



# **Presidential Libraries as Performance: Curating American Character from Herbert Hoover to George W. Bush (Theater in the Americas)**

*Jodi Kanter*

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How do the funding, setting architecture, and exhibition of a presidential library shape our understanding of the president's character? And how do diverse performances of the presidency create radically different opportunities for the practice of American citizenship? In *Presidential Libraries as Performance: Curating American Character from Herbert Hoover to George W. Bush*, Jodi Kanter analyzes presidential libraries as performances that encourage visitors to think in particular ways about executive leadership and about their own roles in public life.

Kanter considers the moments in the presidents' lives the museums choose to interpret, and not to interpret, and how the libraries approach common subjects in the presidential museum narrative—the presidents' early years in relation to cultural ideals, the libraries' representations of presidential failures, personal and political, and the question of presidential legacy. Identifying the limited number of strategies the libraries currently use to represent the diversity of the American experience and American character, Kanter offers concrete suggestions for reinventing and reshaping the practices of museum professionals and visitors within the walls of these institutions.

Presidential museums can tell us important things about the relationships between performance and politics, entertainment and history, and leaders and the people they lead. Kanter demonstrates how the presidential libraries generate normative narratives about individual presidents, historical events, and what it means to be an American.

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