Built Ford Tough: Masculinity, Gerald Ford's Presidential Museum, and the Macho Presidential Style

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Built Ford Tough: Masculinity, Gerald Ford’s Presidential Museum, and the Macho Presidential Style

By

Dustin Jones

A Major Research Paper
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Built Ford Tough: Masculinity, Gerald Ford's Presidential Museum, and the Macho Presidential Style

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May 17th, 2018
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ABSTRACT

In Cold War America, spanning roughly from 1945-1991, masculinity was in crisis. The rise of Communism and the Soviet Union had led to a fear of spies, infiltrators, and defectors known most commonly as the Red Scare. Americans were encouraged to be hyper vigilant in sussing out deviant behaviour. Alongside this scare came the Lavender Scare. It was suggested that homosexuals were deviant peoples and were therefore more susceptible to being turned Communist than their heterosexual counterparts. This led to a crisis of masculinity where even the smallest suggestion of femininity could lead to accusations of potential compromise, an effect felt very noticeably by politicians. It became imperative for politicians who wished to avoid slanderous and potentially career killing rumours to spread, especially if one aimed to be part of the highest office: the presidency. The impact this had was an over emphasis on a macho presidential style that impacted not only the careers of the men who served as president, but also their legacies contained inside their presidential museums. This paper aims to explore the impact of the macho presidential style in the presidential museum of Gerald Ford by comparing his life, his image, and his museum to see what factors are emphasized and to prove that these museums are biased towards the more masculine aspects of a president’s life.
DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to:
My grandparents who began planning for its completion the day I was born.
To my parents, who taught me I could be anything “when I grow up.”
And to Kali, who gave me the final burst of inspiration I needed to finish.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I’d also like to thank Dr. Pauline Phipps. Her classes were both the most entertaining and most inspirational that I had the honour to attend at the University of Windsor. It was my first class with her that introduced me to masculinity history, and each class following opened my perspectives that much more. She has always been incredibly supportive and is a major reason for how far I’ve come as a student and an educator.

Finally, I’d like to thank the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation for their generous support of my research. Without their contributions my work would simply be incomplete and their continued investment in education and history is an example to live up to.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

While the 2016 election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump has shown that many Americans are, at the very least, open to the possibility of a woman president, it also showed that gender still plays a large part in politics.\(^1\) In America, masculinity has become linked with good leadership as stereotypically masculine traits, like strength, aggression, stoicism, and even love of sports, have become associated with the ability to lead.\(^2\) This even extends beyond male versus female as presidents can have differing levels of masculinity. As such, a president’s ability to portray their masculinity has long been intrinsically tied to their leadership skills. This has only escalated over time as the spread of popular culture and the media has made the president even more present in the public eye.

The tie between the presidency and masculinity was only exacerbated by the Cold War when masculinity became linked to American patriotism while stereotypically effeminate men became linked to communism in what was known as the Lavender Scare. During the scare, homosexuals, especially within the U.S. Government, were sought out as being potential security threats because of what was considered deviant behaviour. Anything considered effeminate for a man suddenly became potential proof of this deviance and careers were

\(^1\) A good overview of gender’s impact on politics can be found in Justin S. Vaughn and Lilly J. Goren’s *Women and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics* (2013). For the 2016 election specifically there have been countless articles about the role gender played, and likely many more to come. For a few examples try *Time*’s “How Donald Trump Turned 2016 into a Referendum on Gender,” *ABC*’s “US election: Gender key issue in presidential race, time to break ‘glass ceiling’, Charlotte Mayor says” and *Newsweek*’s “The Presidential Election was a Referendum on Gender and Women Lost.”

\(^2\) Many sources that rank presidents use similar attributes in their ranking. For academic sources on presidential rankings, try William J. Ridings book *Rating the Presidents: A Ranking of U.S. Leaders, from the Great and Honorable to the Dishonest and Incompetent* (2000) or Arthur M. Schlesinger’s journal article “Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton” from the Summer 1997 issue of *Political Science Quarterly*. Polls have also been done by *Sienna College, Gallup, PBS, the Institute for the Study of the Americas, CNN, the Wall Street Journal* and countless others. A compilation of these polls can be found on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_rankings_of_Presidents_of_the_United_States
destroyed over accusations of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{3} As such, presidents during the Cold War had to constantly emphasize their masculinity to both show their leadership ability and to quell any worries about their patriotism.

Fittingly, the presidential library system was born during the Cold War. This system was born out of 32\textsuperscript{nd} President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s proposal to have his presidential papers available to the public. Since then, every president has opened combination library/museums after their first term, with the museums featuring exhibits relating to their lives and their time in the presidency existing alongside libraries containing documents relating to their presidential terms. The timing of their creation raises an important question: if masculinity and good leadership were so intrinsically linked, what impact would this have on portrayals of these Cold War presidents within their presidential museums?

The link between politics and gender has been touched on by a variety of scholars and academics, but the connection between politics, gender, and representations of presidents has seen much less attention. This work intends to explore this connection by looking at Cold War presidential figure Gerald Ford. Ford, the 38\textsuperscript{th} President, was born in Michigan, and was an accomplished college athlete and World War II veteran who came into politics as a congressman in the 1950’s. He is a unique case as he was never elected to the Vice Presidency or the Presidency. He became Vice President when the previous man to hold the position, Spiro Agnew, was forced to step down. He then moved to the Presidency when then President Richard Nixon resigned. Both Agnew and Nixon had been embroiled in the Watergate scandal where men caught spying on the Democratic National Convention were found to have connections to the White House.

Ford’s presidency was characterized by his emphasis on healing the country. He became president during a tumultuous period, with the Vietnam War nearing its end, strained relations with Russia, and confidence in the government waning severely after Watergate. He faced many hardships as president, including two assassination attempts in one month, and his attempts to fix the nation were often met with ridicule, with the most glaring example being his pardon of Nixon, a move meant to help the country move beyond the scandal and return to normalcy, which led many to accuse him of collusion. These failings were only exacerbated by his frequent physical gaffs, like falling down the stairs of Air Force One and hitting a bystander with a golf ball while golfing, that were mocked by the media and in popular culture with the assertion that he was an unintelligent and clumsy man not fit to be president leading to his failed presidential campaign against Jimmy Carter. All these failings did not fit the masculine image of the presidency.

Despite all his alleged failings however, Ford fit perfectly into the masculine mould. He was a skilled athlete, an accomplished naval officer and war hero, and a family man. He embodied the characteristics ascribed to a masculine president and yet was not remembered as such. His football career was used as proof he was a “dumb jock”, his clumsiness proof that he had lost his physical ability, and his pardon of Nixon proof that he too was corrupt. This makes him a unique case study: a president whose life was inarguably masculine according to traditional notions, but who is remembered for the opposite.

This paper will begin with an analysis of masculinity followed by a study of the historiography of the literature on masculinity and presidents. It will then look at Ford and the way his masculinity has been portrayed in his biographies, in popular culture and at his presidential museum. It is split into three sections whose titles define their content. The first,
“The Man,” represents both the defining of masculinity and manliness as well as a stark exploration of exactly who this president was. This is followed by “The Myth,” which represents the historical memory of the American public as they raise presidential figures to exaggerated mythical status. Finally there is “The Legend” which alludes to presidential museums, specifically the Gerald Ford Presidential Museum, and their attempts to further the legend of the figure they represent.

The first section, “The Man,” will explore the life of Ford in an attempt to show how he fits within definitions of masculinity. This chapter will utilize the work of John Orman, a political scientist whose model of presidential masculinity summarizes the key areas in which masculinity has been measured for U.S. presidents. The purpose of this chapter is to gather information about Ford in conjunction with his maleness in order to get a better sense of whether or not any masculine, or unmasculine, portrayals of the president are exaggerations or embellishments by trying to provide a factual depiction of his life. The sources used will focus on Orman’s definitions of presidential masculinity used in conjunction with Ford’s autobiography, primary documents from his time as president and other explorations of his life.

The second section, titled “The Myth”, will look at representations of Ford within popular culture. Their popular cultural portrayals give a sense of the popular and public memory of Ford. Popular culture is often the primary source of knowledge a citizen has about their president. Examining portrayals of Ford provides a sense of how prevalent the myth of his masculine nature and personality were among the American public. This can then be compared to his portrayal in his presidential museums and the facts about his life to see what has been exaggerated or ignored. The themes will include the importance of popular culture to public
memory and politics, and the primary sources are movies, television, comic books, books, and videos.

The final section of this work is titled “The Legend” and it examines how Ford is portrayed in his presidential museum. These museums, made in conjunction with the presidents themselves and funded by supporters, will usually flatter the president and will therefore portray them as a heroic, or perhaps legendary, figure. These museums emphasize the masculine aspects of each president in order to portray them positively as a good and macho leader. This section looks at the portrayal of Ford from the perspective of public history and will examine the importance and impact of museums in portraying and creating a particular masculine image of the president. The Gerald Ford Presidential Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan, itself will be used as a primary source as I examine its layout, exhibits, artefacts, displays, and themes in order to discern whether Ford’s machismo is exaggerated or not.

