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The Postmodern President

George Bush Meets the World

SECOND EDITION

Richard Rose
University of Strathclyde

God grant us the serenity
to accept things we cannot change,
courage to change things we can,
and wisdom to know the difference.
— REINHOLD NIEBUHR

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Dedicated to
Richard E. Neustadt
Scholar, Gentleman, Democrat

THE POSTMODERN PRESIDENT
George Bush Meets the World
Second Edition

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White House has preferred to borrow money from Japanese, Germans, and oil-rich nations rather than cut spending or raise taxes.

Since the postmodern President is the result of historical change, it is appropriate to treat the Bush Presidency as the latest step in an evolutionary process. The analysis of George Bush as a postmodern President is found in chapter 15. The reader can thus evaluate the Bush record to date in the light of the achievements and shortcomings of his predecessors and the problems that meet the President when the President meets the world.

Through the years many friends in government, Washington think tanks, and universities have been courteous and encouraging of my efforts to view the White House from an international perspective. Officials of foreign governments from Stockholm and Rome to Bogota, Canberra, and Tokyo have generously discussed common problems of giving direction to government. I have learned something from each of them.

In preparing the first edition I benefited from being the Visiting Hinkley Professor at Johns Hopkins University immediately after the breaking of the Iran-*contra* affair. Useful feedback was gained from talks about the Presidency at Yale, Princeton, George Mason, and Johns Hopkins universities, and the Brookings Institution. Chapter 2 draws on a paper written with Robert J. Thompson. Kate Bateman of the U.S. Information Service was helpful in digging out promptly a variety of obscure references. John Hart, Karen Hult, George W. Jones, Bert A. Rockman, and Aaron Wildavsky commented on the first edition in draft.

In preparing the second edition, helpful comments were received from George C. Edwards III and Michael Foley; Leslie C. McAneny of the Gallup poll provided up-to-date data on presidential popularity; and Edward Artinian speeded publication of this edition in record time.

Introduction: Approaching the White House

What does concern me in common with thinking partisans of both parties is not just winning this election, but how it is won, how well we can take advantage of this great quadrennial opportunity to debate issues sensibly and soberly.

Even more important than winning the election is governing the nation. Let's talk sense to the American people. Let's tell them the truth, that there are no gains without pains, that we are now on the eve of great decisions, not easy decisions.

—Adlai Stevenson

The easiest way to see the world closing in on the White House is to turn on the TV set. Day after day we see evidence of the impact on American life of actions elsewhere: an arms-control statement in Moscow, the kidnapping of Americans in the Middle East, and prices and jobs going up or down in response to changes in the dollar's value in Tokyo or Frankfurt. Events on the other side of the earth cannot be ignored by the President when they have a great impact on our lives. Nor can foreigners ignore what happens in Washington.

The past quarter-century has been very eventful for America, perhaps too eventful. As the central institution of American government, the years have also been eventful for the Presidency. The White House has been shocked by events in places as distant as Vietnam and Iran. It has been undermined close at hand, as in Watergate. The civil rights movement questioned generations of discrimination in the South and in the nation's capital itself. Assassins have repeatedly tried to intervene in the history of the Presidency, sometimes with success. In spite of the stresses imposed by such events, the American Constitution has maintained legitimacy and celebrated its bicentennial, a rare event in a troubled world. By contrast, the Constitution of the French Fifth Republic only dates from 1958, that of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949, and Japan from 1947.

If a President is judged by responsiveness to public opinion and effectiveness in policymaking, then Ronald Reagan's four immediate predecessors have fallen short on one or both counts. Three Presidents have left office because they could not respond satisfactorily to the public. Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford were rejected by the electorate, and Lyndon Johnson did not run

for reelection in 1968 because of domestic opposition to the Vietnam war. Richard Nixon won two elections, but suffered military defeats in Southeast Asia, inflation at home, and violations of the criminal law within the White House. John F. Kennedy was not in office long enough to leave a record that can be fully evaluated, but he was there long enough to learn that "the problems are much more difficult than I had imagined them to be" (quoted in Hirschfield, 1973: 134).

