*” as one prototype. He characterizes these types of institutions as “a rectilinear processional way [of presenting exhibits], with stated places to pause for especially rapt attention to one aspect or another of a story.”¹¹⁵ The inaugural exhibits at the LBJ Library easily fit into this descriptive category with its Great Hall of exhibits and the exotic and grand nature of some (but not all) of the

¹¹³ International Council Of Museums, “Code of Ethics,” http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/code2006_eng.pdf (Accessed 18 June 2010). American Association of Museums, “Code of Ethics for Museums,” <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/coe.cfm> (Accessed 18 June 2010).

¹¹⁴ Other prototypes that Kennedy discusses include The Schatzkammer, the Iconostasis, The Triumph, The Gallery, The Academy, Shrine to the Muses, The Rotunda, The Hogan, and The Field of the Cloth of Gold.

¹¹⁵ Roger G. Kennedy, “Some thoughts about National Museums at the End of the Century,” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed (New York: Blackwell Publishing.

materials displayed. However, the first exhibits are more than just an archetype for popular medieval churches.

The problem with evaluating the first primary exhibits becomes how to separate a forty-year old exhibit from the rhetoric of today's museology. One cannot fairly hold the original exhibit designers to standards that did not recognize or articulate the distinction between library, museum and memorial functions in presidential libraries. By the standards of the 1970s, major exhibits in a presidential library was relatively new, and the LBJ Library was a hybrid—illustrating the small moment in time when archival/library displays become full blown interpretive exhibits.

Both Cameron and Kennedy argue that in museums, objectivity relates to the origins of museums—objects. Kennedy defines museums as “a place where significant stories are told by the arrangement of objects.”¹¹⁶ Lady Bird Johnson understood that it was necessary to create a narrative out of the objects. While Bunshaft and Drexler concerned themselves with the act of display—with the aesthetic—Lady Bird Johnson and her staff tasked themselves with creating arrangement and order. She understood the important role that narrative had in imparting the meaning of the objects and how they related to the president. This is where Lady Bird Johnson's legacy keeping began.

¹¹⁶ Cameron, 302.

In her article "A View from the Center," Sharon Fawcett, head of Presidential Libraries, claims these first exhibits "are historical artifacts — representing how the former president views his life and presidency." Fawcett's argument applies to the experience of the overall exhibit. The inaugural exhibits at presidential libraries become primary documents of the administration, of those who created them and those who visited, ultimately creating a unique window into the society and time of the exhibit.

Fawcett argues that because there is not enough passage of time to present an impartial or historical perspective, the first exhibits in a presidential library are more likely to appeal to those who agreed with the administration and its policies. This is certainly true of the LBJ Library's first exhibit since the planning of exhibits began as early as 1967, two years before the end of the administration, before much of the Great Society legislation or the escalation of the Vietnam War.

The LBJ Library makes an excellent case study for how the first exhibits illustrate the political climate of the time. In the four short years between LBJ's election in 1964 and Richard Nixon's election in 1968, the popular vote turned abruptly from liberal to conservative. The years between these two elections not only represent a time of division and change, but the often-violent manner in which these change took place make the period one of great upheaval. According to Michael Kammen, these were years "of bewilderingly swift social

change,”¹¹⁷ and rejection of the past and future by people in their teens and twenties have been argued as the genesis for, “An overcompensation manifested as nostalgia by their some of their older contemporaries.”¹¹⁸ Kammen argues that Americans, particularly older Americans who experienced World War II, became nostalgic for a shared, traditional past in reaction to swift social changes. Perhaps the swiftest years of social change coincided with the last two years of the Johnson Administration, 1967 and 1968, and the LBJ Library – a new, more grand manifestation of the presidential library – is one example of ways in which these traditional, civic values could be reinforced.

Fawcett acknowledges that several aspects of the political climate have direct influence on the first exhibits. These include whether or not the president had high or low approval ratings when they leave office and the romanticizing of presidents who die in office. Fawcett’s proposed solution to these problems in first exhibits is transparency. She wants to explain to visitors the nature of the exhibits and who created them, creating a distance between the National Archives and the creators of the exhibits – the President and his foundation. The problem with this solution is that the relationship between library foundations and the National Archives is rarely clear to those involved and would be difficult – and probably of no interest – to visitors who are mostly unaware of the inner workings of the presidential library system.

¹¹⁷Kammen, 534.

¹¹⁸Ibid, 534.