Gerald Ford’s public image is still dominated by the previously mentioned gaffs and failures from his presidency. While some scholars and academics have come out in defense of his actions, the public opinion remains one of an unintelligent and clumsy failure barely in control of his own body, let alone the country he was placed in charge of. His museum’s attempts to rehabilitate his image are therefore unsurprising, yet by ignoring the things that led him to be seen in a more negative light, their portrayal is historically and academically misleading. So, focusing on Gerald Ford, it is apparent that presidential museums, in an attempt to portray their subjects positively, emphasize their respective presidents’ masculinity, a trait tied to good leadership, often adopting an approach and an agenda that can be entirely contradictory to the public’s memory of the president.
CHAPTER 2: Historiography

The field of masculine history has grown exponentially in recent years. Its focus on how perceptions of masculinity have had an impact on historical events connects it to gender history as an important field. For example, the Cold War as a whole can be more thoroughly understood when looking at how masculinity was heavily scrutinized during the Lavender Scare, an important fact when examining Ford whose presidency was during the period. Popular culture has also had a surge in popularity among academics due to its ability reflect and provide insights on public opinion and society itself. How scholars have used it to inform understandings of popular opinion will be explored in more depth here. Finally the fields of public history and museum studies will be tapped into, with a focus on the presidential museum system. These fields are important as they examine the impact that history available to the public can have the overall belief by many that these public displays are unbiased representations of history, and the importance of looking at museums as sources in and of themselves.

Masculinity is a complex term, but for this work’s purposes, a basic definition is still necessary. Historian John Tosh, widely known as one of the discipline’s foremost experts on masculinity, argues it is important to differentiate between manliness and masculinity. In his work, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire*, he states that “[w]hereas manliness was treated essentially as a social attainment in the gift of one’s peers, masculinity is an expression of personal authenticity, in which being true to

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4 There are many examples of this. *Slate* magazine, in their 2012 article “Which Pop Culture Properties do Academics Study the Most” did research in to discover there were nearly 200 articles written on the TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* alone on *Jstor* and *Google Scholar*. Another example comes from the *New York Times* which wrote on a conference held in Chicago about the television show *Jersey Shore* in academia in an article titled “‘Jersey Shore’ Arrives in Academia. Discuss.”
oneself counts for much more than conforming to the expectations of others.” In other words, Tosh defines manliness as a social construct that is gauged by society as a whole whereas masculinity is more of a personal endeavor in an attempt to pursue manliness for one’s own purposes. As such, what is manly exists as a standard to live up to in an attempt to be masculine. So, while masculinity is a personal expression, it is still confined to the expectations of societal manliness. This allows for an analysis of specific individuals on their ability, or failure, to achieve a masculine image through their perceived manliness.

This individual nature of masculinity is explored by other authors. George L. Mosse, for example, in his seminal work, The Image of Man, points out that, in masculinity, there is “no room for individual variations.” There is a standard that all men must live up to. He explores this through the idea of a masculine stereotype, when he claims “stereotyping meant giving to each man all the attributes of the group to which he was said to belong [and all] men were supposed to conform to an ideal masculinity,” and that “The masculine stereotype was strengthened... by the existence of a negative stereotype of men who not only failed to measure up to the ideal but who in body and soul were its foil, projecting the exact opposite of true masculinity.” This both standardizes masculinity within a masculine stereotype while creating an opposite that the stereotype can rally against. The necessity of an opposition to support society’s main ideal of masculinity is supported by many other authors.

Sociologist Erving Goffman argues that, in Cold War America, there was only one truly idealized version of a man. He states in Stigma, that American society had a very specific idea of what it meant to be male, “a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant

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7 Mosse, 6.
father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height and a recent record in sports.” He goes on to point out that, “Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself – during moments at least – as un-worthy, incomplete and inferior.” Here we begin to see the specific characteristics of the idealized American male: unsurprisingly educated, white, straight, religious, a father and a sporting figure. These traits are common among many examples of masculinity and maleness from the period and are directly related to ideals of the presidency, as will be explored later. Furthermore, Goffman’s description once again sets American males against the unmasculine, or un-worthy as he calls it, who cannot live up to the standard. This is, again, an important distinction as it creates a competitive atmosphere, encouraging men to aggressively pursue masculinity to avoid ostracization.

Robert Bly summarized the evolution of masculinity in the Cold War in his influential work, *Iron John*. In it, Bly explores the changing face of masculinity starting in the 50’s. He explains:

He got to work early, laboured responsibly, supported his wife and children, and admired discipline... his view of culture and America's part in it was boyish and optimistic... [He] was supposed to like football, be aggressive, stick up for the United States, never cry, and always provide... [He] had a clear vision of what a man was, and what male responsibilities were, but the isolation and one-sidedness of his vision were dangerous.9

These traits came to represent masculinity as a whole, with sports, responsibilities, fatherhood, nationalism, and knowledge of what it takes to be a man standing at the forefront. Although Bly’s work is more an analysis of literature and a push for men to return to more traditional ideals of masculinity, his analysis of the culture of masculinity is cited by countless authors and

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his work is considered one of the most influential pieces of the period.\textsuperscript{10} These aspects of masculinity appear throughout the scholarship as well. However, there is a further element to the Cold War specifically that is important for this analysis.

K. A. Cuordileone, in her article “‘Politics in an Age of Anxiety’: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960,” illustrates how masculinity and politics became inherently linked during the Cold War. She explores the concept of “hard” and “soft” masculinity and the evolution of the reduction of political positions, and figures, to dualistic images that would be set against each other. According to Cuordileone, the Cold War brought about “an excessive preoccupation with – and anxiety about – masculinity [that] put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft and feminine and, as such, a real or potential threat to the security of the nation” as this soft femininity became connected with Communism, the political ideology of the Soviet Union, and the perceived enemy of America’s capitalist system.\textsuperscript{11} Firstly, men were being pushed to display themselves as masculine figures to fit into the societal norm. Secondly, there was now the added danger of being labeled not only effeminate, or potentially homosexual, but also a possible Communist sympathizer and therefore a potential threat to national security. This was especially true for politicians.

Andrea Friedman furthers Cuordileone’s argument through her analysis of Cold War Politics in her article, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy: The Lavender Scare, Gossip, and Cold War Politics." Friedman specifically focuses on what is known as the Lavender Scare. This scare dealt

\textsuperscript{10} Many of the authors cited within this work address Bly directly as being influential on the field of masculinity as a whole, and it is little wonder. The book has had a major impact on understandings of masculinity, is directly linked to the creation of the Mythopoetic men’s movement, and was a New York Times bestseller for 62 weeks.

with anxieties towards homosexuals and effeminate men. This coincided with the more well-known Red Scare, which was focused on potential Soviet espionage, and connects them both to the controversial figure of Senator Joseph McCarthy. She explains that while McCarthy is well known for accusing politicians of Soviet leanings, he was also involved in the Lavender Scare and was determined to expose any potential homosexuals as they were seen as morally corrupt, and therefore politically corruptible.\(^\text{12}\) These are examples of the push for hard masculinity while also giving another direct connection to the Cold War. McCarthy’s tying of soft masculinity to potential Communist threat shows just how important it was for male politicians to ensure the public saw them as masculine figures. This was something McCarthy himself ironically was unable to do as, amidst the political backlash he received for his underhanded tactics, his career was cut short by gossip that identified him as a possible homosexual.\(^\text{13}\) This illustrates how no political figure could hope to avoid such accusations if they failed to live up to the societal standards of masculinity. As such, it is no surprise that the president would be held to the highest standard of all: one that is specifically tailored to them.

Each president must try to live up to the mythos of the macho president. Macho being the term used by John Orman, a political scientist, to describe the style each president must embody in order to show both their masculinity and their good leadership in his work, *Comparing Presidential Behavior: Carter, Reagan, and the Macho Presidential Style* which focused primarily on Reagan and Carter but touched on the presidency in general as well.

According to Orman, there are seven components to this macho style. The president must be: 1) competitive, i.e. play to win and never surrender; 2) sports minded and athletic, so they must play sports or be a sports fan; 3) decisive, or never wavering or uncertain and always in control;

\(^\text{12}\) Friedman, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy,” 1105-1106.
4) unemotional, by not allowing emotions to control their decisions; 5) strong and aggressive, not weak and passive; 6) powerful, having a will to power and 7) a real man, or simply, never feminine. Otherwise, they risk their political power “within a sexist system that attempts to define social and political roles by gender.”

These aspects of being macho coincide with general stereotypes of western masculinity seen throughout the scholarship. Now, no single president necessarily encapsulates each and every one of these components. They are instead placed on a continuum which means the more they can fulfill, the better they will seem. This also reinforces the idea that the political system is intrinsically sexist and defines one’s ability by gender. That being said, the system is by no means entirely logical.

Though the macho presidential style encourages presidents to portray themselves in a masculine way, Orman recognize the seven components are neither intrinsically masculine nor antithetical to femininity. Indeed, many women in history have been decisive, powerful, aggressive, or sports-minded while still being praised for their femininity. However, presidents are asked to comply with the seven traits automatically to help perpetuate the myth of masculinity by a sexist political system even though “the biological fact of being born with a penis does not determine traits” such as those indicated in the seven components of a macho presidency. This can actually take a psychological toll on presidents who must force themselves into these very specific roles. Perhaps the most obvious example of this comes from the fact that being interested in sports, which offers a wide range of activities from figure skating to boxing, is not something controlled by one’s genitals, nor their gender, and is simply something

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15 Bly’s *Iron John*, for example, lists many similar aspects when discussing the 50’s man. Mosse also supports them in *The Image of Man* when discussion the evolution of an aristocratic masculinity based on chivalry into the more modern middle class masculinity of today.

people either take interest in or do not. As such, being a man does not make you like sports, but showing that you are a man suddenly makes it a requirement, especially for the president.

