



American Presidents Attend the Theatre: The Playgoing Experiences of Each Chief Executive

By Thomas A. Bogar

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No presidential visit to the theatre is as famous as Lincoln's last night at Ford's, but American presidents attended the theatre long before and after that ill-fated night. As a young man in 1751, George Washington saw his first play, *The London Merchant*, while in Barbados. William McKinley avoided the theatre while in office, on professional and moral grounds. Dwight Eisenhower used drama as a vehicle for political propaganda. Richard Nixon took a personal view of theatre, having met his wife at a community theatre audition. Surveying 255 years, this volume examines presidential theatre-going as it reflects America's shifting popular tastes. It provides a chronology of theatre attendance for all 43 American presidents. Defining theatre as a live dramatic performance (including opera but excluding ballet), the book details the attendance and theatrical tastes of each chief executive and the ways in which his choices reflected the tastes of the contemporary American public. An afterword provides a summary of presidential theatre-going preferences.

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