

2. CHARACTER IN MOTION

Visitor Performance

The visitor's movement through the museum is shaped both by culture and by space. As she travels, she embodies prescribed ways of walking—her pace, her rhythm—and of looking—how she is looking and what she is looking for—that have remained relatively stable for at least the last two hundred years of western culture. These behaviors have been cultural expectations in museums since the eighteenth century: to walk at a moderate pace, to speak at a moderate volume, to begin in the first gallery and end in the last.

To be sure, visitors have not always conformed to these expectations. Nonetheless, Helen Rees Leahy affirms, “As people move through a gallery, their bodies articulate the shape of their museum visit, whether or not they conform to its script or walk in the ‘right’ direction. Their movements calibrate the space of the gallery as a quantity of both distance and time.”

The rhythm of the visit, Leahy goes on to argue, is produced reciprocally by the visitor and the museum itself. It is

set by the punctuation of our walking as we stop to look . . . before moving on again, as well as by our pace of walking and the overall duration of the visit. In turn, each of these factors reflects the structure of the display, the density of the exhibits and the size of the exhibition or building.¹

By the ways in which they perform their subjects, museums encourage visitors to move and to see in particular ways.

This chapter considers how the presidential libraries of two men, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, elicit particular performances of American character from their visitors. Setting aside temporarily the major scandal of each president's second term (see chapter 5), I focus here on how the sites, architecture, and layout of the two museums encourage the visitor to move, think, feel, and act. The performances these spaces move visitors toward have significant implications for their behavior in American public life.

The Clinton and Reagan Libraries perform very different kinds of knowledge, creating contrasting visions of America's relationship to its history, the role of the president in public life, and the optimal relationship between the president and his citizenry. Explicitly and implicitly, each museum creates what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett might call a different "museum effect," offering its own model for participating in American public life outside its walls. Through these differences, the libraries produce two divergent moral imperatives for the American character—that is, two different versions of who an American ought to be.

Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton embody American leadership at the end of the twentieth century. Together, they led the nation for sixteen of the century's last twenty years. Although President Clinton left office in 2001 and President Reagan died in 2004, the legacies of both men continue to have a major impact on our shared understanding of American character. In a 2010 poll conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute in which respondents were asked their views about a number of American leaders, including Barack Obama, George W. Bush, and Sarah Palin, Bill Clinton had a significantly higher favorability rating than any other figure, republican or democrat, with 68 percent of Americans reporting a very or mostly favorable opinion of the former president.² Ronald Reagan is still one of the foremost icons of conservative America. In 2008, presidential hopeful John McCain characterized himself as a "foot soldier in the Reagan revolution"³ at a convention that featured an enormous image of the former president as its backdrop. And in September 2011, the republican presidential candidates debated each other at the Reagan Library, implicitly vying for the mantle of his legacy.

At its site and through its internal organization, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library stages an America of limitless space in which each individual is free to make his or her own path. Its exhibits present Reagan, a radio and film actor, as a speaker whose words are performative; they conjure a mythic land into being. His is a frankly selective performance, obviously partial in both senses of the word, which derives its authority from the space between the president's body and other bodies. The museum exhibits work to create distance between Reagan and other leaders, and between Reagan and the visitor, in order to underscore the Great Communicator's unique strength. The visitor's role is to move through the landscape at a leisurely pace, and with appropriate deference to the leader who makes this independent movement possible.

The William Clinton Presidential Library presents Bill Clinton, a Rhodes scholar and Yale Law School graduate, as a student of history. His story can be told in text—lots and lots and lots of text—and requires a serious reader to understand and appreciate it. In sharp contrast to the Reagan Library, the story that the Clinton Library tells derives its force from its claims to comprehensiveness and shared authority. It is a linear narrative with a large bibliography and an extensive list of coauthors. While the Reagan Library creates distance through its uses of space, the Clinton Library creates intimacy by way of a temporal logic. The museum exhibits work to create a sense of intimacy between the president and other leaders, between the president and his predecessors, and between the president and the visitor. The museum presents the American story as one of historical progress and situates the visitor as the actor who will move us to the next critical point on the timeline.

Museum scholars agree that the visitor's experience begins outside the building's walls. Describing the Experience Music Project Museum in Seattle, Chris Bruce argues that "the building itself sends the initial message of the institution as destination, and acts as a very specific tool in connecting with and even determining an audience type. . . ."⁴ I would add that the performance of the museum may begin even earlier, through the visitor's interaction with images on the library's website or as she approaches the library, before the building itself comes into view.

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, dedicated on November 4, 1991, is located in Simi Valley, California, nearly two thousand miles from Reagan's boyhood home in Dixon, Illinois, but near to both his early career home in Hollywood and his vacation home just outside of Santa Barbara. I visited the library in the summer of 2008.⁵ As I turned onto Presidential Drive and began rounding the lazy curves up the hill to the site of the Reagan Library, I was dazzled by the beauty of the place. The wide, winding road was lined with trees and every turn offered a fresh view of the valley and nearby mountaintops. Every fifty feet or so I encountered a new banner with a sepia-toned image of one of the former presidents, beginning with George Washington and rising up toward Ronald Reagan.