The argument that manly activities are not intrinsically tied to male biology permeates gender studies. Herbert L. Sussman argues this very point in his work *Masculine Identities: The History and Meanings of Manliness*. He states that what he calls “scripts of manliness” can be done by both biological males and biological females. This is because masculinity does not depend on biology, but is instead “a social construction that can be adopted by people of any gender” but is tied to being male because “our patriarchal society has attempted to wed masculinity with dominance and power in an attempt to maintain its hold over all things masculine.” Sussman therefore agrees with Orman’s point that biology is not a factor in determining masculinity and manliness. They instead agree that it is America’s male-dominated society that encourages the argument that biology is important to masculinity. As such, by tying masculine traits so closely to the presidency, it makes it harder for non-biological males to aspire to be president by society. This both hinders biological-females from achieving the presidency while forcing males with the same aspirations to ascribe to these rigid guidelines or face scorn from society. With all of this in mind, the question becomes: how do we measure the success of a political figure to portray themselves as masculine? Popular culture can help answer this.

Popular culture is a term that is often difficult to define. A useful definition comes from Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, who state that, “popular culture refers to the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among

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a population.”¹⁸ They argue popular culture impacts a population on a deeper level than just entertainment thereby shaping the very way they live their lives as well as what they feel. They also emphasize the objects transmitting this popular culture to the masses, such as mass media, television, movies, comic books, and more. While the objects themselves are not necessarily popular culture, their integration into public life and their transmission of popular culture ensures these objects remain important. Both of these aspects are flushed out further in other works on the topic.

There is an important separation between mass media and popular culture, though, in the current age; the latter would not exist without the former. Mary Stuckey and Greg M. Smith make this important distinction. Popular culture, however, is not so much defined how it is circulated, but instead is defined by how it is “is integrated into people’s everyday lives. People receive it from mass media, and they use it for their own purposes,” talking about it with others, placing it on their clothing or vehicles, sharing it over e-mails and texts.¹⁹ As such, combining these two definitions, popular culture becomes about the information spread through various means as well as the way it is then used by the masses who consume it. As such, many individual actors will take in popular culture and spread it to others with the most popular items becoming widespread enough to form a society’s culture as a whole. Since popular culture directly affects many different aspects of society it is a helpful analytical tool for historians.

Popular culture reflects the period in which it was made and the mood and feelings of the masses. Feminist scholar Andi Zeisler explains that, “we view [our lives] largely through the lens of popular culture, using songs, slogans, ad jingles, and television shows as shorthand for

what happened at the time and how we experienced it.” She goes on to point out how many feel that, in the 60’s and 70’s, “rock, folk, and experimental music were some of the chief expressions of an entire generation’s disillusionment with what it saw as a pointless war waged by a repressive, hypocritical government.”20 The 60’s and 70’s, for example, are often associated with the protest songs of the period, and those songs have come to represent the feelings of much of the public at the time. Popular culture influences those who consume it, whose responses in turn shape its production. One area that has been particularly relevant for popular culture is politics.

Studies have shown that many Americans have more knowledge of popular culture than they do of their government. For example, a 2006 report from the McCormick Tribune Foundation found “that while 22 percent of Americans can name all five members of the family from the popular television show The Simpsons, only 0.1 percent could name all five freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.” 21 This is similar to an experiment done by documentarian Morgan Spurlock who humorously showed, in his documentary Super Size Me, two women, who had trouble with the pledge of allegiance, quickly recite the McDonalds Big Mac jingle.22 Amusing anecdotes like this help to support the study’s primary purpose which is to show how something as prevalent as popular culture becomes quickly ingrained into the public’s memories. In the case of both The Simpsons and the McDonald’s Big Mac advertisements, their frequent appearances on television made them far more memorable than information about their governments. Unsurprisingly, much of the general public’s knowledge of political figures has come from popular culture. Furthermore, their views of


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politicians are often constructed by the caricatures of those figures that they see on TV and in movies.²³

Popular culture and politics are intrinsically linked. In today’s society, with the importance of social media, news media, talk shows, and even the rise of satire news programs, the general public receives much of their political knowledge through popular culture. In fact, popular culture and politics have a “mutually reinforcing relationship” as it allows people, especially those in America where popular culture is prevalent and the leadership is obsessed over, to learn about the political system. They can then, using what they’ve learned, influence the system with their responses.²⁴ Increasingly, politicians will need to adapt to popular culture while also attempting to control it.

Popular culture is also an effective vehicle for politics because it is simple to understand. Justin S. Vaughn and Lilly J. Goren explain that the public has the ability to appreciate popular culture with no special knowledge or experience.²⁵ Politics can be complicated making it daunting to the general public. Popular culture, on the other hand, is accessible to the widest possible audience. Unsurprisingly the public readily turns to popular culture to better understand politics. This is especially true of the presidency.

Indeed, the presidency itself can be seen as a cultural creation. The public’s view of a president is created and crafted by the culture they live in as most people will never meet the person holding the office or, if they do, it is in highly scripted or planned settings. The fact is, as

²³ Fittingly, many current and past presidents have appeared on the Simpsons specifically, including, but not limited to, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, Donald Trump, Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush.
stated by political reporter Jeff Smith in his work *The President’s We Imagine*, the president is essentially an imagined figure: who they are is not nearly as important as how they are portrayed in the public’s imagination. This concept is based on Benedict Anderson’s work on “imagined communities.” As much as the nations and communities we live in are intangible and imaginary, so too are the leaders. The position of the president has an almost mythic quality and the figures that hold the position are elevated to a different level from the rest of the world. People imagine what they are like, what they believe, what kind of person they are, and how they govern the country. This is only amplified by popular culture which is highly responsible for both embracing and creating these imagined ideas of who these men (and, perhaps someday, women) are.

The public’s perception of the president is directly influenced by popular culture. Indeed, Melissa Crawley argues that popular culture spread through mass media like television has “become an ‘eyewitness’ to the nation’s highest office. This affects how citizens understand and experience their leaders,” providing “insights into our nation’s history.” Despite the president traveling the country frequently, a majority of Americans do not get a chance to see the president in person and especially do not get to witness the inner workings of the presidential office. Television shows, both fictional and non-fictional, show the presidents’ life to the public in a manner not generally available to average citizens. They also allow for the average American to witness the lives of past presidents in both documentary and dramatized fashions. Since the average person knows more about popular culture than they do about their

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26 Jeff Smith, *The Presidents We Imagine: Two Centuries of White House Fictions on the Page, on the Stage, Onscreen, and Online* (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 3-13.
government, consistent popular cultural portrayals of a president reflect how the broader public sees them.

Political analyst J. Michael Blitzer also notes the cyclical relationship between the public and popular culture. Each influences the other, though Blitzer argues that the media as a whole influence the public to a far greater extent. Being that it controls what is considered newsworthy, frames the way events are interpreted, and presents issues in a similar manner repeatedly, it is no surprise that the media and popular culture have a strong influence over public opinion.28 The media and popular culture are the prime sources of information about the president. There is, however, one other place the public can gain knowledge about presidential figures and that is through their presidential libraries. But how accurate are these homes of public history?

To fully understand the meaning, importance, and impact of museums on the public, one must look to public history. Public history, as defined by historian Robert Kelly, refers to “the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia.”29 Public historians work through establishments like museums, galleries, and heritage villages, and public displays like cenotaphs, statues, and plaques. These places of historical learning generally appear outside of the education system and are a pertinent source of historical knowledge for members of the public. Academic historians have often critiqued museums about the way the history is presented. The aims of public history, to reach a broad generally non-academic audience, differ somewhat from that of academic history, which more often aimed at specialists and offers more complex understandings of the past. Museums tend to present a simplified

version of the past that is often subject to nationalistic or other political aims. This is especially true amongst presidential museums.

Presidential museums are heavily curated institutions carefully constructed to present the president in a favourable light. Sometimes, they ignore, downplay, or exaggerate some facts. Benjamin Hufbauer, an expert on presidential museums, explains that they receive funding from the former US presidents and supporters, but are also run by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). This creates a tension between heritage and history, with supporters often encouraging flattering displays while repressing potentially more historically accurate, yet uncomplimentary, displays.\textsuperscript{30} Presidents are key figures in the American mythos and are therefore often exaggerated or aggrandized to continue with the patriotic tradition. This is such a prevailing issue with these museums that many other scholars besides Hufbauer have noted it.

Historian R. Bruce Craig in his article, “Presidential Libraries and Museums: Opportunities for Genuine Reform,” agrees with Hufbauer, noting that these museums are often built to validate a president’s positive image, not to challenge this perception. According to Craig, exhibits are not created to present history, but rather to become historical artifacts in themselves. The artifact may be remembered more than the truth it is loosely based upon.\textsuperscript{31} This, according to Craig, is emblematic of the issues with these museums that can only be fixed by a massive overhaul of the system and the federal government becoming more directly involved.\textsuperscript{32} Currently, Craig argues these museums are often flawed spectacles that portray presidents in an exaggerated way and need to be scrutinized by scholars. This major paper


\textsuperscript{32} Craig, “Presidential Libraries and Museums,” 53-54.
hopes to contribute to this debate by critically analyzing Gerald Ford’s presidential museum. Through this and other analyses, scholars can encourage change in the system and critical thinking among the public.

This overview of the historiography offers some insights and models for this study of the Gerald Ford Presidential Museum and Library. Using Orman’s definitions of masculinity and the macho presidential style alongside Cuordileone’s explanation of the state of masculinity in the cold war creates a perfect starting point for a study of Gerald Ford. It offers a culturally-appropriate model of masculinity that was prevalent at the height of the Cold War period when Ford was president. The articles and works on popular culture demonstrate that popular culture can be used to create a powerful image of a president that resonates throughout society. Finally, the literature on presidential museums is important to this research as it provides a structured approach to critically analyzing Ford’s Presidential Museum.
CHAPTER 3
The Man: Masculinity in the Lives of Presidents

As Orman and others have observed, many feel that the presidency requires a certain level of hypermasculinity in order to be effective. This became inherently so, according to Cuordileone, during the Cold War.\textsuperscript{33} Due to the perceived ties between good leadership, capitalism, masculinity, and the American way, governmental figures, and especially presidents, usually presented themselves in a masculine mould. This raises the question of how did presidents exaggerate their so-called masculine traits. This section will examine the life of Gerald Ford using Orman’s model of the macho presidency, to see how well his life experiences aligned with traditional standards of American masculinity.