The postmodern President is not under pressure because American government has become weaker; the challenge arises because other countries have grown stronger. America is richer today than it was a quarter-century ago, and the armed forces are equipped with weapons that were then only visionary. But European countries and Japan have grown much richer, and oil-producing nations have grown rich by exploiting their natural resources. The vast populations of the Soviet Union and China have been mobilized into commanding military forces. Leaders of these countries see that America's President still stands tall. But foreign leaders can also stand tall. They want to advance their national aims, cooperating with the White House if appropriate or opposing the White House if necessary.

The Postmodern President

In two centuries, America has had three different Presidencies: a traditional President who had little to do; a modern President who had a lot to do at home and abroad; and a postmodern President who may have too much expected of him. As the world changes, our ideas must change, or we will become confused by applying the standards of one era to a different one. A modern President would not think of wearing a powdered wig, even though George Washington did so.

The traditional Presidency was designed two centuries ago to protect the American people against the abuses of an autocratic monarch and to guard against the emergence of an elected despot. For a century and a half, the White House was an office in a system of separated powers in which Congress and the Supreme Court each acted as a check on the Presidency and Congress was the leading branch. The traditional Presidency was not a driving force in government; with occasional exceptions, it was a dignified office of state.

The modern Presidency was created by Franklin D. Roosevelt's response to the depression of the 1930s. Although Roosevelt was not the first occupant of the Oval Office of the White House to believe in an active Presidency, he was the first to be an active leader in peacetime. To support his leadership, Roosevelt began the practice of appealing to the public for support through the new medium of radio broadcasting. Few Americans

ever saw or heard the voice of Abraham Lincoln or Woodrow Wilson, but FDR's fireside chats made his voice familiar to every voter. America's involvement in World War II made President Roosevelt an international leader too. President Harry Truman placed America's world role on a permanent basis, deciding to drop the atomic bomb on Japan, and after 1945, committing American troops to the defense of places as far apart as Berlin and Korea. Because other nations were then devastated by war or had never been industrial powers, the modern President's eminence was at first a solitary eminence.

The military and economic eminence of America after 1945 resulted in American *hegemony* in the international system, that is, the United States was the dominant nation influencing what happened around the globe (cf. Keohane, 1984; Gilpin, 1987). The mobilization of American arms to contain the Soviet Union had a great impact because of America's vast population, double that of Japan and four times that of Britain, France, or Germany. The impact was enhanced by the development of new and increasingly sophisticated weapons' systems. Whereas the Soviet Union is also a military superpower and Japan is also an economic superpower, only the United States has been both a military and economic superpower. American money stimulated the economies of Europe and Asia, and products such as IBM computers, Xerox machines, and Coca-Cola penetrated every corner of the earth. U. S. policies sought to secure mutual defense and worldwide economic growth: "For Americans it was the ideal outcome: one could do well by doing good" (Russett, 1985: 228).

The difference between the modern and the postmodern Presidency is that a postmodern President can no longer dominate the international system. President Carter and President Reagan have each appeared as helpless victims of forces abroad: oil-exporting nations, foreign armies, small bands of terrorists, and bankers and businessmen profiting from problems of the American economy. *Interdependence* characterizes an international system in which no nation is the hegemonic power. The President is the leader of a very influential nation, but other nations are influential too. In an interdependent world, what happens in the United States depends on what happens in other countries as well as what happens at home. For example, if America is to increase its exports, then other countries must increase their imports. The line between domestic and international politics is dissolving.

While the White House is accustomed to influencing foreign nations, the postmodern President must accept something less appealing: Other nations can now influence what the White House achieves. Whereas the Constitution made Congress and the Supreme Court the chief checks on the traditional and the modern President, the chief constraints on the postmodern President are found in other nations. The White House depends on the cooperation of the Kremlin to deter nuclear war and for agreement in arms-control negotiations. It makes a big difference to the White House whether the Soviet Union

pursues a policy of *glasnost* or aggression. The White House looks to the Japanese government to act to reduce the American trade deficit, and it looks to the German central bank, the Bundesbank, to boost demand in Europe for American exports. When the President looks to the Middle East, he must wonder what next will disrupt White House hopes for stability in a region where instability is endemic.