Even if a presidential exhibit were to “enact” transparency by giving visitors or audiences the opportunity to “participate” in the creation of a collective memory that includes alternative perspectives, research has demonstrated that there is often “active public resistant to this operation.”¹¹⁹

Another possible solution that Fawcett mentions but does not elaborate on is the use of these exhibits as “historical artifact.”¹²⁰ The way in which the exhibits are developed and those involved in their development offers valuable lessons for historians, if not valuable lessons for the visitor.¹²¹ The meaning of objects and the ways in which museums impart knowledge is the “assumed” function of the museum and “the most common type of knowledge to derive from museums is a sense of the past.”¹²² Such analysis can illuminate the “coercive” nature of museums. Jordanova argues that “there are a variety of ways in which institutions can express their guiding assumption and bring them to the attention of visitors...in such cases, we are entitled to speak of the representational practices of a museum as ‘coercive.’”¹²³ Jordanova points out

¹¹⁹ Susan A Crane, “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum,” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Betting Messias Carbonell, ed. (New York: Blackwell Publishing, XXXX) 333.

¹²⁰ Fawcett, 30.

¹²¹ Although, Crane makes an argument that it then becomes the responsibility of the curator or museum professional to articulate these lessons to the visitor in ways in which they find meaningful.

¹²² Ludmilla Jordanova, “Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums,” in *The New Museology*, Peter Vergo, ed (Reaktion Books: London, 1989) 25.

¹²³ Ibid, 33.

that this coerciveness can be intentional or unintentional and museums coerce on many information levels. For Jordonova, objects are “the source of revelation to visitors,” and object selection and presentation shape the knowledge that visitors bring to and acquire at a museum.¹²⁴ Jordanova concludes, “historical perspectives play in important role by provoking questions about the relationships between museum and their parent societies—questions that treat politics, epistemology, and aesthetics as necessarily intertwined.”¹²⁵ Examining what was included and excluded in the first exhibits and the ways in which exhibit designers made these decisions illustrates what the decision makers found important.

The first permanent exhibits at presidential libraries give historians a microcosm of the administration and the president’s style of leadership—whether he took a direct role in the design or left it to trusted advisors. It also serves to illustrate what subject/content was important to those involved - which elements of the story are prominent and which are excluded all together. On a deeper level, taking these elements of the exhibit and placing them within the larger context of the period that created them points to a more nuanced understanding of the time by not only illustrating what was important to those wielding power but also what was deemed important to the audience. Using Crane’s theory that museum exhibits are also shaped by audience expectation,

¹²⁴ Ibid, 22.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 40.

the first permanent exhibits offer an historical perspective on those for whom the exhibit was created.

Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory* sets up the theoretical framework by which to do this. Kammen's work does not specifically analyze presidential libraries. However, he uses the Freedom Train traveling exhibit as an illustration of one way in which the federal government actively participated in shaping a national identity during the Cold War. The Freedom Train was a joint effort between several government agencies including the National Archives, the Justice Department, the Library of Congress, and to a lesser degree, the White House. It was an exhibit of American documents that promoters wanted "to resell...the American way of life through the traveling exhibition of the most impressive collection of original American documents ever assembled."¹²⁶ Promoters mounted the exhibit in a rail car that visited 332 cities in a 413-day tour between 1947 and 1949, and hosted over 3.5 million visitors. Documents on board included: the Treaty of Paris (1783), Northwest Ordinance, the Bill of Rights, the Emancipation Proclamation, George Washington's annotated Constitution, Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence, the Mayflower Compact, and others.¹²⁷ The Freedom Train is also an early example of American's reaction to the Cold War, with a stated goal of "aiding the country in its internal war against subversive elements and as an effort to improve

¹²⁶ Kammen, 576.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 573-581.

citizenship by reawakening in our people their profound faith in the American historical heritage."¹²⁸

In his analysis of the Freedom Train, Kammen examines the stated and unstated goals of the exhibit, the motivation of those who prepared it and the different community responses to the exhibit. Kammen argues, "Although the government's role as a major custodian or sponsor of civic memories expanded steadily during the third quarter of the twentieth century...it must be noted that many of the most significant 'events'... were decentralized by design and enjoyed far more success in scattered localities than at the national level."¹²⁹ The presidential libraries mimic this decentralization as each of the libraries were built outside of Washington D.C. in the scattered localities each president was from.

The Freedom Train was a "success" that eventually led to later, organized heritage events such as the Civil War Centennial Commission and the Statue of Liberty Centennial. Presidential traditions and the "variable role of American presidents as arbiters of tradition" are situated within this context.¹³⁰ This same type of analysis may be applied to any of the presidential library exhibits, as they too become an important part of the creation of a civic memories or a shared national identity.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 574.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 572.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 612-613.