The first step in Orman’s macho presidency model is competitiveness. Being competitive, playing to win, and never surrendering, are key to embracing the macho presidential style. It isn’t simply about competing, however, as Orman does stress the importance of simply refusing to quit. For Gerald Ford, the best two examples of this trait come from his time in the Navy and during the two assassination attempts on his life while he was president. In the former, Ford was twice placed in moments of peril, nearly sliding off the deck of a burning aircraft carrier in the middle of a typhoon and only barely escaping a burning plane wreckage. Despite his brushes with mortality, Ford told reporters, “I don’t think any person as president ought to cower in the face of a limited number of people who wants to take the law into their own hands.”\textsuperscript{34} Ford showed perseverance throughout his life, and his unwavering

\textsuperscript{33} Cuordileone, “Politics in the Age of Anxiety,” 515-545.
drive fits perfectly within the competitive aspect of the macho presidency. Ford easily fits into the category.

Next in Orman’s model comes sports mindedness and ability. Of all of the categories, this one quite obviously favours Ford. Ford grew up playing sports, was named MVP, got into Yale explicitly for his athletic ability, and even considered himself “the most athletic President to occupy the White House in years.”\(^{35}\) He even turned down at least two opportunities to play football professionally opting instead to further his education.\(^{36}\) Ford’s early life was full of sport and athleticism making this by far the easiest category for him. This is especially true when one considers the fact that his sporting aptitude did not end upon his entry into politics.

Ford continued his love of sports into and beyond his presidency. While no longer playing competitively anymore, his love of sports was constantly on display. He continued to play golf, a sport he had enjoyed during his time in college, in his downtime.\(^ {37}\) Furthermore, throughout his presidency, he corresponded frequently with friends and athletes about sport and was often asked to speak at athletic conferences.\(^ {38}\) Even when he was no longer a star athlete, Ford’s love of sport is well documented as persisting throughout his whole life. That said, there are points that actually work against him in this category.

Ford’s frequent physical gaffs detracted from his sporting ability. While Ford was indeed a very athletic individual, his well-documented stumbles during his presidency hurt his athletic image somewhat. For example, he had a few gaffs caught on camera which were broadcasted

\(^{35}\) Ford, A Time to Heal, 43; 53-58; 289.
\(^{38}\) Box 4, RE 6 Boxing-Wrestling-Karate-Judo (Exec.) to RE 10 Football 1/20/77 (Gen.); Gerald R. Ford Library.
widely such as hitting a bystander with an errant golf ball in 1974, stumbling down the steps of Air Force One in 1975, and falling while skiing in 1976. In the television age, these small stumbles gave the impression Ford was a klutz. Former President Lyndon B. Johnson once mocked Ford for this supposed clumsiness, saying he had played football without a helmet and could not “walk and chew gum at the same time.” While certainly not enough to completely negate his athletic accomplishments, these stumbles call into question his overall sports prowess. Still, despite these, Ford easily fits into the macho style with his involvement in sport.

Next in Orman’s model is decisiveness, referring to a president’s ability to be unwavering and always in control. Ford’s life shows many examples of decisiveness, including two that were defining moments of his presidency. The first was when Ford, early in his presidency, decided to unconditionally pardon Richard Nixon for any crimes he may have committed while president, including those committed in relation to the Watergate scandal. Despite being an unpopular decision among politicians and the public alike, Ford stuck by it, defending it in front of Congress voluntarily, committing to his decision and never once stating he regretted his choice. In his mind it was the right decision for healing the country and his unwavering belief in his decision easily shows his decisive nature.

The second incident showing Ford’s decisiveness comes from his handling of the Mayaguez incident, the last official battle of the Vietnam War on May 12, 1975 where a merchant ship was captured by Khmer Rouge’s forces. These forces were communist Cambodians who had sided with the North Vietnamese during the Vietnam War in opposition of American allied forces. Ford acted quickly, sending in the Marines on a potentially dangerous mission to rescue the captured crew. Orman himself uses Ford’s reaction to illustrate

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39 Ford, A Time to Heal, 84, 289; Troy, What Jefferson Read, 162.
40 Ford, A Time to Heal, 178-181.
decisiveness, stating that Ford’s choice as commander-in-chief caused him to be “portrayed as a decisive, unemotional, and manly president who took quick bold action to save the United States from embarrassment” by the media.\(^{41}\) Despite this strong image, however, the reality was less heroic. The crew of the \textit{Mayaguez} had already been freed unharmed before the Marines arrived and several Marines died in the resulting battle, and others were left behind for eventual capture and execution.\(^{42}\) Although this incident (minus the uncomfortable details) made Ford look decisive, other events made him seem less so.

A few incidents during Ford’s public life suggested he sometimes wavered. There are a few known times in his life where Ford either did not make up his mind on an issue or made choices he later regretted that caused him to seem less in control. In one case, he did not comment on his wife Betty’s pro-abortion sentiments, which caused people on both sides of the debate to accuse him of lacking guts. Another time he claimed he regretted not calling out Joseph McCarthy who was brazenly accusing various politicians of being communist sympathizers with little or no evidence during the Red Scare. In another publicly high-profile moment, he considered, and then declined to name Anne Armstrong as his Vice-Presidential running mate in the election against Jimmy Carter in 1980. Despite being open to the idea, he reportedly was afraid that the country would not respond well to a female vice president.\(^{43}\) Moments like these call into question Ford’s decisiveness but did not overshadow it.

Being unemotional is another aspect of the macho presidential style, and Ford himself admitted he did not fit that stereotype. While Ford once said laughing at one’s own mistakes is essential for success, he also stated that some people had the impression he was unemotional.

\(^{42}\) A full rundown of the events leading up to, during, and after the Mayaguez incident can be found in Ralph Wetterhahn’s 2001 work \textit{The Last Battle: The Mayaguez Incident and the end of the Vietnam War}.
He denied that, stating “I do care very deeply... Tears well up in my eyes very easily. I don’t hide it very well.” Ford, by his own admission, was in fact an emotional man, something he saw no shame in. While some of the public may have assumed him unemotional, Ford’s own revelation suggests he does not fit into this aspect of the macho presidential style.

Another of Orman’s criteria is strength and aggression. This refers not to physical strength, but avoiding passivity and never appearing weak. Perhaps the best example of this was his willingness to voluntarily join the Navy during World War II before the draft. Ford was quick to enlist, even pushing to be sent into combat rather than remaining as a physical fitness instructor, the position to which he was originally assigned. Another example of his strength and aggression was when he was at Yale where he was originally accepted only as a coach. He pushed to be allowed to take classes as well, eventually convincing the school to accept him temporarily and then going on to prove himself capable of balancing the job and his schoolwork. In both cases, Ford went out of his way to attain what he wanted. Instead of being passive and waiting for things to come to him, he showed strength of character and pushed himself forward. However, this was not the case with everything in his life.

Ford’s political career could be characterized as being full of strong ambitions but often achieving goals that were not his own. Indeed, Ford repeatedly ended up in positions he had never aspired to by simply being in the right place. He had dreamed of being Speaker of the House but never actually attained it, instead being chosen to be Vice President by Richard Nixon who was in a rush to replace disgraced Spiro Agnew. He then became President not by running, but by default when Nixon resigned rather than be impeached. Ford did not aspire to become

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44 Ford, A Time to Heal, 119, 32-33.
45 Ford, A Time to Heal, 57-58.
46 Ford, A Time to Heal, 54-55.
47 Ford, A Time to Heal, 34, 5.
the leader of the USA, nor was he seen as being strong, with many stating that Ford was lacking “in the strength and ruthlessness to succeed as president.” Becoming president was never part of his plan, but something he fell into when he was considering retiring. This is not the sign of a strong or aggressive individual and in fact seems to overshadow his more assertive actions. This also factors into Orman’s model in regards to power and seeking power as Ford’s aspirations were focused on healing the nation rather than making it, or himself, more powerful, showing that Ford also does not fit that category.

The final category of Orman’s macho presidential model is masculinity. While difficult to define, Ford’s biography shows he spent a lot of time in his formative years being members of homosocial groups including all-boys’ schools, fraternities and the military. Moreover, he seems to have thrived in these environments, being part of the all-male culture. For example, Ford was a prankster, participating in pranking Tom DeFrank, a White House correspondent, who had attended an all-boys’ school. The running joke was that in order to keep warm at night the boys would smuggle in sheep. Ford and others capitalized on this by having a sheep placed in DeFrank’s hotel room one night. Clearly to Ford and his fellow pranksters the idea of homosexuality being practiced in an all-boys school was even more ludicrous than the prospect of potential bestiality.

Another example of Ford’s masculinity came from his involvement in frat house culture. Ford was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon during his time at the University of Michigan and, while he was often identified as being more reserved than the other boys, he still participated in frat activities. This included taking part in a party ritual wherein boys would try to pick up girls visiting the school from cities like Detroit, who were identified as “easy” and “whores,” and

49 Ford, A Time to Heal, 369.
renting a hotel room for the weekend for sexual liaisons. This, in conjunction with Ford’s athleticism, time in the Boy Scouts, and veteran status are all signals he thrived in a masculine environment.