Although America remains a world power, it is no longer the dominant power that it once was. The White House has not lost Britain or Germany or Japan, for these independent countries never belonged to the United States. Each remains an ally, but the terms of the relationship have changed. American support for other nations' development has met with such success that countries dependent on the United States shortly after World War II are now major players in the international system. As the United States becomes more integrated in the international system, it becomes more like other nations. America is no longer isolated geographically, as in the days of the traditional Presidency, or isolated by the preeminence of its power, as in the era of the modern Presidency.

In an interdependent world a President cannot always do what he wants, because policies cannot always be stamped *Made in America*.* A ruler with unchallenged authority could assume that to govern is to choose. A postmodern President must start from the assumption: *To govern is to cooperate*. A President has always needed to cooperate with Congress in order to succeed in a constitutional system that separates powers. What is novel is that a postmodern President must cooperate with foreign governments to achieve major economic and national security goals. Cooperation requires a mutuality of interests between nations. If this is lacking, then a postmodern President can face stalemate abroad, just as he can face stalemate in Congress. As Reinhold Niebuhr notes, the President requires strength to change those things that American government can change and a stoic sense to accept what he cannot change. Above all, a President needs the wisdom to tell the difference between what can be changed and what must be accepted.

If a postmodern President does not adapt to changes in the international system, then he is doomed to fail at home as well as abroad. The rise of other nations to economic and military power presents greater challenges to the postmodern President, and lessens the capacity of America to influence international outcomes. Whereas a modern President had international influence consistent with his responsibilities, a postmodern President does not. Hence political commentators have shifted from worrying about the Imperial Presidency, deemed too powerful for the nation's good, to worrying about an imperiled Presidency, too weak for the nation's good.

*Presidents are referred to as he, since every President has been a male, while countries as diverse as Britain, India, Israel, and Norway have had women as national leaders. To refer to Presidents by the phrase "he or she" would convey a misleading impression of gender equality.

The leading contemporary scholar of the Presidency, Richard E. Neustadt (1980: xi, 241), has asked: "Is the Presidency possible?" His answer is not encouraging: "Weakness is what I see." The standard for presidential success that Neustadt (1980: 210) offers is challenging but not impossible: A "minimally effective" President should match the achievements of President Truman; he adds that there is "nothing high-and-mighty about that." If Truman's achievement is taken as the standard for the Presidency, three-quarters of the country's leaders fall below this mark, in the judgment of historians (figure 13.3). It is particularly worrisome that historians do not rate any occupant of the White House as having reached this standard since Truman left office in 1953.

It is right to worry about the capacity of the President, for the man in the White House is not an ordinary officeholder. The President is unique in his claim to political authority; he alone is elected by the nation as a whole. Lincoln's idea of government by the people is simply not practical. When America has a population of 240 million people, big decisions about the economy and foreign policy cannot be taken in a New England-style town meeting. Nor can 535 congressmen give clear and coherent direction to government, individually or collectively. The job of a congressman is to represent his or her district in Washington. The job of the President is to represent the whole of the nation in an uncertain and sometimes hostile world.

The concern of this book is not with looking backward into history, but with history read forward. To look back longingly to a world in which the President stood as a colossus is to default on our obligations to the future. We are much closer to the twenty-first century than we are to the days of George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, or John F. Kennedy. By the middle of the next century it will be easy to assess the successes and failures of the person inaugurated as Ronald Reagan's successor on 20 January 1989. Reading history forward is a challenge to understand under what conditions and to what extent a postmodern President can succeed in an international system in which he is not the only leader who counts, because America is not the only nation that counts.