Despite the inherent objectivity problems, the permanent exhibits form an important part of the presidential libraries. According to the Princeton report, "For most citizens, the exhibits in presidential museums, not the archival services, are the basis on which they assess the particular library and presidential libraries generally."¹³¹ At the LBJ Library, the first permanent exhibit remained mostly unchanged for nine years until the first major re-design in 1980.¹³² With an annual attendance ranging from 160,000 to 190,000 visitors, this nine year span meant that the opening permanent installations easily reached millions of people before any changes were made.¹³³

The first permanent exhibits at the LBJ Library evolved from a series of meetings led by Lady Bird Johnson. She held the first meeting at the White House in February of 1965, not long after Bill Heath made the proposal on behalf of the University of Texas Board of Regents. Not only did Lady Bird Johnson act as the intermediary between The University of Texas and the President at the beginning, but according to architect Gordon Bunshaft, "She's been really the daily guide on the whole building, especially on the exhibits."¹³⁴ Lady Bird Johnson's involvement is obvious through her presence and voice at each of the

¹³¹ Princeton, 19.

¹³² Exhibit Plan, May 1971, Museum Archive Box 1, Folder 2, LBJ Library.

¹³³ LBJ Library, "Facts About the LBJ Library and Museum," http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/lbjforkids/lbjlib_print.shtm, 28 March 2010.

¹³⁴ Bunshaft, 24.

design meetings. President Johnson even remarked, "I did not have to designate anybody [to work on the library]. Mrs. Johnson appointed herself."¹³⁵

Lady Bird, the White House staff, University of Texas Board of Regents representatives and a revolving cast of aids and assistants, devised a majority of the exhibits in a series of thirty-two meetings that took place at the White House between February 1965 and January 1969.¹³⁶ The cadre of staff members included Horace Busby, special assistant to President Johnson; Bess Abell, Lady Bird Johnson's personal secretary; Colonel Juanita Roberts, President Johnson's personal secretary; and Dorothy Territo, unofficial archivist of the Johnson family. Ironically, the First Lady and Dorothy Territo represent the only two people in the design meetings with a background in history or archives. Territo's experience with the Library of Congress along with the help of an unnamed summer intern from Texas who informed her about the important names in Texas politics, made her specifically qualified to address the issues of identifying and classifying documents and objects of significance.¹³⁷

Meeting topics varied, as did meeting tone, but Lady Bird Johnson and staff remained the constant throughout the design process. Meetings also varied in length from brief informal breakfast or luncheon meetings to four to five hour marathon planning sessions. Several meetings included committees formed to

¹³⁵ Hufbauer, 74-75.

¹³⁶ Chronology, 1.

¹³⁷ Territo, 8.

complete specific duties, including the Audio Visual committee responsible for creating a featurette about the President's life to show at the library and the Acquisitions Committee responsible for locating possible donors to the library's historical materials collection.¹³⁸

The architecture reference file at the LBJ Library Archives contains many of the meeting notes that recorded these discussions. These meeting notes reveal a great deal about the planning of the library including the process by which the exhibits and designs came together. Initially, the meetings consisted of only a few people. However, the size of the meetings grew as the library and exhibit designs became more complex. The meeting notes went from two page draft copies of notes to summary minutes, which always included a list of those participating. Most meeting notes offer paraphrased summaries of the various presentations and the points of discussion, while others read like scripts, with direct quotes and dialogues between those present. Despite the differences in detail and format, these notes clearly outline the process for creating the first exhibit.

Bunshaft commented on Juanita Roberts' presence early in the design process, noting her presence at the architect's design concept presentation on September 6, 1966. Bunshaft usually referred to her as a "secretary," but at one

¹³⁸ As part of the collection process, the LBJ Library acquired the original artwork from Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* when Liz Carpenter met Dr. Seuss at a cocktail party. At a loss about what to discuss with Ms. Carpenter, he started telling her about the book he was working on because he thought she would be interested in its theme—ecology. A few minutes later, Dr. Seuss was summoned to the phone because President Johnson wanted to personally thank him for so *generously* donating his artwork to the President's library.

point admitted, “she’s very close, not his secretary, she’s an assistant.” Bunshaft was very complimentary of Roberts, referring to her as “very bright,” when explaining how she devised a solution to the Oval Office replica problem regarding the President’s desire to use the reproduction as an office.

One of the biggest points of contention between the Johnsons and Bunshaft was the inclusion of a replica of the Oval Office. Lady Bird Johnson and Bunshaft saw the Truman replica as part of their tour of other presidential libraries. When Bunshaft refused to include it, Lady Bird Johnson had LBJ intervene. He personally called Bunshaft to insist on the office, but instead of using it for an exhibit, LBJ wanted to use it for an office on the eighth floor. Bunshaft and others believed the President’s use of a “replica” of the oval office would somehow be seen as “sort of hanging on to something that wasn’t his.” However, Roberts came up with idea to put the replica of the Oval Office on the top floor and convert it into exhibit space after the President’s death. This solution also solved Bunshaft’s dilemma of “having to mutilate the building inside.”¹³⁹ Bunshaft believed the style of the oval office would not match the modern style of the building he designed and he was concerned that the need for a ceiling on the oval office would ruin the open spaces of the Great Hall.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ibid, 13-20.