Overall, Ford fits well into Orman’s model of a macho presidency. His competitive nature and sports mindedness from his sporting career, his decisive choices throughout his time as president, and his easy fit into traditional aspects of masculinity are all more than enough proof of Orman’s ideas of what a macho president looks like. Notably, Ford did not have to force his macho style – it was something he had his whole life. Despite his macho visage, however, what still needs to be explored is how well this macho image was relayed to the public, and whether or not he met societal expectations for their macho presidency. For this, we turn to popular culture.

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CHAPTER 4:
The Myth: Popular Memory through Popular Culture

After examining the man behind the presidency, we will now examine his mythos. Most people have not spent much time doing research on presidential figures. However, depictions of presidents in popular culture abound, with around 10 plays and 450 movies and television shows being made concerning presidents. As Stuckey and Smith argue, these figures are very important as, a president’s image in popular culture can often become the defining image of the presidency.\(^{51}\) This does not include brief appearances of presidents in a variety of formats for the sake of satire. These appearances are important as, popular culture heavily influences the public’s perception which in turn can have an impact on political behaviour. People creating popular culture use what society believes and wants to see and turns it into mass consumed properties that reinforce these beliefs. In other words, if a community sees a famous figure in a specific way, popular culture properties will be created that capitalize on this by emphasising these beliefs and spreading them to wider audiences. And presidents, because of their stature, receive a lot of attention in popular culture.

To see how effective presidents were at creating a macho image, one need only to look to their portrayals in popular culture: if they were successful then popular culture will portray them as such; however, if they failed to do so for whatever reason, popular culture will instead emphasise their failures to do so. This is exemplified by Gerald Ford who, despite his befittingly macho life, is remembered for something quite differently. This is seen across a variety of mediums but for this works purposes the focus will primarily be television shows, comic books, humour novels, and internet videos. This is because these formats were and are very popular

\(^{51}\) Stuckey, and Smith, ”The Presidency and Popular Culture,” (2008), 211.
today and are all easily utilized for parody, satire, and mockery, which are the primary genres in which Gerald Ford has been represented.

In popular culture, Ford appears as a clumsy and unintelligent individual who merely stumbled into his position as president, helping to create this image of a stumblebum president. Even the more positive portrayals of Ford manage to emphasize his clumsiness. Humourist Daniel O’Brien’s *How to Fight Presidents*, for example, details, in a comical manner, the more masculine aspects of U.S. Presidents in order to portray them as, as the book’s subtitle puts it, “The badasses who ran this country.” Ford is no exception, with O’Brien noting that “Ford was an athlete his whole life, excelling at football through high school and college” and that “he spent his summers working as a professional bear-feeder, which is a title I would pretend to hold to impress women if it didn’t sound so completely made up.”


He also details Ford’s acceptance into Yale on the condition he coach the boxing team. This was, according to O’Brien, seemingly due to the fact that Ford looked like he knew how to punch people. Ford’s experiences in World War II are also detailed, especially the event where he nearly fell off of his then on fire and nearly capsized aircraft carrier in a typhoon. Ford stayed aboard only by catching the rim of the deck with his foot, later claiming he never had any fear of death which, according to O’Brien, “when your boat is sideways and on fire is literally impossible.” All of these examples portray Ford in a stereotypically masculine fashion, as a fighter, a war hero, an athlete, and, overall, a very macho man. This is, however, not the full story.

Despite praising Ford’s more masculine traits, O’Brien still emphasizes the stumblebum image. This is clear from the chapter title “Gerald Ford: Can’t Fight You until He Finishes His
Battle with Gravity." He goes on to point out how Ford is generally remembered for pardoning Nixon, which was seen as a poor choice, and for falling down a lot, while explaining that the stumblebum image came from the fact that Ford “looked dumb, spoke slowly and awkwardly, he tripped getting out of Air Force One, and once while golfing hit a random person with his ball directly in the head (and also again while playing tennis).” Despite the general praise for Ford’s athletic ability and overall masculine image, Ford’s clumsiness still dominates his overall representation. O’Brien gives Ford credit, but also recognizes that Ford’s various mishaps had a fairly detrimental effect on his public image. Ford’s uncoordinated gaffs dispelled much of his masculine appeal by portraying him as awkward and unintelligent. In addition, Ford’s image as a stumblebum is far from limited to O’Brien’s book.

Ford’s appearance in the long-running animated show *The Simpsons* also emphasized his clumsiness, similar to one of the show’s main characters, the bumbling Homer Simpson. In the episode, Homer has a prolonged feud with his new neighbour George H.W. Bush that leads to the latter moving away. At the end of the show, the Simpsons see a new family begin moving into the home across the street. Emerging from a vehicle with the licence plate “MR DUH”, Gerald Ford waves hello then approaches the Simpson family. The similarities between Homer and Ford are immediately apparent as the pair are drawn similarly, and Ford’s suggestion that the pair could eat nachos, watch football, and drink beer at his place are met with much glee from Homer, a character known for his enjoyment of such activities and refreshments. The pair walk off, seemingly becoming fast friends, before they both trip over a curb, exclaiming Homer’s trademark “D’oh!” This episode contrasts Ford starkly with Bush. In the episode, Bush comes

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56 *The Simpsons*, “Two Bad Neighbors,” episode number 141, written by Ken Keeler, Fox, January 14th, 1996.
across as a hardworking, articulate, and skillful, albeit petty and vengeance driven, individual, and Ford’s image as a simpleton makes a strong contrast. By comparing him to Homer, a character also known for his pratfalls, the viewers quickly see Ford in the same light. As the McCormick Tribune Foundation study suggested, the public’s knowledge of *The Simpsons* was greater than its knowledge of their government. Ford’s portrayals also extend into comic books.

Gerald Ford’s portrayal in the comic book *Deadpool: Dead Presidents* further emphasizes his clumsy demeanour. The comic follows the titular Deadpool, a comical anti-hero with regenerative powers known for breaking the fourth wall by addressing the audience directly, as he attempts to stop a necromancer from raising deceased presidents as zombies. In one instance he encounters a zombie Gerald Ford. Ford’s athleticism is shown briefly when he kicks a crumpled up car containing Deadpool. He is seen recalling his football days, saying “Ford goes back for the game-winning kick! It’s good!” but then comically jumping about after hurting his foot on the car. His clumsiness is exemplified further when Ford is about to leave by helicopter. He trips, exclaiming “Whoopsie!” before shouting “Oh fiddlesticks!” as he falls into the tail rotor of the chopper, obliterating his entire upper body much to the befuddlement of the zombified Lincoln and Washington. Deadpool quips that he hopes “the Franklin mint releases a commemorative plate of that classic Gerry moment” and his lower body is later seen stumbling about.57 The author plays up Ford’s clumsiness for the sake of comedy. Notably, the comic features every other deceased president and none of them are portrayed as being clumsy, making Ford the only outlier. In order to make the presidents recognizable, they are each portrayed through well-known icons, symbols, and sayings from their presidency. As such,

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57 Gerry Duggan, Brian Posehn, and Tony Moore. *Deadpool: Dead Presidents*, vol. 1. (New York: Marvel Worldwide, 2014), Issue 3: Dr. Strange Lives (or How I Learned Deadpool was the Bomb).
Ford’s portrayal as a klutz is further proof that his unmasculine clumsiness greatly overshadows his masculine athleticism in popular memory.

Perhaps the most famous example of Ford’s popular culture depictions is *Saturday Night Live*, a popular sketch comedy show that still airs. Starting from the very first episode on October 11th, 1975, one of the show’s stars, Chevy Chase mocked Ford relentlessly. It began innocuously enough, with Chase stating Ford’s new campaign slogan was “if he’s so dumb, how come he’s president?” but in subsequent episodes Chase pretended to be Ford by stumbling around, tripping over things, and showing a general lack of intelligence.58 One sketch, for example, titled “Operation Stumblebum” had Chase, playing Ford, stumbling his way through a speech with his secret service agents, played by other members of the *Saturday Night* cast, copying his pratfalls to make his stumbling seem normal.59 These sketches were playing up Ford’s perceived lack of intelligence and capitalizing on his various slips, falls and accidents.

Many authors have argued Chase’s portrayals of Ford as a stumblebum helped create the lasting image of an unintelligent and physically awkward man. Historian Lewis L. Gould asserted that Chase’s antics caused Ford’s clumsiness to become a fixture of popular culture.60 But even those directly involved at the time recognized the impact. Chase, along with many *Saturday Night Live* cast members, as well as Ford’s Chief of Staff, Dick Cheney, and Press Secretary, Ron Nessen, all said they believed the sketches actually impacted Ford’s campaign for re-election. Nessen claimed that SNL’s influence in New York caused Ford to lose the state,

costing him the election.\textsuperscript{61} This shows not only the impact that popular culture can have on society and politics, but also how prevalent these images can become. If it was not for Chase’s parody of Ford, perhaps we would have a far different perception of him. Chase’s image of Ford as a Stumblebum, however, still persists to this day.

Starting in 1997, \textit{Saturday Night Live} took the joke even further in a series of cartoons that were recreated into a comic book. The sketch and book, both titled \textit{X-Presidents}, came out of the shows “Saturday TV Funhouse” segment that featured a variety of cartoons. \textit{X-Presidents} tells the story of four previous presidents, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, and Ronald Reagan, all gaining superpowers and using them to save America against various stereotypical evils. The book and show portray Ford as being extremely unintelligent, with the book playing up many of his famous gaffs, being shown as being less famous than his wife Betty, constantly playing with a paddleball, lacking the ability to read, and even calling his presidential library a “place of solitude where humans never venture.”\textsuperscript{62} As with all his other depictions, Ford’s lack of intelligence is emphasized, as is his clumsiness and his status as a lesser known and lesser respected president.