At the front edge of the museum site two benches perched on the edge of the hill, inviting the visitor to sit and contemplate the sun-drenched landscape. I sat on one of them and felt the warm northern California sun on my face as I looked out. The primary feature of the landscape, a panorama of enormous mountains, towered above the valley site in every direction.



The Reagan Presidential Library and Museum boasts the most spectacular setting in the presidential library system. The western vista includes a piece of the Berlin Wall donated to the museum. *Photo courtesy of Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library.*

In the distance, the mountains embodied nothing so much as the purple majesty of “America the Beautiful.” The site would inspire a love of the land in the most curmudgeonly visitor.

The building itself plays a relatively minor role in the scene. Architect Hugh Stubbins called the building style “early California,” recognizable to the novice as Spanish mission style. It is a wide but modest structure, low to the ground, encouraging visitors to look over its red tile roof and through its stucco arches at the sweeping natural landscape. The Reagan Library site deflects attention from the museum building. Instead, it directs the visitor toward the contemplation of a majestic natural landscape.

The pastoral landscape has played a vital role in the American cultural imagination since the discovery of the New World. Our most treasured national myths revolve around an idyllic community that mirrors the surrounding environment. In their cultural study, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, Lawrence and Jewett describe the backdrop against which the American hero performs:

A small, well-organized community whose distinguishing trait is the absence of lethal internal conflict arising from its members; the surrounding pastoral realm echoes its inner harmony. The citizens are law-abiding and cooperative, without those extremes of economic, political, or sexual desires that might provoke confrontations.⁶

It was this mythic American community to which Reagan referred at the library's dedication ceremony, when he described his upbringing in Illinois:

I grew up in a town where everyone cared about one another because everyone knew one another, not as statistics in a government program but as neighbors in need. Is that nostalgic? I don't think so. I think it is still what sets this nation apart from every other nation on the face of the earth. Our neighbors were never ashamed to kneel in prayer to their makers nor were they ever embarrassed to feel a lump in their throat when old glory passed by. No one in Dixon, Illinois, ever burned a flag and no one in Dixon would have tolerated it.⁷

And it was this myth to which Reagan referred when, in conclusion, he alluded as he did throughout his presidency to America as a "shining city upon a hill," echoing and embellishing the famous words of John Winthrop, founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.⁸

Through these allusions Reagan emphasized in speech what the library emphasizes in structure: the goodness of the enduring American landscape and the correspondingly natural goodness of its people. Such a harmonious landscape does not require human intervention to prosper. It invites contemplation and prayer. The library site implicitly associates the former president with the fabled majesty of America, inviting the visitor to pause and contemplate its beauty.

Even on the brightest of days, the landscape of industrial downtown Little Rock, Arkansas, is no match for Simi Valley, California. The terrain is strikingly flat and the grounds of the Clinton Presidential Center, while well-tended, offer neither particularly attractive flora nor impressive views. As I first approached the library on a summer day in 2004, my strongest feeling was one of disappointment. In addition to the flatness of the landscape, the library building itself, a construct of glass and steel, is heavily industrial in appearance. It reminded me of a skywalk in an airport or a viaduct on a highway topped by a Howard Johnson's restaurant. At the dedication ceremony,

I later learned, the president himself had acknowledged the already circulating joke that the building resembled a doublewide trailer.⁹

Despite these unintended associations, architects James S. Polshek and Richard M. Olcott did in fact design the Clinton Presidential Library to look industrial. Specifically, the design echoes the nearby Rock Island Railroad Bridge, thereby creating “a tangible link between yesterday and tomorrow: on the one hand, a relic of the 19th century and, on the other, a major architectural statement of the 21st century.”¹⁰ The design also echoes the theme of Clinton’s second term of office, in which he promised to “build a bridge to the twenty-first century.”

The right side of the Clinton Library is planted firmly on the grounds of the center, which also include an archive building and the Clinton School of Public Service. The left side of the building is cantilevered out over the Arkansas River, as if toward an unseen, unknown destination. The bridge, then, is unfinished, heralding a major theme of the library exhibit, the necessity for visitors to participate actively (here through their imaginations, elsewhere in more fully embodied ways) in the ongoing construction of the American project. However one responds to the aesthetics of the exterior,



At the dedication of the Clinton Presidential Library, which echoes the theme of his second term, “building a bridge to the twenty-first century,” President Clinton joked about the structure’s industrial architecture. *Photo by Arnie Kanter; used with permission.*

the bridge metaphor focuses viewers' attention on the need for collaborative work in the service of community. Echoing this theme, the keynote of Clinton's address at the library's dedication was his effort to span the conservative-liberal divide; in the end he heralded an ethic of community: "What should our shared values be? Everybody counts. Everybody deserves a chance. Everybody has got a responsibility to fulfill. We all do better when we work together. Our differences do matter but our common humanity matters more."¹¹ As Reagan's remarks highlighted the goodness of the land and its people, Clinton's highlighted the importance of collaborative human labor.