¹⁴⁰ Bunshaft mentions an interesting aside in his oral history. He was friends with I.M. Pei who was designing the Kennedy Library at the same time. Pei was also against including a replica Oval Office, but was doing so at the insistence of the Kennedy family. Both architects agreed to do their replicas at seven-eighths the size and each used the excuse of the other library to sell the idea to their prospective clients.

Juanita Roberts met the Johnsons in 1938 through her husband “who was one of his NYA [National Youth Association] boys.” She worked on LBJ’s 1941 Senate campaign, talking to women throughout East Texas about LBJ, “Selling people on the man persuading them to become campaign workers and furnishing them with campaign materials.” During World War II, she joined the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, where she eventually became Colonel Roberts. After World War II, Colonel Roberts returned to Texas and again worked on a Senate campaign for LBJ in 1948. In 1952, when LBJ’s Senate career began to take off, he asked Roberts to join his staff as a self-described “generalist...I did something of nearly everything.” Colonel Roberts joined a special Congressional Army Reserve Unit in 1952, and when LBJ was elected Vice President, he arranged for her to be placed on active duty to serve as his secretary and personal assistant. Roberts continued to serve as secretary, advisor and generalist through Johnson’s administration, even staying on active duty as a National Security advisor past the Johnson administration.¹⁴¹

Juanita Roberts played an active role in the exhibit design process, serving as primary note taker at the exhibit meetings. Roberts, along with Dorothy Territo, appear to represent the President’s office during the exhibit design. Territo was another long-time Johnson aid. Territo took a leave of absence from the Library of Congress in the spring of 1958 in order to work on a mail project in

¹⁴¹ Juanita Roberts, Oral History Interview II, 29 August 1969, by Joe B Frantz, Electronic Copy, LBJ Library, Austin Texas.

Senator Johnson's office. During this project, she started a classification system that included identifying items of possible historical significance – to record head of state gifts, to classify and copy speeches according to subject, and to organize a photo archive.¹⁴² Territo referred to the system as a "paperwork management program...established...for the purpose of analyzing, identifying and organizing records that would facilitate any possible archival process that might be 'initiated at some future date.'" ¹⁴³ The LBJ library adapted this system, which the library still uses to assist researchers.

A third invaluable staffer was Lady Bird Johnson's personal secretary, Bess Abell. She began working for Lady Bird during President Johnson's senate years by helping with her correspondence. Mrs. Johnson continued employing Abell on a part-time basis during Johnson's Vice Presidency, and in November of 1963, made Abell her full-time social secretary. Abell eventually became author and organizer of the various memos and meeting notes associated with the library and would later go on to serve on the board of the LBJ Library Foundation.

Gordon Bunshaft was not directly involved in the planning of the exhibits, although he still maintained a tight control on how the inside of the building would look. Possibly in an attempt to retain architectural control over the inside of the building, Bunshaft appears to have taken an active role in the hiring of the

¹⁴² Territo, 2-19.

¹⁴³ Chronology, Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

exhibit designer. The May 12, 1966 meeting notes make the first mention of an exhibit designer, "Discussion of the 'Great Hall of Achievement' continued, with emphasis on the height and how this could be utilized by an exhibit specialist. Mr. Bunshaft will employ, as soon as possible, an exhibit-graphic arts specialist, to formulate an exhibit concept for this space."¹⁴⁴ In a September 1966 meeting, Bunshaft recommended, "Someone write a scenario so a graphic arts specialist could begin the planning for the great hall."¹⁴⁵

Bunshaft hired Arthur Drexler, Curator of Architecture at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York from 1951 to 1984. Drexler, an architect and designer, specialized in thought-provoking exhibitions with several notable exhibitions on architecture and engineering completed before his work at the library. Although Drexler had extensive experience with design and architecture, he had no formal training in history or politics or in developing historical exhibits.¹⁴⁶

Bunshaft repeatedly refers to Drexler's work as the "interior design," and credits him as "having the patience of a saint."¹⁴⁷ Throughout the design

¹⁴⁴ Minutes, Meeting with Drexler, Heath, Roberts et. al at White House, 12 May 1966, Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Minutes, Meeting with Lady Bird Johnson, Heath, et.al. at White House, 6 September 1966, Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library.