Chase even revisited his Ford parody character for a sketch done by the online comedy video website \textit{Funny or Die}. In a 2013 sketch titled “Funny or Die’s Presidential Reunion,” Ford, played by Chevy Chase, storms into the room and abruptly trips over a table before trying to call out “Live from New York, it’s Saturday Night!”\textsuperscript{63} but is cut off and reminded by Dana Carvey’s George H.W. Bush that this is actually on \textit{Funny or Die}. Ford then suggests Obama fix the

\textsuperscript{61} Hill, \textit{Saturday Night}, 188; Ron Nessen, \textit{It Sure Looks Different from the Inside} (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1978), 177.
\textsuperscript{63} This is the standard intro of “Saturday Night Live” that used at the beginning of every episode and was often stated by Chase during his run on the show.
economy by pardoning Nixon. He also acts startled by seeing Dan Akroyd’s Jimmy Carter as he thought he was dead, after which Carter informs him that he is the dead one, a fact that Ford does not seem to realize. This sketch once again plays up Ford’s clumsiness, his involvement with *Saturday Night Live*, and also his pardon of Nixon as being an ill-advised move. All of this is reminiscent of Chase’s SNL parodies, and shows that the parody is just as recognizable as the actual man would be.

While it is obvious that Ford’s most well-known image is that of an affable though unintelligent klutz, the importance of such an image is somewhat more complex. What it shows us is that Ford was unsuccessful at putting his macho image on display. Despite the many ways he fit into the macho presidential style, he is remembered quite differently, meaning that, to the public, perhaps Ford’s most lasting contribution to the country was the mockery he received. With that understood the question then becomes whether or not his presidential museum will mention this fact due to its popularity, or if it will ignore what he is best known for in an attempt to create a more positive, and more macho, depiction of Gerald Ford.
CHAPTER 5:
The Legend: Heritage vs. History in Presidential Museums

Museums are important to the culture and the history of the countries in which they reside. While many will only ever directly study history in elementary and high school, their interest lying in other fields, the museum is an institution that is often enjoyed by both scholars in the field and those with little knowledge alike. They are bastions of information, providing descriptions, pictures, artefacts, and more to the general public, often for a nominal fee, and, in doing so, they provide access to a past that many visitors may not otherwise be familiar with. In fact, one could argue that many museum goers’ entire body of knowledge on a subject is formed by the museum itself and the exhibits within; however, this isn’t always a good thing.

As previously explored, there is room for error within the museum system. While many treat museums as being places of unbiased knowledge, there is obviously evidence that this is not the case. Curators and those who donate heavily to these institutions have their own goals, purposes, and ideals when creating these spaces and their influence tends to show. While more subtle than what you may find in written works, museums are selective in what items are to be displayed, how they are arranged, what topics will be emphasized, and what topics should be avoided. This is especially true of museums within the Presidential museum system.

Presidential museums, being focused on these imagined larger-than-life figures, are especially prone to being constructed with a very specific message in mind. While in recent years these institutions have taken steps to change this, many museums are still controlled by

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64 For more on this topic, Politico did a piece titled “Presidential Libraries are a Scam. Could Obama Change That?” on 44th President of the United States Barrack Obama whose presidential center is
donors and presidential foundations that have a specific version of these men that they wish to deliver. As historian Benjamin Hufbauer shows, in his work *Presidential Temples*, these libraries have been transformed into institutions of presidential commemoration that push a civil religion, that are built more as sacred places that encourage pilgrimages to see relics from these mythic individuals. While not done with malice nor ill intent, these museums can often focus on specific aspects of the lives of Presidents and therefore miss or ignore other potentially important facts about which the public may want to know. This section will examine the Gerald Ford Presidential Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in detail to see how the museum tells his life history, what they emphasize and ignore, especially in regards to his stumblebum image from popular culture, and how this relates to constructing an image of a macho presidency.

The Ford Museum, which first opened in 1981, is a modern looking building with recent renovations having added a few large sections to the structure. At the front is a donated sculpture of a bent over football player sporting Ford’s number from his time playing for University of Michigan. By the doors is a statue of the man himself, standing tall, holding two books, and looking almost hopefully off towards the Grand River that runs straight through the center of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The statue is engraved with dates representing his time as president and vice president, as well as his time in the House of Representatives and time served in the US Navy.

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66 I visited the museum in October of 2016. While there I took roughly 220 photographs of which 30 appear in the appendix of this work. The 30 chosen were the best quality pictures of specific items described in the museum with the rest being mostly farther shot of whole sections or pictures that are of unrelated details.
67 Appendix: Image 1.
The exhibits on Ford himself are on the second floor, and they flow in a clockwise manner chronologically detailing the events of Ford’s life. The first section, titled “Foundations of a Civic Life”, explains that the section covers his early years, his time in college, and also his time in the military. Notably, the sign detailing this section also features a nearly life size photograph of Ford in his scout uniform. This is significant as this first section emphasizes his time in Boy Scouts of America, known primarily as a place for boys to become men that had, several times, come under fire for their strict policy against allowing homosexuals to join until the ban was lifted in 2013.

While this first room details some events of Ford’s childhood not relating to Boy Scouts, it is hard to miss the emphasis. The museum, however, does not avoid details about his childhood that were difficult. Ford’s biological father was abusive to his mother and left while Ford was still an infant. When Ford’s mother’s second husband adopted him, Ford, who was originally named Leslie Lynch King Jr. after his biological father, had his named changed. His mother decided to name him after his step-father, Gerald R. Ford Sr. Including these details shows that the museum is not afraid to show his childhood was not entirely wholesome.

However, the space is dominated by a sculpture of Ford in uniform, obviously constructed using the aforementioned photograph as the inspiration for its design. In addition, there are sections describing Ford’s boyhood as “active”, detailing his skillful mastery of his anger (with his mother’s help), and his strong work ethic. This section also includes a whole section devoted to his time in Boy Scouts complete with a video full of photographs and a quotation stamped on

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68 Appendix: Images 2 and 3
the wall praising the Scouts for providing the principles of self-discipline, teamwork, and moral and patriotic values.⁶⁹

Notably, these initial few sections on Ford’s youth seem more verbose and detailed than the rest of the museum. While Ford’s time as president is obviously given specific attention, these sections on the early years of Ford’s life are all highly emphasized with few details being overlooked. This is significant as it strongly pushes a specific narrative about Ford’s early years, one that, as you will see, puts special focus on his athletic ability, leadership skills, strength of character, and, overall, masculinity.

Just past this section is an exhibit dedicated to his time in high school. This section focuses on his introduction to football, as well as his winning the most popular student title. His grades are mentioned in passing on two occasions, one in a passage on how, in addition to football, Ford was also on the honour roll, and one showing his high school report card, remarking on his skills in history and physical training. Once again there is special emphasis placed on his athletic ability which was a big part of his life. The focus on sports, however, overshadows other achievement of his youth such as his involvement in school government and his social life, which are mostly ignored except for a few small blurbs.

This sports theme reaches its apex in the next room, which is dedicated in theory to Ford’s time in college yet primarily focused on his athletic ability once more. This room is filled with trophies, plaques, medals, Ford’s team photographs, descriptions of Ford as an All Star athlete, and materials and memorabilia relating to Ford’s participation in the various sports and track teams. Ford’s honour roll status is mentioned, but the story about him receiving a special

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⁶⁹ Appendix: Image 4
scholarship to play football at Yale receives more attention. Even the campus life section focuses on his involvement in the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity which would, after Ford won the presidency, donate to him a paddle, an item best known for its use in Frat House hazing rituals. The paddle sits on display in the exhibit.

This section also features the story of Ford’s interactions with Willis Ward. Ward was a black member of the same football team as Ford. When a rival team refused to play unless Ward was benched, Ford refused to play until he was allowed back on the field. This event fits nicely into the macho template under the guise of Ford being decisive as well as being strong and aggressive but also portrays Ford as being ahead of his time in fair-mindedness and race relations. Ironically these points are undercut near the sign’s end when it is mentioned that Ford eventually did play when Wade encouraged him to anyway. At least, as the sign helpfully points out, they went on to win that game.

After these initial sections the museum displays shift to Ford’s initial interest in politics. This section features a summary of his time at Yale University and his eventual law practices, as well as his involvement in the America First campaign that pushed for the United States to remain out of World War II. However, the text in this section also points out that Ford’s acceptance to Yale was conditional and required him to coach the football team. Interestingly there is no mention of his work as a boxing coach here. This could perhaps be an attempt to focus on his more well-known sporting endeavours, but doing so also ignores the peculiar fact that Ford was coaching a sport he never officially participated in himself. Boxing can also be seen as a more brutish and working class sport compared to the complex tactics of football.

70 Appendix: Image 5
71 Appendix: Image 6
72 Appendix: Images 7 and 8
The next room is important as it focuses entirely on Ford’s time in the Navy. The United States is a patriotic country with strong military traditions so unsurprisingly Ford’s veteran status received a lot of attention. As such, this room pushes the macho narrative perhaps more than any other because of the military’s association with masculinity, and it focuses on Ford fighting a war for the United States. It is also the only room in the museum steeped in audio visual effects. During a film that explains the *USS Monterey*’s involvement in the Pacific front of World War II special emphasis is placed on Ford’s narrow escape from death when his ship violently tilted sideways. This whole film is accompanied by narration, video, sound effects, and even a dramatic moment where the lights dim to display, through the projection screen, a recreation of the deck of the *Monterey* complete with a fighter plane while rain and thunder effects play through the speakers.\(^{73}\) This macho imagery connected to Ford’s fight for survival is perhaps the most elaborate display within the entire museum.