Other features of the Clinton Library site also emphasize the importance of working for the community. In the service of economic equality, the Clinton Foundation's capital investment in a neglected and largely inaccessible piece of land beside the Arkansas River helped to revitalize a dilapidated portion of the city. In the service of environmental justice, it was designed with maximal efficiency in mind, drawing on materials such as recycled tires, bottles and cans, solar energy, and regional stone. As a result, it became a landmark building, the first presidential library to receive a silver rating for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, the third highest rating in the U.S. Green Building Council's system.¹² Finally, the Clinton School of Public Service, as the first institution in the country to offer a Master of Public Service degree, represents a significant investment in the development of human capital.

The exteriors of the two libraries highlight different roles for the visitor and correspondingly different ideals for the American character. The Reagan Library site encourages the visitor to privately contemplate the timeless beauty of a distant "city on a hill." The Clinton Library site turns the visitor's attention toward human progress and the collaborative work required to achieve it.

Museums act on and through the body of the visitor in what Leahy calls the "felt quality" of exhibit walking. Jill Stevenson identifies a range of design choices that "direct visitors to interact with certain material elements, to navigate the space in particular ways, and to conduct themselves in a specific fashion, while at the same time seeming *not* to force anything on them."¹³

Commensurate with the divergent postures toward citizenship the library exteriors evoke, the Clinton and Reagan Libraries command very different kinesthetic practices from visitors. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett distinguishes between "in-context" and "in-situ" displays. She explains that in-context displays textualize objects. "The larger narrative may be a story of evolution or historical development. The performative mode is exposition and demonstration. The aesthetic is one of intelligibility."

The Clinton Library follows the in-context model. It is profusely expository, replete with lengthily captioned objects and images that are, in turn, situated in a larger narrative of a given policy priority. The most prominent component of the Clinton Library's main exhibit hall is a timeline of the Clinton presidency that spans the length of the hall. The timeline consists of eight enormous panels narrating, in chronological order, each of the eight years of the administration. Each of the panels is flooded with text. In addition to text blocks within the main displays that narrate specific events or themes for each year, a text subpanel to the right of the display material narrates the year as a whole, and a large-print quotation above the display provides a keynote for the year. As if this were not enough text to navigate, at the bottom right of each year's panel is a recessed bookshelf filled with binders containing complete presidential schedules for the year. The visitor could, in theory, account for the president's whereabouts and activities every hour of every day of his administration.

The perimeter of the main exhibit hall also aims at intelligibility through in-context displays. Although the linear narrative of the timeline holds center stage, it is supplemented by information presented in a thematic rather than chronological fashion. The hall is lined with fourteen alcoves highlighting the Clinton administration's policy priorities and accomplishments. Reviewer Stephen L. Recken notes "the absence of a historian's work" here, explaining that "a historian would have organized these fourteen topics into three or four broad themes."¹⁴ The policy alcoves, like the timeline, are swarming with text. Each is lined on all three sides with glass-enclosed display cases featuring multiple audiovisual images and artifacts. There is text below each segment of each display that narrates the artifacts, text inside many of the displays, and text on the glass over the displays, creating a palimpsest for the reader.

The in-context approach of the Clinton Library is commensurate with the educational function of exhibits championed in the late nineteenth century by Dr. George Brown Goode, director of the U.S. National Museum. Goode's model for the museum was "the public library" in which "objects were to be read like books"¹⁵ and in which explanation of the artifact eclipsed the artifact itself in importance. According to this model, the museum visitor was a student, reading her way to greater knowledge.

The problem with this model is that it does not describe what, on the whole, museum visitors do. A number of visitor studies have confirmed that museum visitors interact with exhibits rather than study them. "Visitors devote most of their time to looking, touching, smelling, and listening, not



The main hall of the Clinton Library features large panels describing each year of the president's tenure in office and is lined with alcoves detailing policy priorities. *Photo by Arnie Kanter; used with permission.*

to reading. Visitors tend to be very attentive to objects, and only occasionally attentive to labels.¹⁶

Nor is it necessarily what visitors ought to do. The in-context display is also problematic insofar as it does not tend to make for a compelling museum experience. Elaine Heumann Gurian illuminates some of the problems with both historically linear and text-based museum exhibitions. "Exhibitions are places of free choice. Try as we might, the public continually thwarts our attempts to teach incrementally in an exhibition. They come when they want, leave when they want, and look at what they want while they are there. Therefore, linear installations often feel like forced marches." Furthermore, Gurian argues that "the more complex the verbal message becomes, the less understandable the exhibition turns out to be, since exhibitions are basically nonverbal enterprises."¹⁷ In recent years, museum studies and museum practices have both focused on how to augment this inherent element of free choice in visitors' experience, encouraging the visitor to create his or her own story and to improvise a unique path through the museum.

In a history museum such as the presidential library, the in-context display's focus on intelligibility encourages the visitor to trace a narrative of more or less linear progress and, therefore, to experience herself as having

a role to play in creating it. This can be empowering for the visitor; as the ancient alphabet democratized access to knowledge, the textual approach to display makes it possible for the visitor to write her own chapter in the American story, with the stipulation that rigorous reading of the past is a prerequisite of future textual production.

On the other hand, the moral dangers of narratives of progress are legion and, by now, familiar. De Certeau argued that the entire scriptural enterprise “stocks up what it sifts out and gives itself the means to expand” in an explicitly colonialist manner.¹⁸ The in-context museum display expands the power of those who already have it, the best educated and therefore, typically, the most economically advantaged visitors.