An Overview

The success of the postmodern President depends on cooperation with leaders of other nations. This does not mean that a President can ignore public opinion or congressional opinion. It emphasizes that what the public and Congress think of the President depends, at least in part, on what the Japanese Ministry of Finance, the Kremlin, and diverse political forces in the Middle East think of the President. Any one of them can make the White

House look bad by imposing economic burdens or military setbacks on the United States. In an interdependent world, the President cannot avoid dealing with leaders in other nations; the question is whether the President plays his cards well or badly.

The biggest problem of the postmodern President is: *What it takes to become President has nothing to do with what it takes to be President.* A postmodern President must focus on complex economic, diplomatic, and military problems in the international system. But anyone who wants to be elected to the White House today must start campaigning years before a Presidential election is held. Instead of focusing on international problems, attention must be directed to parochial concerns of the counties of Iowa, where the first primary caucus is held, and of voters in New Hampshire, where a critical primary ballot is held. To win nomination for the Presidency requires great campaign skill and endurance. But it says nothing about the candidate's capacity to deal with the problems of an interdependent world in which the dollar is suspect, and friends and foes are not so easy to identify as once was the case.

An even more troubling prospect must be faced: *What it takes to become President actually makes it more difficult to be a successful postmodern President.* The demands of the campaign trail are such that in 1988 the Democratic party had difficulty in attracting respected Democratic leaders to enter the race. A contemporary presidential candidate is expected to demonstrate to voters that he cares about their views, and to the media that he has a chance of winning the nomination. Success in doing this is no proof that a candidate understands anything about the dollar in a volatile international economy, or about the troublespots that threaten national security. Years of campaigning have a high opportunity cost. A politician who dedicates his time to pressing the flesh on the campaign trail has little or no time to think about what he would do if he won the White House.

Personal character is important in determining who is nominated and elected President; compare the troubles of Gary Hart's candidacy or Senator Edward Kennedy's decision not to make the race for the nomination, with the ability of Ronald Reagan to smile through many problems. But the choice of President should not be reduced to a personality contest. Attempts have been made to apply insights from clinical psychology and personality theory to predict whether or not a President will be successful, but it is very difficult to relate differences in the personalities of Presidents with their performance in office (cf. Barber, 1972; Buchanan, 1987; Tulis, 1981). For example, by any conventional psychological standard, Abraham Lincoln was an oddball, but Lincoln was nonetheless a great President. To erect a superhuman standard for judging Presidents is to doom every White House occupant to failure. Since the typical President is likely to achieve some successes and some failures, his ups and downs are difficult to explain as the simple reflection of personality, which is a constant.

The immediate problem of a President is not what to do in his private life, but what to do about public issues that press on the Oval Office from the day he arrives. Jimmy Carter entered office with the simple belief that policy choices were between doing what was right or wrong, but found that presidential politics is about reconciling competing definitions of what is good. Lyndon Johnson entered office with a down-to-earth view that presidential ends justified any political means. The fundamental issue is not the personality of the President, but how he performs in office.

This book starts from the assumption that the Presidency can be understood only in terms of politics *and* government. Most studies of the Presidency concentrate on a single aspect of the Oval Office, such as the President's appeal to the electorate, his relations with Congress, the use of the media, or problems of managing White House staff. These concerns are means to the end of public policy. Although a President can never stop thinking about politics, neither can a President ignore the fiscal limits of the American economy or the impact of other nations on the success of a President's foreign policy.

The postmodern Presidency can be understood only by examining both the politics and the policy concerns of the White House. A public policy approach judges a President's success by what he does, as well as by how he deals with public opinion and with Washington. To succeed, a President must be effective as well as responsive. Responsiveness to the electorate is necessary if the authority of a President is to rest on the consent of the governed, a fundamental requirement of democracy. A President must be judged by the actual impact of his policies as well as by what he would like to do. Effectiveness is necessary if a nation's leader is to do more than declare good intentions. When push comes to shove, the test of a President is whether he acts effectively. The oath that the President takes to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States" commits him to be effective in upholding the fundamentals of sovereignty: national independence in a troubled world, and the prerequisites of a sound economy (Rose, 1976a). Whereas a traditional President could be effective by doing little at home or abroad, a postmodern President can be effective only by acting in the international system.