¹⁴⁶ Joseph Giovanni, "Arthur Drexler, 61, Authority on Architecture," *New York Times*, 17 January 1987.

¹⁴⁷ Bunshaft, 24.

process, Drexler acted as an aesthetic voice for Bunshaft, who seemed to trust Drexler to protect the “contemporary” feel of the building. In his oral history, Bunshaft talks about Drexler being “under our control,”¹⁴⁸ and praises Drexler for his ability to design fixtures and cases that enhance the stone interior of the building so that, “the bad taste of various people won’t affect the building.”¹⁴⁹ Bunshaft was not at all concerned about the content of the exhibits. He was concerned that the look of the exhibits did not detract from the architecture

There were no meetings specifically regarding exhibit content until August of 1967 (a full eleven months after Bunshaft mentioned hiring a “decorator”) when Arthur Drexler and long-time LBJ aide Horace Busby presented two memoranda proposing categories and themes to be considered for the exhibits. Drexler and Busby suggested that a brief “history of the era” would “serve merely as a background...for telling what events and influences molded the president.”¹⁵⁰ The other theme, which “the group as a whole found great appeal in” was “The President and the People.”¹⁵¹

Drexler’s formal presentation of a design concept reflected these themes. He presented his design, as well as a scale model, to a group that included President and Lady Bird Johnson, Bunshaft, three members of the University of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 18.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 23.

¹⁵⁰ Minutes, Meeting with Lady Bird Johnson, Bunshaft, Drexler, Busby, Grover, Heath and Territo, 1 August 1967, Reference File, Architecture, LBJ Library.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Texas Board of Regents, the head of the GSA, and members of President and Lady Bird Johnson's staff. The Summary Minutes for this meeting briefly outline Drexler's original concept in its first few paragraphs, simply explaining, "the first floor would be detailed and intimate; the great hall would be devoted to the President's achievements, ideals or aspirations; and the space under the stack area would contain the personal-family material."¹⁵²

The meeting notes go on to describe Lady Bird Johnson's counter to Drexler's design. Among her ideas were "space for a vignette of a White House room, suitable for the display of Luci and Lynda's wedding gowns and a changing exhibit of entertainment at the White House," as well as "an exhibit for the artifacts she has collected...from all over the world."¹⁵³ The meeting notes intimate that Lady Bird Johnson was merely brainstorming about other things that could be a part of the exhibit. However, the fact that the final exhibit included both of these ideas suggests Lady Bird Johnson's influence equaled or exceeded that of the exhibit designer and the architect.

The final design in almost no way reflected Drexler's original proposal. The first floor where visitors entered did contain a biographical panel, but it was only one panel of many on the first floor. Instead of presenting an intimate portrait of Johnson, head of state gifts overwhelmed the first floor exhibits, easily accounting for at least half of the display cases. However, one of the first panels

¹⁵² Summary Minutes, Meeting with Lady Bird Johnson, Dr. Ransom, Mr. Erwin, et. al., at White House, 28 January 1968, Architecture Reference File, LBJ Library, Austin, TX.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

visitors saw was the biographical panel, which mixed documents and photographs of Johnson during different stages of his political career. It also included pictures of Johnson in the Texas hill country as a younger man, helping to tie Johnson back to the local and regional community.¹⁵⁴

The first floor space was also home to a single panel of objects that recounted Johnson's Great Society legislation. Each daughter's wedding received a case that included a mannequin dressed in a replica wedding gown and memorabilia of their White House weddings. The largest single case on the first floor was the "Life in the White House" case. This exhibit case integrated Drexler's design aesthetic with Lady Bird Johnson's exhibit ideas. The case featured "lighted transparencies of some of the public and private rooms in the White House." The case also integrated audio-visual clips of events at the White House along with objects such as Carol Channing's "Hello Dolly" hat and Maria Tallchief's ballet slippers, featured in the clips of their performances.¹⁵⁵

Head of state gifts dominated over half the cases on the first floor. These displays feature some of the most expensive and valuable items in the museum collection. Head of state gifts represented gifts presented to President and Lady Bird Johnson for the American people from the people of the gifting nation as part of diplomatic formalities. These items usually held a cultural significance for the presenting nation, resulting in items that appeared either exotic and

¹⁵⁴ Exhibit Plan, May 1971, Museum Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, LBJ Library, 1-2

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 6.

foreign or lavish and “royal” to the average museum visitor. In this regard, the first permanent exhibit reflected the idea of a civil memorial to the power and prestige of the Office of President.