Further, as historiographers note, an emphasis on intelligibility tends to produce a false sense of coherence as it “strains for the effect of having filled in all the gaps, of having put an image of continuity, coherency, and meaning in place of the fantasies of emptiness, need, and frustrated desire that inhabit our nightmares about the destructive power of time.”¹⁹ Similarly, the profusion of text in the Clinton Library generates the sense of an uncensored, uncut story, eliding the selection process upon which the construction of any narrative—and any memory place—depends.

In-context displays can also make visitors weary. Museum professionals have long endeavored to understand the challenge of “museum fatigue.”²⁰ A number of social scientific attempts to explain the waning of visitor attention over time—is museum fatigue physical or psychological? How is it affected by the arrangement of objects in space?—have been unsuccessful. But the problem persists, and continues to concern exhibit designers. No study is needed, however, to determine that long periods of standing in one place and reading will exhaust the museum visitor. Whatever other factors may contribute to its onset, the visitor to the Clinton Library is highly susceptible to museum fatigue.

Yet it is likely this very feature of the Clinton Library, its profusion of text and encouragement of methodical, linear movement through space, that prompted NARA assistant archivist Sharon Fawcett to comment that the museum “is so Bill Clinton. It’s completely Bill Clinton.”²¹ Despite his administration’s early efforts to “reinvent government” by cutting down dramatically on the textual excesses of federal regulations, Clinton himself was known for producing a profusion of text. His verbal excesses include his infamous nominating speech for Michael Dukakis at the 1988 Democratic National Convention that went on for so long that the crowd cheered when he said, “in conclusion”; the longest State of the Union speeches since

Calvin Coolidge; and, later, an autobiography that came in at just under a thousand pages. In the name of inclusivity, Clinton had a propensity for exhausting his audience.

The main exhibition hall of the Clinton library asks the visitor to read a historical narrative of progress (and to fit fourteen subplots into that narrative). Its linear presentation of the presidency directs the visitor to proceed through the exhibit methodically, chronologically, with the rigor and stamina of a scholar. The library's displays, overflowing with text, seem to offer the visitor a comprehensive performance of history, if he will only study them hard enough.

In contrast to in-context displays, in-situ displays de-emphasize exposition, modeling themselves instead on "the experience of travel and the pleasures of engaging the life world."²² Following this kinesthetic logic, the Reagan Library surrounds the visitor with minimally contextualized objects, images, and media, encouraging affective engagement with and leisurely movement through its spaces.

The arrangement of exhibitions in the Reagan Library, therefore, commands a less disciplined performance practice. The museum's narrative divisions, both spatial and chronological, are imprecise. The central exhibits occupy three large, open spaces: a room with a series of stations representing Reagan's youth, a second with a series of stations representing his career in radio and film and his early political life, and a third representing his presidency. While the Clinton Library's main hall is bathed in natural light, all three of these rooms are windowless; like the darkened movie theater, they encourage the visitor to immerse herself in the story of the exhibit space. Although the pamphlet that guides the visitor through the museum presents these rooms in a clear and orderly fashion ("Early Years Gallery," "Gubernatorial Gallery," "First Term Gallery"—oddly, there is no second-term gallery), none of these collections are prominently labeled in the space itself.

In contrast to the Clinton Library's timeline, the eight years of the Reagan administration are represented by a series of key moments of contact between the president and the citizenry. These moments are the assassination attempt by John Hinckley Jr.; Reagan's response to the Professional Air Traffic Controllers union strike; and his speech commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Normandy invasion. All of these moments occurred in Reagan's first term of office, the first two very early in his first term and the last toward the end. While in one sense these choices are diverse—the first a moment of personal trial, the second a moment of national challenge, and

the third an international anniversary—it is certainly impossible to construct any narrative of the Reagan presidency based on these three points.

Following these central rooms, the visitor enters a small and cluttered though more brightly lit gallery filled with gifts from Reagan's travels around the world, a feature of many presidential libraries. From there, the visitor walks down a short hallway to a replica of the Reagan-era Oval Office (another common feature) and then to another large, dark room featuring images of the Reagans' postpresidential life on their California ranch.

Not surprisingly, film is featured throughout the museum. A video program for each major gallery runs continuously on a plasma screen. These films feature collages of footage organized around themes or periods. They, too, are frankly selective and unbound by constraints of linear time. In each room one can begin watching any screen at any point and keep watching until the footage repeats itself. And in a later addition to the museum displays, the visitor can even play at being the star herself.

The three discrete sites of engagement highlighted by the exhibit on the Reagan administration do not invite the visitor to study a comprehensive historical timeline. Rather, through selective attention to events, they allow the visitor to participate in the idealized atmosphere of the *mise-en-scène*, Reagan's America. In this sense, they mimic the role of the nineteenth-century panoramic exhibit that, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, was a valuable surrogate for travel before the advent of mass tourism. Indeed, since the exhibit omits unpleasant elements of the original experience, "viewers might prefer the panorama of Naples to Naples itself." The displays of the Reagan Library offer the contemporary analogue of the museum-as-travel, the interactive "experience" that "has become ubiquitous in both tourism and museum marketing" and that "indexes an engagement of the senses, emotions, and imagination" rather than an engagement of the intellect.