The next room is open and the narrative is straightforward as it bounces between key events in Ford’s life and political career. The room contains short blurbs about Ford’s family and wedding but primarily focussing on the 50’s and 60’s and Ford’s congressional career. Much of the section looks at key events in Ford’s career but even here the macho style is emphasized in a section on defense spending which connects to the masculine bravado of the military. The museum prominently displays photos of Ford, then a congressional member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, visiting troops in Korea, where he is pictured wearing the same uniform as the troops he is meeting.\(^{74}\) This once again brings attention to Ford’s military service portraying him as a soldier despite the section being about budgetary issues.

\(^{73}\) Appendix: Images 9 and 10
\(^{74}\) Appendix: Images 11 and 12.
This large open area also features several walls adorned with photographs alongside positive descriptions of Ford, usually pertaining to values Ford held dear. Terms like “Respectful”, “Hard-Working”, and “Team-Player” are prominently displayed in bold fonts beside collages of Ford in various stages of his life but focusing on his time in football and other sports, the boy scouts, and in the Navy. These collages generally reflect the emphasis on football, scouts and the Navy featured elsewhere. Once more this may not be a conscious decision made by the curator of the museum but it does portray a very specific image that coincides with the macho presidential style and could very well have been specifically chosen to counteract the more popular image of Ford as a bumbler.

Another section is dedicated to Ford’s appointment to the vice presidency, his time served in the role, and his assumption of the presidency. The Watergate scandal is mentioned as it played a key role but far more focus is placed on Ford being the right man for the job as he was respected by members Congress on both sides of the aisle. This section also features the pardon Ford gave to Nixon which, as explored earlier, many believed was a poor choice but has since become better understood by political analysts as being a wise choice to help the country move on. As such, while some may still see it as a blunder, the museum presents it and frames it as being strong and decisive. The text of the story mentions that Ford’s decision would likely have political ramifications, suggesting the act was brave. The display also claims that Ford acted in the best interests of America. A description of the pardon is flanked by examples of some of the reactions to it from the media. Overall, the display claimed it was the right choice and Ford was courageous for making it, even comparing him to Washington and Lincoln.

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75 Appendix: Images 13-16
76 Appendix: Image 17.
77 Appendix: Images 18, 19 and 20.
Just past this section is a display focused on the Secret Service, and its role in the two assassination attempts, by Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme and Sara Jane More, and made on Ford within the same month, September, 1975. This exhibit raises many questions as it is far less straightforward than the others. While Ford as a sportsman, a sailor, and a Boy Scout are all clear examples of his masculinity, this section requires more in-depth analysis. Three key areas of the exhibit provide insights into the way the museum tries to frame Ford in a masculine context: the actual pistol used in the first attempt, a section profiling the attempted assassins, and a display featuring the man who stopped the second attempt.

First is the pistol itself: the M1911 pistol that Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme used which is prominently exhibited in the forefront of the display. The United States is known for having a strong culture surrounding guns, especially in reference to the Second Amendment of the constitution giving citizens the right to bear arms. Nonetheless, prominently displaying a modern weapon that nearly killed a president is a strong and perhaps threatening image. In modern society, guns are a strong symbol of masculinity. While the gun did not belong to Ford, nor did he use it, it is still effective in delivering a message about masculinity. Ford survived two separate assassination attempts and the exhibit at no point describes Ford as fearful, worried, and scared, apart from him wincing at the sound of a gunshot. By including the gun, the museum puts on display a very tangible threat, making Ford’s survival seem strong and unemotional. This leads to a second question though: was it significant that both shooters were female?

Appendix: Image 21. An interesting fact is that the M1911 pistol was standard issue for the US during World War II, meaning that Ford very likely had the same model of gun during his time in the Navy. For an in depth examination of this topic try Angela Stroud’s article “GOOD GUYS WITH GUNS: Hegemonic Masculinity and Concealed Handguns” from the April 2012 edition of Gender and Society which expands upon much of the existing literature on the topic to tie hegemonic masculinity to concealed carry handguns.
The fact that both attempted assassins were women also plays an important role in understanding the message of this particular exhibit. Female assassins draw extra attention as they are generally rarer than their male counterparts, but they are also considered quite effective. Women are often seen as more gentle and passive so when women do kill, they are often portrayed as hysterical or deranged.80 This exhibit draws on that stereotype of “deranged women” in describing Fromme and Moore. Notably, the exhibit uses Fromme’s nickname, “Squeaky” rather than her real name, Lynette, further subtly discrediting her. The picture of her in the exhibit shows her after having been tackled by the Secret Service, mouth agape, eyes closed, and looking disoriented and fragile.81 While subtle, the image suggests Fromme was almost crazed, and exhausted by the severe actions she had taken. More telling is the description of Sara Moore who is described as “an attention-hungry bookkeeper” who was “involved with radical groups.”82 By resorting to calling her attention-hungry, this exhibit belittles her, presents her less seriously as if she were a man. This is furthered by the emphasis on apparent radical groups, which labels her as a leftist, further attempting to marginalize and discredit her, while also ignoring her time as a member of the Women’s Army Corps during World War II.83 The message is therefore clear: Ford’s unemotional response to these shootings is masculine while these attention seeking women are inherently flawed females in their actions. However, the exhibit shifts in its tone when addressing the man in the crowd who stopped Sara Moore as she tried to fire a second time.

81 Appendix: Image 22. It is worth noting that no mention of her connections to Charles Manson is made anywhere.
82 Appendix: Image 23.
83 The only group Moore seems to have been associated with is People In Need, a group created by Randolph Hearst in an attempt to satiate the Sybionese Liberation Army who had kidnapped his daughter Patty. For more information on her life and involvement in PIN and the WAC, try Geri Spieler’s Taking Aim at the President: The Remarkable Story of the Woman Who Shot at Gerald Ford.
The description of Oliver Sipple, who stopped Sara Moore from killing Ford, is another example of the way the exhibit minimizes negative aspects of the president’s life. The attempt occurred in San Francisco, 17 days after the Fromme attempt. Moore pulled a gun and fired at the president but missed. As she attempted to line up a second shot, Sipple, a former marine, tackled her and pulled her to the ground. While it correctly identifies Oliver Sipple as a former Marine and the man who stopped Moore, it did not disclose the difficulties Sipple faced as a result of the notoriety he received. Sipple was a homosexual but was not fully open about it, and after the incident, reporters revealed this publicly, much to Sipple’s discomfort. Sipple, and his family who had not known of his homosexuality, were hounded by the press leaving them humiliated and often openly mocked. Sipple became estranged from his family and died poor and alone from pneumonia 14 years later. While his life story is not necessary to the exhibit, identifying him as a former Marine but ignoring his homosexuality and treatment after the fact shows how the exhibit was carefully curated to present Ford and the assassination attempts positively. While the curators may have omitted this detail to respect Sipple’s privacy, his privacy was already destroyed by the event. Being saved by a gay man does not fit well into the macho narrative. The exhibit features no pictures of Sipple, nor does it mention the letter Ford sent to him in thanks for saving his life. This is perhaps one of the most obvious examples of the danger of seeing museums as places of accurate history as important stories like this are left out so more misleading items that fit a specific political agenda can be displayed.

Further on in the museum, past the replica of Ford’s office in the White House, lies another display touting Ford’s sporting ability. The display, titled “Most Athletic President,”

mirroring Ford’s own comments from his autobiography, mirroring Ford’s own comments from his autobiography, mirroring Ford’s own comments from his autobiography,85 focus on Ford’s involvement in football while also featuring his love of swimming, golf, tennis, and skiing. The exhibit features several items of Ford’s, including his skis, swim trunks, tennis racket, golf bag, and golf shoes.86 Notably, this section includes a short and undetailed reference to the media capitalizing on Ford’s missteps—a brief piece of text stating “the media loved to exploit any physical missteps along the way.” This piece is the only reference in the entire museum to Ford’s popular image as a stumblebum. It seems ironic that a for a president who was comfortable mocking himself on occasion would ignore the incredibly popular portrayals of him by Chevy Chase, a man with whom Ford became close friends. The museum even has the potential to depict Gerald Ford positively as a man with a sense of humour and a good spirit. Once again we see how museums can often ignore things that may be seen as unflattering.

The display on the Fall of Saigon in 1975 is another example of the positive spin placed on events perceived to be embarrassing or negative. During the fall, North Vietnamese forces took the South Vietnam capital and Ford was forced to order the evacuation of the American embassy. The display prominently features a set of metal stairs leading up towards a military helicopter. The staircase is the very one used during the evacuation on the roof of the embassy.87 Even though many, including Ford himself who described it as a “military humiliation” saw the evacuation as disgraceful and embarrassing,88 the display portrays it in mostly positive terms. The exhibit focuses instead on Ford’s comments that it “symbolizes man’s undying desire to be free.” Even the description of the event, despite stating Ford saw it as his

85 Ford, A Time to Heal, 289.
lowest point, still described the event as “real heroism.” Again, the museum disregards the more well-known narrative and frames it positively to present Ford in a better light. It is therefore fitting that an exhibit about something generally seen more positively, the Mayaguez incident, is placed directly next to the fall of Saigon.

The exhibit on the Mayaguez incident falls directly into John Orman’s description of the macho presidency, so unsurprisingly it is prominent at the museum. At the end of the Vietnam War, Ford sent marines in to save the merchant vessel the Mayaguez which was captured by communist Cambodian forces. Orman referred to this event in his book, noting Ford’s use of marines to put on a showy rescue of the crew of the Mayaguez “Ford opted for a macho presidential style solution – to send in the marines.” He also pointed out that the incident caused public opinion of Ford to jump dramatically, seen “as a decisive, unemotional, and manly president who took quick bold action to save the United States from embarrassment.” As such, having a prominent display on the incident, alongside a replica Marine uniform, is a strong example of the macho presidential style. Notably, the exhibit only vaguely mentions that many Marines died on the mission and completely ignores the fact that the operation itself was relatively useless as the people being rescued were not even on the island that was attacked.