Yet another case was dedicated to the Johnson administration’s “four principles which underlined U.S. foreign policy.” These policies included “detering and resisting aggression, promoting economic and social progress, encouraging cooperation among nations of the same region and seeking reconciliation with the communist world.”¹⁵⁶ This case highlighted the role of foreign policy in the Johnson administration and Johnson’s emphasis on the importance of foreign policy in his administration. In an early planning meeting, Johnson spoke to the role of the U.S. in the world, taking credit for slowing down India’s population explosion and talking about “how during the drought no one died in India because of the wheat that had been furnished.” Long time Johnson aide, Horace Busby followed up the President’s speech saying, “the concept would be the President and the World, for this is what President Johnson will be remembered for — keeping the world together.”¹⁵⁷ Historians, and probably the everyday visitor in 1971, recognize that “detering aggression” and “seeking reconciliation with the communist world” referred to Vietnam without directly saying “Vietnam.” However, without knowing the long-term implications of the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 21.

¹⁵⁷ Minutes, 28 January 1968, 4

U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, it is hard to imagine that visitors of the first exhibit appreciated Johnson for “keeping the world together.”

The final two cases on the first floor featured letters to the President. The first represented letters of personal importance to the President from “prominent persons.”¹⁵⁸ These letters were personal letters written to the President from Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Eisenhower and a letter from Sam Rayburn. These letters highlighted the President’s political career and each of the authors symbolized a political hero or mentor of Johnson’s. The second case of letters were equally important and helped Johnson maintain his “bark off” policy. These were letters and gifts from the American people. While some of the letters were congratulatory or supportive, they also included a letter from a mother whose son died in Vietnam and another letter from a veteran protesting America’s involvement in a war across the world. Admittedly, situating these letters next to hand-carved statues of the president and letters from children calling the president their hero minimized and diminished the impact of the more negative letters.

The first floor exhibits emphasize the dualistic nature of the library, which directly and indirectly presented its subject as both president and citizen. This contradictory view acts a metaphor for the many facets of LBJ. The first floor alone portrays LBJ as a rural farm boy, a world leader, a father and husband, an invaluable aide in the progressive crusade of FDR, a beloved and benevolent

¹⁵⁸ Exhibit File, 22.

leader in his own right, a powerful congressional leader, and a tough decision maker. This also reinforces the accessible and democratic nature of the libraries by creating a profile of a president to which visitors can relate.

The next floor of exhibits was the Great Hall. The Great Hall remained Bunshaft's ideal and the exhibits in the Great Hall only emphasized the larger-than-life aspects of the presidency. The walls, the floors and grand staircase railings are all made of the same travertine as the outside of the building. The ceiling in the Great Hall extends to the full height of the building, creating a massive open space. On one wall, the seal of the president is etched into the marble in bas-relief and the opposite wall highlights the archival collection by presenting four floors of the collection behind thick glass. 42,000 special red archival boxes with a gold presidential seal line the four floors of windows seen from below in the Great Hall.¹⁵⁹ The Great Hall also features a granite pylon etched with President Johnson's more memorable speeches, and magnesium and acid mural featuring pictures of Johnson with Presidents from Roosevelt to Kennedy. Despite Bunshaft's insistence that his building was modern, the travertine Great Hall, with its giant open space, is reminiscent of the temple, creating a sense of awe, and elevating the man to me.

Despite the grandeur of the Great Hall, the second floor of exhibits in this space may represent the most honest of exhibits and highlights Lady Bird Johnson's desire to present "the themes that have dominated the President's life

¹⁵⁹ Factsheet, 2.

and work.”¹⁶⁰ At one end of the Great Hall were seven cases documenting “a period of time based on President Johnson’s diary.” These cases were meant to “give the visitor a sense of the varied kind of activities that crowd a president’s day.”¹⁶¹ There were also two cases of television banks playing video clips highlighting themes that Johnson specifically requested in the September 6, 1966 meeting: “Science, Conservation, (REA, recreation, parks, beautification); Health, human relations-Civil Rights, Education, Space, Atomic Energy (Atoms for Peace), Youth, International Affairs (Health, Food for Freedom, etc.), and Poverty.”¹⁶²

The clips were developed over a series of meetings and included long-time LBJ aide Jack Valenti, who left the Johnson administration in 1966 to head the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). There was much debate about how and where to present the clips. The First Lady and Valenti even discussed a forty-five minute documentary to present to visitors, but instead opted for shorter clips, presented together to juxtapose the good times and the challenges of the administration. The style chosen is reminiscent of LBJ’s personal style of watching television. His Oval Office (and the replica) included

¹⁶⁰ Minutes, 28 January 1968.

¹⁶¹ Exhibit plans, 24.