The visitor to the Reagan Library is also encouraged to move differently. The helter-skelter layout of the museum exhibits delineates, following Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "conceptual paths through what becomes a virtual space of travel."²³ In the Reagan Library, without a clear spatial or temporal trajectory, the conceptual paths create a space not of work or study but of leisure. They encourage the visitor to simply move where her interest takes her and enjoy the scenery.

This is the leisurely movement of the cowboy on his trail, represented in the library by a life-sized bronze sculpture of the president in his riding gear and broad smile that adorns the building's central courtyard. The image was fixed in popular memory by, among others, Roy Rogers, another

radio star born in the same year as Ronald Reagan. In his signature song, "Happy Trails," written by second wife Dale Rogers-Evans, Rogers croons to the rhythmic clop of horses' hooves, "it's the way you ride the trail that counts."²⁴ The song celebrates the American ethic of individualism. It's the way you ride the trail and not the destination that matters. You are expected to ride alone, meeting up with others only by chance at an unspecified future time. With its slow rhythm and gentle melody, the song promises an easy, if not always happy, journey.

While the Clinton Library's narrative structure emphasizes historicity, progress, and the value of work, the Reagan Library's looser and more discontinuous displays emphasize freedom of movement, timelessness, and the value of leisure. This more independent, less structured spatial practice resonates strongly with the mythic terrain of the American West, a terrain Reagan claimed as his own through many of his presidential performances and, later, through the reiteration of these performances in his everyday life at his ranch.

Writing in the context of the art museum, Leahy describes the visitor's body as "alert to the requirements of the object on display; each exists in a relationship of dynamic symbiosis with each other, as well as with the space they occupy and everything within it."²⁵ In the context of the presidential library, however, this "dynamic symbiosis" is itself a subject of representation. Each library displays a different ideal spatial relationship between the president and the citizen, and each evokes a different performance from the visitor. Ideas about the relationships between the ordinary American and the president must be analyzed, then, both as they are represented within the library's exhibits and as the library invites the visitor to embody them.

The Clinton and Reagan Libraries perform strikingly different spatial relationships between the president of the United States and other citizens, important and ordinary, domestic and foreign. The Clinton Library works to diminish space between the figure of the president and a wide array of others, while the Reagan Library creates maximal distance between the president and everyone else. These spatial relationships encourage visitors to the two libraries to imagine themselves as part of a community of leaders and as independent actors, respectively.

While the idea of a bridge to the twenty-first century is self-consciously a metaphor for the future, in the Clinton Library the bridge also serves as a metaphor for working closely across differences, a major theme of the permanent exhibit. The museum displays a relationship of intimacy between the president and his political collaborators, both domestic and foreign.

Interactive screens in the model cabinet room (a feature shared only by the Ford Library) emphasize the extent to which Clinton brought people together within his administration. They note that he held more cabinet meetings than any president in recent history and solicited advice from cabinet members about matters beyond their designated roles. The museum also highlights Clinton's strong professional alliances with Vice President Al Gore and first lady Hillary Clinton, both of whom Clinton gave historically unprecedented responsibility. Of his wife, Clinton says, "To take someone with her ability and not use it I thought would have been a big mistake." Of Gore, Clinton says simply, "Al Gore knew things I didn't know."²⁶ The gallery dedicated to Gore's work is unique in the presidential library system for the amount of space and substantive documentation it provides the contributions of the second in command.

At the level of national policy, the museum emphasizes Clinton's ability to bridge differences between people through his domestic agenda. One of the policy alcoves in the museum's central display hall is dedicated to "Building One America" and emphasizes the policies and other activities through which the president promoted dialogue and tolerance on issues including religion, race, and sexuality, as well as the creation of the AmeriCorps national service program. And at the level of foreign relations, two double-alcoves—the only such spaces in the library—are dedicated to "Confronting Conflict, Making Peace" and "Building a Global Community." These alcoves detail the president's engagement in the Balkans, the Middle East, Ireland, and Kosovo; his efforts to preserve security in American relations with Russia, China, and Korea; his efforts to strengthen relationships with the governments of longtime allies; and his efforts to forge new international alliances.

Above all other collaborations, the museum emphasizes Clinton's work to bring together people of African and European descent in both the United States and abroad. Clinton's work on behalf of racial reconciliation in the United States is noted throughout the museum, and is highlighted particularly in the museum's final exhibit entitled "The Work Continues," which describes the work of the Clinton Foundation both in Little Rock and in Harlem, New York.

The symbolic foundation of Clinton's work for racial justice abroad is his close relationship with Nelson Mandela. It is arguably this relationship, even more than his relationships with the first lady, the vice president, and the cabinet, that serves as the museum's touchstone and moral center. Mandela and Clinton are featured together in several large photographs, in quotations on the main floor of the library, and in remarks by Mandela about Clinton

in the museum's introductory film, in which Mandela refers to Clinton as "my friend" and as a partner in working for peace.

