Twitter Thread by Darren Samuelsohn



Darren Samuelsohn
@dsamuelsohn

NEW: Historians worry a Trump library will be an airbrushed 'MAGA' tribute to a twice-impeached president https://t.co/1MWRjE3WlN by @rbravender & @davelevinthal ($) @Politicsinsider

Historians and presidential-library buffs say they're worried that any sort of Donald Trump presidential library or museum will be used entirely to glorify the ex-commander in chief while promoting lies about his administration and attacking his critics.

Construction could wind up being a major battleground over the legacy of the 2x-impeached president. Historians & DC insiders are speculating about whether Trump's kids might lead the effort, where it would be located, & whether the federal government might withhold its support.

"It will be ostentatious. It will be like Trump Tower. It'll be like everything he does — over the top & not very subtle," said Julian Zelizer, a professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University.

"I think he'll use it to promote his memory or his understanding of what's happened. Not only the things he accomplished, but the people he doesn't like," Zelizer added.

Sources close to Trump say it hasn't been a central focus for POTUS in the waning days of his administration, partly because of his reluctance to admit he lost. Former WH spox Sean Spicer said he was unaware of any plans that Trump or his associates had for a library.

Political insiders are chattering about whether Trump might look to a conservative college or university to house a presidential center or museum, or if his family might run the effort. Trump himself could design the exhibits to excoriate his enemies.

"I'd assume the kids take charge" of any library planning, a former senior Trump administration official told Insider. "Maybe Ivanka or Don Jr."

Zelizer predicted a whole wing packed with exhibits about Trump's perceived opponents, like the media, Democrats, and "socialists." He said he expected that Trump's friends and donors would happily shell out cash to bolster the effort.

"I actually made a crack when he was first elected he'd probably put his library over a casino," said John Dean, the former White House counsel to President Richard Nixon often seen on cable TV sizing up the latest presidential scandal.

Trump and his backers are entitled to portray his life and administration any way they'd like inside a monument to his legacy. That could be a glitzy "MAGA" museum housed inside a casino in Florida or a glowing Trump exhibit inside a new wing of a conservative university.

But things get a lot more complicated if they want it to be an official presidential library with the logistical support of the National Archives and the legitimacy that comes with it.

Presidents dating back to Hoover have presidential libraries. The latest addition for President Obama is in the works, and it will be run under a new model where there's no on-site research facility — but the Obama Foundation is paying to digitize official White House records.

Such a "virtual presidential library" model, where research-worthy material that is administered in part by the National Archives is stored in a low-profile facility & publicly presented online, could appeal to Trump, said Mark Updegrove, president and CEO of the LBJ Foundation.

That way Trump could erect a privately funded monument "to control his own narrative and not have the federal government having a hand in presenting his narrative to the public," said Updegrove, the former director of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum in Austin.

Libraries are treasures for historians & extreme points of pride to outgoing & former presidents, who dedicate a lot of their energy to mapping out how they're perceived by the buses of school children, retirees, & history buffs who will visit their libraries and museums.

The federal government technically owns ex-presidents' documents, & the National Archives usually works in conjunction w/ private foundations. That federal backing is important for the public's perception that the enterprise is providing factual information.

But if Trump wants an official library with guardianship over his White House records, he'll have to follow the federal government's rules. Congress can deny any presidential-library proposal.

So much more in this gem of a story by @rbravender & @davelevinthal - subscribe to @businessinsider and you too can be a presidential library & history nerd like us. Here's how: https://t.co/aC5iwU4Ch6