¹⁶² Minutes, 6 September, 1966.

a special console that could play all three network news programs simultaneously.¹⁶³

The most interesting case on the second floor was behind the Orientation Theater, and beyond the giant ceilings of the Great Hall. Tucked into a corner were two cases titled, "Controversies of the Nation." Each case had two panels—one panel dedicated to the Civil Rights movement and race riots, one panel to the student protest movement and two panels dedicated to Vietnam. Unlike the other cases in the exhibit, these consisted only of images and two-dimensional, visual displays. Each panel included two letters from the public on each issue—one negative and one positive. There were no objects associated with the events on display, but the images were graphic for the time and the colors used for the student movement and civil rights displays were eye-catching.¹⁶⁴ The planning notes do not mention this part of the exhibit. However, they do include about ten letters considered for inclusion. The exhibits' placement and the way in which it differs from the other displays make it seem like a last minute addition.

The last minute nature of this case reflects the way in which planners adjusted to the changing image of the President and his administration. As the war in Vietnam began losing public support after 1967, the administration's policies lost favor with many Americans. These cases illustrate the more trying aspects of LBJ's presidency and how Americans perceived these issues. Their

¹⁶³Exhibit Plan, May 1971.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

inclusion also represents a voice in the exhibit for the public, reinforcing the way in which the exhibits created a forum.

Cameron argued that forward thinking museums would become places where society can “confront established values and institutions.”¹⁶⁵ By giving voice to both positive and negative aspects of both the administration and the era, the museum becomes a space for political and social discourse. It allowed visitors to gather new information and still feel that their opinions can inform their new knowledge and are valued by the institution and society.

The exhibits left visitors with two very different impressions—LBJ the president and LBJ the man. Much like the outside of the building, there are aspects of the monumental within the exhibits, especially the parts that highlight the office of the president. Other aspects of the exhibit underline Johnson’s human side by emphasizing his life before his public service. These two differing images coalesce in the interpretation of the Great Society legislation. It is here that the human side of LBJ merges with the political, where the emphasis on his early years explain how and why addressing poverty and improving education became the focus of his career.

Mrs. Johnson carefully constructed the narrative with the help of aides and family who best knew the president. Many of these people—Lady Bird, Harry Middleton, Lynda Johnson Robb and Luci Johnson—continued to promote and protect the Presidents legacy well after his death, taking an active role in

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 68.

how history remembers LBJ and his administration. Today, this work is done through the non-profit foundation that supports the work of the library and the LBJ School of Public affairs. There is also the LBJ Future Forum led by the Johnson's granddaughter Katherine Robb, which represents the next generation of Johnsons involved in keeping LBJ's legacy. As the LBJ Library has matured, so too has its exhibits matured, reflecting both a change in perception of LBJ and changing expectations of museum visitors.

CONCLUSION

“The Story of our Time”

After he left office, LBJ retired to Stonewall, Texas where he became a full-time manager of his 1500-acre ranch. Biographer John L. Bullion calls this time “The Spent Gold Coin,” and describes it as “miserable” for the ex-president, noting he “was committing a slow suicide.”¹⁶⁶ He withdrew from politics, lost interest in much of his business dealings, no longer maintained his diet and started smoking and drinking heavily. Bullion even commented on the fact that the former President grew out his hair, further illustrating the distance that LBJ created between himself and his former life. Bullion characterizes Johnson as intimidated by his loss of power and claims that he “shrank from criticism” of his administration. Mrs. Johnson’s biographer, Jan Jarboe Russell confirms this image, claiming that Mrs. Johnson became a full-time manager of her husband, who would rarely let her leave his side.¹⁶⁷

It is difficult to reconcile these images, especially an intimidated LBJ, with the man who, during this same time, stood in front of crowds of dignitaries and

¹⁶⁶ Bullion, 225.

¹⁶⁷ Russell, 302-310.

V.I.Ps at the opening of his library, and proclaimed, "It's all here."¹⁶⁸ LBJ was perceptive about his image, and it is not hard to imagine that he realized he was also standing in the gaze of history, challenging it, and all of those present, to judge him.

His legacy seemed to be one thing that interested LBJ after his retirement. He hired a staff and opened his boyhood home in Johnson City, fifteen miles from the ranch. He also kept a close watch on the attendance figures of his library. Doris Kearns recounts how library staff had to keep count of daily attendance figures for LBJ and would often feel the need to inflate them in order to keep LBJ from becoming angry.¹⁶⁹

After his death on January 22, 1973, just sixteen months after the LBJ Library dedication ceremony, Mrs. Johnson, their daughters, LBJ Library Director Harry Middleton, and the LBJ Library Foundation took over maintaining LBJ's legacy. Jan Jarboe Russell noted, "Lady Bird continued to live through her husband by becoming the chief steward of his memory. She presided over public events at the LBJ Library in Austin, interpreted his legacy for historians and the press, and continued to run the radio and TV business."¹⁷⁰

The LBJ Library is a lasting legacy to both the man and his administration. Despite the criticism of the presidential library system, the process of its building

¹⁶⁸ Lyndon Baines Johnson, "Remarks at the Dedication of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library."