The museum also creates intimacy between the visitor and the president through the library's audio tour, which visitors can borrow as a guide and purchase as a souvenir. The tour, comprised almost entirely of reflections by the president himself, acts as a bridge between the former leader of the free world and the visitor. Here, in a tone that is variously folksy, nostalgic, and analytical, President Clinton literally whispers in the visitor's ear. With an occasional self-deprecating chuckle, he shares his personal reflections on topics ranging from his favorite books (some of which are displayed in the museum) to his grandparents to the time in his presidency when "they were trying to run me out of the job."²⁷ The track about the impeachment is perhaps most striking in its performance of an intimate confidence between the visitor and the president, excluding the possibility that any visitor would herself be part of such a "they." And in a section of the audio tour dedicated to his relationship with Mandela, Clinton recounts advice Mandela offered during his impeachment hearings, letting the visitor into this private conversation among leaders.

President Clinton also casts visitors explicitly and repeatedly as his collaborators in the work of leadership. In the museum's introductory film, in the first track of the audio tour, and in the official companion book to the museum, he insists that "America will always be an unfinished project. We all have a role to play in carrying on the work."²⁸ The architectural metaphor of the bridge reverberates throughout the Clinton Library's permanent exhibition, from close collaboration inside the administration to Clinton's foreign policy priorities to the relationship between the president and ordinary citizens. Finally, it reverberates in the museum's consistent efforts to create a sense of intimacy between the visitor to the presidential library and its subject.

While the Clinton Library stages the president's relationships to others as intimate, the Reagan Library works to maximize the distance between the president and others. It does this primarily by reproducing the high degree of selectivity the Reagan administration exercised over his public appearances. From the beginning of his administration, one journalist noted, Reagan consistently appeared "far away and in transit."²⁹ Similarly, the museum exhibits offer selective, fleeting access to Reagan's presence. The audio guide to the museum is narrated not by Reagan himself but by an anonymous professional. The introductory film, made after Reagan's death, does not feature the president directly addressing visitors to the museum as Clinton's does. And the museum exhibits do not highlight his personal relationships

with other leaders, either domestic or foreign. Indeed, of the three first-term highlights mentioned above, two of them—the assassination attempt and the PATCO strike—feature the president singlehandedly defeating an adversary.

There is only one nonadversarial relationship highlighted in the museum: the relationship between the president and his wife. In all of the galleries except the first, Nancy Reagan plays a staunch supporting role. Always pictured by Reagan's side, she is the recipient of handwritten love notes first from "Your guv" and then from "Your pres." (These signatures, however lightly penned, may suggest a certain distance even in their relationship.) She is also featured in a small gallery following the postpresidential ranch room.

Mrs. Reagan's role, however, is consistent with her script in the historically male space of the Hollywood western, in which "women play roles which are conventionally secondary to male action."³⁰ Unlike Hillary Rodham Clinton, Mrs. Reagan is not featured as an intellectual partner or a collaborator but as a supportive, steadfast, and largely silent physical presence. She is the Tonto to Reagan's Lone Ranger. Even her most identifiable contribution to the administration's programs, the "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign, is framed as emanating from a spontaneous, in-the-moment outburst on Mrs. Reagan's part rather than from a crafted strategy.

Two other small exhibits help to create distance between Reagan and others. The first focuses on Reagan's film career, which serves as a reminder of the extent to which Reagan's was always a mediated image, one his audiences sat in the dark and enjoyed. The other centers on the Berlin Wall and features a clip of Reagan in one of his most famous moments as president, commanding Mikhail Gorbachev to "tear down this wall." Rather than representing intimacy between the two leaders, this exhibit demonstrates the extent to which Reagan could command his fellow world leaders to act, in spite of—or because of—his distant location.

Nowhere does the museum perform Reagan's distancing practices more dramatically than in the Air Force One Pavilion, a ninety-thousand-square-foot space that the Reagan Library website touts as "one of Southern California's must-see destinations!"³¹ While the rest of the museum offers almost no natural light, Air Force One faces the Pavilion's massive, two-hundred-foot-wide by sixty-foot-tall glass outer wall. It is dramatically illuminated with natural light and poised, as the museum brochure narrates, for flight.

The Air Force One Pavilion was an expensive addition to the museum and is maintained by the Reagan Library Foundation rather than the National Archives. The imposing aircraft is the president's high-speed, technological steed and its presence here (it served six other presidents as well) emphasizes

the extent to which it became identified with Reagan. Indeed, visitors learn that Reagan used the plane more than any previous president, traveling over 660,000 miles. Although some of this travel was domestic, much of it was international, and the exhibit highlights his global diplomatic missions.

In a gesture that would seem to collapse the space between the visitor and the president, visitors are invited to board Air Force One. The museum sells this as an extraordinary opportunity, highlighting it on printed materials and offering photo-taking as one climbs aboard. Visitors can later purchase these photos. But the “trip” aboard the plane itself is anticlimactic. Inside, the plane is considerably less glamorous than the average commercial aircraft. The center aisle is as narrow as a small commercial flight’s, the interior walls are charcoal gray with wood paneling, and mannequins dressed in flight uniforms perch awkwardly, lifelessly in two of the several small cabins.