After this exhibit little else in the museum emphasizes masculine themes. A room dedicated to Ford’s campaign against Carter is mostly filled with flashy memorabilia and campaign paraphernalia. The only real evidence towards masculinity here is the use of car and vehicle imagery to play on Ford’s sharing his name with a motor company. Otherwise the rest of the museum contains a replica of the presidential cabinet room and a section detailing Ford’s

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89 Appendix: Image 26 and 27.
90 Orman, Comparing Presidential Behavior, 102-103.
91 Appendix: Image 28 and 29; Orman, Comparing Presidential Behavior, 103.
92 Appendix: Image 30.
funeral that serves as a dedication to the man who made the museum possible. Ford’s final resting place is on the museum grounds next to his wife Betty’s. It is a low-key and respectful, befitting its purpose as a memorial.

Looking at the museum as a whole, it is obvious Ford’s masculinity and macho image were taken into consideration when choosing which exhibits would be featured permanently. While this may be unsurprising as Ford’s life easily fits into the macho narrative, it is still noteworthy. There are areas where things are left out or ignored to the detriment of visitors and while this was certainly not done with malice, or perhaps even conscious knowledge it was happening, it still serves as an important message about the carefully curated messages museums delivery. By simply forgoing the typical masculine narrative and instead focusing on facts the museum could easily improve their message and break free from the usual emphasis on macho masculinity – something that could benefit many visitors to the museum.
CHAPTER 6:

Conclusion

Gerald Ford’s presidential museum puts special emphasis on his masculine traits, which, while fittingly in tune with his life, is something directly in contrast to what he is remembered for in the wider popular culture. We know that Ford’s life is remembered more for its blunders and pratfalls than its successes and victories and that, despite his life of athleticism, scholarly accomplishments, and masculine endeavours, he is known mostly as an unintelligent klutz whose athletic ability is generally used for the sake of making jokes rather than as a source of praise. As such, one might argue that his museum seeks to rectify this, to change the public perception of him, yet by leaving out key moments of his life, and ignoring the moments he is most well-known for, does a disservice to his memory.

Orman’s work proved instrumental in categorizing the presidents within the macho presidential style. Having a standardized system has allowed an easier analysis of a presidential figure and expanded upon Orman’s original purpose. Identifying the macho presidential style helps us think about how masculinity is used in the American presidency, as well as both the impact it has on the presidency and the people. Orman did not look at presidential museums and libraries but, this study suggests a fruitful area of analysis for other presidents.

This work also helps to expand upon the centrals points put forth by authors like Vaughn and Goren whose work, “The Mechanized Gaze” touched on the surface impact that presidential representations in popular culture can have. By not only looking at how presidents are portrayed, but also what portrayals can do to the public image of these figures, and connecting it to the disparate ideals put forth by the presidential library system calls to light how influential
popular culture can be. It also touches on the importance of having an accurately curated museum system in place to better reflect a proper history in order to rectify misinterpretations stemming from pop culture. Vaughn and Goren never explored this specifically, but this study helps to expand upon and prove their point.

This work also serves to, if nothing more, confirm the issues presented by authors like Hufbauer and Craig. Their argument that the presidential library and museum system is in need of an overhaul is an accurate one as proven by this work’s analysis of the Ford museum. It is telling that even the shortest serving president of the Cold War who was never elected to the presidency or the vice presidency would have elements of this push towards a mythical status in place. Not only the well-known, popular, or controversial presidents’ museums have these flaws, all of them do. This may change in time with works such as this that raise questions about how presidents are portrayed.

Ford embraced his mistakes. While at times he felt hurt by the political jabs taken at his expense, he also recognized the importance of laughing at himself and allowing the press and the media to make jokes. He even wrote an entire book on the subject in which he makes light of all the mockery he received for his various blunders.\(^9\) Including this fact within his museum would give museum goers a far better idea of what kind of person the president really was: not just an athlete, a boy scout, or a President, but a human being with flaws, but also with thick-skin, confidence, and a sense of humour. Ford embraced the media’s right to poke fun, something that has been a source of major contention ever since the 2016 presidential election and the spread of charges of fake and biased news.

This is not to say that the museum, as it is now, is inherently a poor place for gaining historical knowledge. Quite the contrary, the museum contains a large amount of information and the archive within the library, which is controlled by the same institutions, is an incredible source of information. That said, there is always room for improvement, and an easy way to begin improving is to take the focus away from a macho presidential style and instead embrace the truth, no matter how messy. Considering many may only ever hear of Ford’s name in conjunction with his stumbles and his mockery in popular culture would it not make sense to embrace that? After all, who knows how many visitors to the museum are only there because they’ve enjoyed Ford’s depictions.

Furthermore, what of other presidential museums? Further research should be done into them to ensure they too do not fall into the trap of focusing on a macho presidential style. Knowing that these museums are important institutions that give otherwise unavailable access to presidents it is important that historians and curators work together to ensure that the information presented is as unbiased as possible and that further information is easily accessible. Doing so is of great benefit to museum and museum goer alike.
Primary Source:
Box 4, RE 6 Boxing-Wrestling-Karate-Judo (Exec.) to RE 10 Football 1/20/77 (Gen.); Gerald R. Ford Library.


Secondary Source:


Smith, Jeff. *The Presidents We Imagine: Two Centuries of White House Fictions on the Page, on the Stage, Onscreen, and Online*. Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009.


APPENDIX OF IMAGES

Image 1: Gerald Ford Statue in front of museum listing dates of time as President, Vice President, time in the House of Representatives, and time in the US Navy.
Images 2 and 3: The sign in front of the beginning of the museum exhibits flanked by a picture of Ford in the Boy Scouts.
THE THREE GREAT PRINCIPLES WHICH SCOUTING PROVIDED — SELF-DISCIPLINE, TEAMWORK, AND MORAL AND PATRIOTIC VALUES — ARE THE BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF LEADERSHIP.

Image 4: Quotation and video.
Image 5: Sign indicating Ford’s attendance to Michigan was funded by a scholarship set up for him specifically.
Images 7 and 8: Replicas of Ford and Wade Willis’ uniforms and a description of the incident they were involved in.
Image 9: The video detailing Ford’s narrow escape from death plays with a photograph of a damaged carrier on the screen.

Image 10: As the lights fade and rainstorm sound effects play, a fighter plane with wings folded up can be seen behind the projection screen.
Images 11 and 12: The section on Defense Spending during the Cold War flanked top and bottom by Ford, in uniform, meeting with troops in Korea.
Images 13-16: Selections from collages of photos of Ford’s life alongside positive descriptors

Image 17: Nixon’s presidential pardon, signed and delivered by Ford.
Image 18: The opposition side of the section on Nixon’s Pardon.
Images 19&20: Political cartoons praising Ford’s decision to pardon Nixon and his willingness to testify in front of congress, comparing him to Washington and Lincoln.
Image 21: The pistol used by Squeaky Fromme in her attempt to assassinate Gerald Ford
Image 22: Squeaky Fromme just after having been tackled by the Secret Service.
During the afternoon of September 22, 1975, President Ford left the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. He had spent the day addressing conventions and meeting with local news reporters. Across the street from his car stood Sara Jane Moore, an attention-hungry bookkeeper who was involved with radical groups. She raised a .38 caliber revolver and fired a shot, barely missing the president. Before she could fire again, Oliver Sipple, a former Marine, pulled her to the ground as Secret Service agents pushed Ford into his limousine and sped off. Moore received a life sentence for her attempt. She was paroled in 2007.
Image 24: Most athletic president display complete with skis, golf clubs, swim trunks, and tennis racket.
Images 25 and 26: The “Saigon Staircase” used in the evacuation of the US Embassy in Saigon

Saigon Staircase
This staircase symbolizes the end of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. During the final days of the evacuation of Saigon in April 1975, thousands of people ascended it to the roof of the American Embassy to board helicopters. President Ford later stated, “To some, this staircase will always be seen as an emblem of military defeat. For me, however, it symbolizes man’s undying desire to be free.”
Fall of Saigon and Evacuation of Embassy

Ford ordered an emergency evacuation of American personnel from Saigon as the North Vietnamese army pressed into South Vietnam’s capital in April. Journalists, business people, and South Vietnamese allies swarmed to the U.S. Embassy to be airlifted by helicopter to U.S. Navy ships waiting off Vietnam’s shores. In the end, 6,500 Americans and South Vietnamese were rescued due to the resolve and actions of Ford, which National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft called “real heroism.”

One of the Marine choppers used to fly over 6,500 American and South Vietnamese personnel from the U.S. embassy in Saigon to Navy ships waiting offshore.

Ambassador Dulles Martin, one of the last of the American personnel to leave Vietnam, left a series of messages in Mia’s Bible to explain them to the rapidly changing situation during his last hours in Saigon.

Image 27: Panel describing Fall of Saigon.

Image 28: Recreation of Marine tactical gear
Send in the Marines

First ordered Marines to land on the island of Koh Tang, where intelligence analysts thought the Mayaguez crew was being held. The attack, based on faulty intelligence, resulted in a bloody battle between the Americans and the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, in which the Marines suffered heavy casualties. As important as it was to rescue the hostages, Ford delivered a show of force was necessary to reassure our friends and to warn our adversaries.
Image 30: Campaign materials with car puns.
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