¹⁶⁹ Kearns, 363-364.

¹⁷⁰ Russell, 311.

and the original stories it told becomes an historical artifact. Contextualizing the development and content selection of the inaugural exhibits offers a way of looking past the negative aspects of the exhibits and what they represent—memorialization, legacy keeping and the fact that they are message driven—to a unique perspective on the man, the administration and the history of that time.

Michael Kammen explains how the Post-War years elicited a fear of totalitarianism in the American public and how this fear was met with both “official” and grass roots patriotism.¹⁷¹ Selective commemoration of events in an American past created a common civil identity, and Robert Bellah argues that a civil religion was created as heritage sites popped up across the country¹⁷².

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. contends that another product of this fear was a strengthening of the executive branch and Benjamin Hufbauer asserts all presidential memorials, including presidential libraries, are temples of the civil religion and the increased power of executive leaders¹⁷³.

The architecture of the library certainly reflects the monumentality of the office, and architect Gordon Bunshaft’s idea of a modern “temple.” Bunshaft built the building to be “virile” because he thought “the President was really a virile man, a strong man with nothing sweet or sentimental about him,

¹⁷¹ Kammen, 572.

¹⁷² Bellah, 108. This idea is expanded on in both Kammen’s *Mystic Chords of Memory* and Rough’s *Are We There Yet?*

¹⁷³ Hufbauer, 176-199. This theme is present throughout Hufbauer’s work.

and he ought to have a vigorous, male building."¹⁷⁴ As such, the building reflects Gordon Bunshaft's idea of who LBJ was, becoming a physical manifestation of the public perception of Lyndon Baines Johnson. The architectural elements included inside the building lend the exhibits a greater sense of gravity. The travertine walls with brass display cases tucked inside highlight the idea of protecting the treasures within. These aspects of the library emphasize the way in which architecture and space act as a means of creating authority within museums.

Despite the lack of objectivity, the stories that the exhibits tell reveal the monumentality of the decisions made, whether they were the exhibits highlighting the positive effects of the Great Society or the negative ones associated with the Vietnam War. The process of selecting itself reveals a great deal, since what was left out of the exhibits can tell even more about the administration than what was included. The timing of its creation marks the story the museum tells of Johnson's administration. The exhibit's content becomes debatable because it was created during the most turbulent years that Johnson was in office. This debate extended to the public spaces of the museum, creating a place for visitors to question the implications of the administration and the time.

¹⁷⁴ Bunshaft, 27.

However, the most revealing facet of the design of the first exhibit is the way in which it reflects the man it memorializes and the role that LBJ played in its creation. LBJ left the details of the library to the one person he trusted most—Mrs. Johnson—and she carefully oversaw the building and exhibit designs. Because of this, the library and the exhibits reveal how the designers conceptualized and reconciled both Johnson’s public image and the private man. The exhibits, on the other hand, are where Mrs. Johnson developed ideas for what LBJ’s legacy would be and how best to present it, which would become her life’s work after his death. The story the exhibits tell is Mrs. Johnson’s narrative and even still recordings of her voice echo throughout the library, where she continues to narrate what LBJ referred to as “the story of our time.”¹⁷⁵

As Lady Bird saw it, LBJ dedicated his career of public service to helping the less fortunate throughout the world. The inaugural exhibits displayed LBJ’s humble beginnings as a way of illustrating where he got his empathy. His early political career and mentors were included in an attempt to tie the President to a long line of progressive, democratic ideals. Mrs. Johnson’s “Life in the White House” brought museum visitors to sacred grounds, giving them a glimpse of the glamorous life of America’s political elite and the Head of State Gifts hinted at the imperial power wielded by the U.S. and, more specifically, by the President. The themes of LBJ’s domestic legislation ran through the entire

¹⁷⁵ Lyndon Baines Johnson, “Remarks at the Dedication of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.”

exhibits, highlighting the positive changes his administration enacted. Those responsible for LBJ's continuing legacy focus on the positive impacts of his Great Society Legislation.

A detailed study of the creation of the LBJ Library & Museum provides insights by examining what aspects of an administration are included or excluded from exhibition. On a deeper level, presidential libraries and their progression can also illustrate both the ways in which each president has influenced the office and the traditions associated with it and highlights what the public chooses to embrace as part of a shared national identity. The content of today's exhibits at the LBJ Library is roughly the same. The three major redesigns have updated the looks of the exhibit, but the messages — the legacy — remain.

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