The dinginess of the plane’s interior dramatizes the performative nature of Air Force One; it is, by definition, the president’s presence on any aircraft that makes it “Air Force One.” When the visitor accesses the physical space of the famous plane, she finds that its aura has departed with its occupant. And, of course, this plane to which we are permitted entry cannot fly anywhere, least of all into the rarefied airspace of presidential performance. Here, inside the president’s most privileged sanctuary, the visitor is further from Reagan than ever before.

The interior of the Clinton Library is designed as a library. While this may seem wholly unremarkable, in fact most presidential museums do not resemble libraries at all. In the case of the Clinton Library, however, the exhibit planners strove to make the building “more library-like than the other twelve presidential libraries,”³² consciously modeling the main exhibit room of the museum after the reading room in the Trinity College Library in Dublin, Ireland. Clinton had a very direct relationship to this space; the Trinity Library reading room was situated in one of his favorite buildings and, significantly, was a place he first visited as a Rhodes scholar. As well-credentialed academically as any American president, Clinton’s Rhodes scholarship was sandwiched between his undergraduate years at Georgetown University where he studied on a scholarship (one of many he was offered as a high-school senior) and his matriculation at Yale Law School.

Next to the main exhibit room’s central timeline, the space’s most conspicuous features are the surrounding, towering, twenty-eight-foot high wooden book stacks. These two-story stacks, which so closely resemble those created at Trinity College a century and a half earlier, contain close to five

thousand archival boxes—less than 8 percent of the actual historical archive of the administration. The total archive includes 80 million pages of documents. (To put these numbers in perspective, this is 30 million more pages of documents than can be found in the presidential library of Ronald Reagan, Clinton's closest two-term predecessor.) If the modern library's exterior architecture points toward the future, the physical replication of the old reading room is one important way that the museum represents the president as a good and serious student of the past.

Clinton most explicitly performs the role of history student through the museum's audio tour. Early in the tour, Clinton upholds the wisdom of the very earliest American statesmen. "If you look at the whole history of our country, it's basically been a story of progress toward the founders' dream of a more perfect union."³³ Later, he lists some of his favorite books, which include several biographies of great American leaders as well as Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*, an adaptation of a play by Sophocles that focuses on learning from history. In its most famous passage, the chorus directly addresses the listener, encouraging her both to study and to improve upon history, making "hope and history rhyme."³⁴

But Clinton emphasizes that his education did not only come from books. It began, he explains, with his grandparents. Of his commitment to civil rights, Clinton says that he deserved "no credit whatsoever," "because I was raised that way. My grandparents opened my eyes at an early age to the evils of discrimination. . . . It was just built into my grandfather's genes, I think." And an entire track of the audio tour is dedicated to a discussion of the president's high-school English teacher who, he says, "opened my eyes to the world around me . . . and the world inside me." Ending this track, Clinton relates that, as he was writing his memoirs, his editor reprimanded him, "You cannot put the names of every teacher you had in grade school, junior high and high school and college, and you cannot write a story about each one, the book will be five thousand pages long, you can't do it."³⁵ Here, Clinton jokes about his tendency toward long-windedness while simultaneously acknowledging his debt to all those with whom he studied, even those there isn't space to name.

While the Clinton Library presents the president as a student working hard to learn from both books and people, the Reagan Library presents the president as a speaker whose words brought a better world into being. His words are displayed, following the classic definition of J. L. Austin, as performative utterances, not just describing new realities but, in the iteration, creating them.³⁶ Reagan did things with words—and not, like Clinton, by

studying them or by producing them in vast quantities, but through a kind of iterative magic. Reagan's speeches were efficacious in conjuring, through repetition, a timeless (if mythic) American spirit.

Reagan is widely acknowledged as a masterful storyteller with a single great story to tell. He began formulating this story in his famous 1964 endorsement of Barry Goldwater, "A Time for Choosing." The speech began by articulating a choice that was, he argued, far more important than which political party to endorse:

And this idea that government is beholden to the people, that it has no other source of power except the sovereign people, is still the newest and the most unique idea in all the long history of man's relation to man.

This is the issue of this election: Whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capitol can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves.

You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between a left or right. Well I'd like to suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There's only an up or down—[up to] man's old—old-aged dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. And regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would trade our freedom for security have embarked on this downward course.

Approximately twenty-five minutes later, the speech concluded with a choice of mythic proportions:

You and I have a rendezvous with destiny.

We'll preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we'll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness.³⁷

Although Reagan gave this speech fifteen years before he ran for president, it formed the core of what his aides in the administration called "The Speech":

The importance of "The Speech" cannot be emphasized enough for Reagan's politics . . . It was a skeleton of the speech, always to be edited and perfected and as such it had multiple shapes, but these shapes loom behind all of Reagan's public speeches. It was the one great speech Reagan spent his entire lifetime improving and recreating.³⁸

“The Speech,” was timeless, captivating, and ahistorical. It followed the structure of a particular kind of performative utterance Arthur Frank calls the restitution narrative. It worked to restore normative power relations. It righted wrongs and healed wounds. It restored order in the world. A quintessentially modern narrative, the restitution story concedes that things do not always run perfectly; machines, people, and relationships do break down. But it does not concern itself with the history of the problem. Rather, “the plot of the restitution has the basic storyline: ‘Yesterday I was healthy, today I’m sick, but tomorrow I’ll be healthy again.’” Time, in these narratives, is not progressive but cyclical; we can return to the beginning again—indeed, we are meant to do so. The restitution narrative “affirms that breakdowns can be fixed” and focuses attention on the “heroism of the healer.”³⁹

Important as the content of “The Speech” was for laying out the tenets of American conservatism, it was Reagan’s performance rather than the ideas themselves that proved most transformative. In *Morning in America*—a title taken directly from Reagan’s second presidential campaign and itself suggestive of Reagan’s storytelling style—Gil Troy calls it “Goldwater-Conservatism-with-a-Smile.” Reagan was a “charming optimist,” who projected an “ease in his own skin” and “comfort at the helm.” Reagan could “motivate Americans by identifying many challenges that infuriated them, while reassuring them that they would overcome.” Reagan’s performances conjured an optimistic, confident, and prosperous America, bringing to life a “storyline of decay and renaissance” that “was all the more remarkable given its tenuous relationship to the truth” of 1980s America.⁴⁰

The Reagan Library reenacts some of the president’s most memorable performative utterances. Significantly, two of these three speeches are reenactments, already conjuring the past through repetition. First, a highly condensed filmography exhibit features a young Ronald Reagan as college football star George Gipp. In his final and most famous scene, Reagan as Gipp lies bravely on his deathbed and says to his coach, “Some time, Rock, when the team is up against it, when things are wrong and the breaks are beating the boys, tell them to go out there with all they got and win just one for the Gipper.”⁴¹

The real-life George Gipp was a college football star who died of strep throat and pneumonia in 1920, just two weeks after becoming Notre Dame’s first Walter Camp All-American player. Gipp never gave the inspirational speech. Instead, Gipp’s coach, Knute Rockne, invented it to rally the team during a game in 1928, the acclaimed coach’s worst season.

Fictional or not, Gipp’s words inspired his team from beyond the grave, turning near-defeat into victory. Similarly, throughout his political life in

general and his presidency in particular, Reagan repeatedly exhorted crowds to “win one for the Gipper,” invoking a future for the “All-American” team that, as Knute Rockne had imagined, would soon be as glorious as it had been in the past.

On a screen in the first-term gallery, one can view a reenactment of another one of Reagan’s most famous utterances. Here, in a space devoted to the failed 1981 attempt on the president’s life, an actor playing Reagan’s doctor reports that, on the brink of death, Reagan quipped that he hoped his doctors were Republicans. The actor also performs the doctor’s response, “Today, Mr. President, we are all Republicans.”⁴² Archival footage highlighting Reagan’s ease in the midst of life-threatening injury culminates in images of the president leaving the hospital, sporting a bright red sweater over his bulletproof vest and smiling at the cameras. The story of the assassination attempt is yet another performance of optimism strong enough to conquer the threat of death, here not from illness but from an evil adversary. Far from weakening a president’s resolve, this threat actually brought the American community together, making us “all Republicans,” at least for a day.

A gallery toward the end of the permanent exhibition deals with foreign relations and features one of two sections of the Berlin wall owned by the library. The gallery includes footage of Reagan’s most famous speech act of all, his command to the Soviet leader, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.” Although the wall would not, in fact, come down until Reagan was out of office, the implication here is clear: Reagan felled the Berlin Wall, mending with a six-word performative utterance a quarter-century rift between East and West.

Although Frank articulates the restitution narrative in the context of the ailing body with the medical doctor in the role of the hero, his formulation is easily and usefully transposed to the social body, where the leader assumes the position of the doctor. In this context, it is not the sick person who tells the restitution narrative but the healer. Speaking on behalf of the temporarily afflicted body politic, Reagan’s words restored the wounded nation to health. The Reagan Library presents the president as a virtuosic teller of restitution stories, both in and out of political life. In each performance, Reagan’s speech restores the conservative ideals of strength and freedom to the “patient,” whether that patient is the team, the presidential body, or the nation.

The Reagan and Clinton Libraries create different museum effects, moving the visitor toward very different performances of American character. Emerging from the Reagan Library experience, the visitor might pause to

take another long look at the surrounding beauty of an essentially good and peaceful landscape and experience a surge of national pride. She might proceed slowly on to her next destination, confident that she has within her all that she will need there. She might experience a deep sense of gratitude that the leader of her country is somewhere far away, restoring order and health to the world through the magic of his performances. And she might see herself as essentially different from her president, just an ordinary citizen who might play at being a movie star or a passenger aboard Air Force One, but who ultimately belongs in the audience and on the ground.

Emerging from the Clinton Library experience, the visitor might move back into the world exhausted but with a sense of urgency about the important and difficult work ahead of her. She might well feel overwhelmed by the number, breadth, and depth of the tasks to be accomplished. But she might also feel inspired to reach out to others; others who know things she doesn't know and others who need what she has to contribute. She might experience a sense of gratitude that the leader of her country is not merely acting on her behalf but inviting her to play a critical role—a role not essentially unlike the leader's—in the performance. And she might emerge understanding her own character, the characters of her leaders, and the character of the nation as ongoing, demanding, and collaborative works in progress.