Chapters of the Book

The first part of this study describes what the postmodern Presidency is, the imperatives for action in the White House, the standards for assessing the performance of Presidents, and how the Presidency differs from other forms of democratic government. In the second part, the tangible and intangible resources of the Presidency are analyzed. On close inspection, some of these resources turn out to be limitations. The third section considers the way in which economic problems and national security issues are dealt with in Washington and in an international system that America can no longer

dominate. The concluding section evaluates how the American people judge a President, and how other countries view the Oval Office as the world closes in on the White House.

While the evolution from the traditional to the modern Presidency took a century, the shift from the modern to the postmodern Presidency has occurred within two decades. The transition to a world in which the President must bargain with leaders of other nations has occurred so abruptly that some presidential candidates have yet to notice it. Yet even the briefest consideration of America's position in the world economy makes it clear that the days are gone when President Kennedy could pledge that America would pay any price to lead the world. Chapter 1 describes the evolution of the Presidency from its traditional foundations and what this means when America is not the only elephant in the system. A President now cooperates and competes with other elephants to succeed in the Oval Office.

A postmodern President must respond to three different imperatives. To exercise influence within a system of separated powers, a President must go Washington, that is, learn how to bargain with congressmen, bureaucrats, and interest-group representatives who can make or break his policy initiatives. Going public is a second imperative; after an arduous campaign for election the President must continue campaigning for popular support for himself and his policies. Going international is the third imperative, involving bargaining with foreigners on whose cooperation the President depends for success in foreign and economic policy. Chapter 2 considers how the President may deal with each imperative on its own or simultaneously try to take charge of public opinion in Washington and the international system.

Because the President is a political figure, assessments vary about the proper role for the President; one school of thought favors an expansive role and another a more limited role. There is controversy about the direction in which a President leads: Those who approve of Ronald Reagan's policies are likely to disapprove of Lyndon Johnson's policies, and vice versa. Chapter 3 shows how an active President is praised as a leader if his policies are approved, but attacked as an overmighty Imperial President if his policies are disliked. A President who defines his role narrowly is praised as an exemplar of stoic virtue, if this fits with the political outlook of the evaluator, or criticized as imperiled if the President is thought to be too inactive. Assessments of a postmodern President need to consider how other nations respond to the President's efforts to take charge in the international system, influencing whether a President appears as a world leader, vulnerable, isolated, or a global failure.

Although the Presidency is regarded as normal in America, it is not the normal form of democratic government. Most democratic nations have a parliamentary system. The differences between the American system and the parliamentary system are set out in chapter 4. The American Constitution makes the Presidency one of three separate powers in Washington. By

contrast, the parliamentary system fuses power in the hands of a Prime Minister and Cabinet that is accountable to a popularly elected Parliament. The independent strength of Congress, executive branch agencies, and interest groups create subgovernments that exclude the President from influencing many areas of public policy, whereas in a parliamentary system subgovernments must submit to the authority of government. The intent of the American system is to keep government weak, whereas the parliamentary system assumes that strong government is good government. The United States is thus represented internationally by a President whose power in government is far less than that of those with whom he must deal.

In order to understand what a President can do, we must first ask: How much does American government do? The surprising answer, given in chapter 5, is that it does not do much by comparison with mixed-economy welfare states of Europe. American government raises much less money in taxes, has relatively fewer public employees, and takes fewer legislative initiatives. Moreover, the federal system leaves Washington responsible for a much smaller proportion of the nation's resources than governments in London, Paris, and Tokyo. The checks and balances of the Constitution further limit what a President can effectively do. Sizing up the President's influence cuts the President down to size, for relatively few problems of public policy can be resolved by the White House acting alone.

Campaigning for the White House is necessary, but there is a political cost; the time spent in campaigning is not available for learning how to govern. The road to the White House typically attracts candidates who have no experience in the executive branch of government. Chapter 6 contrasts this with the experience of leaders in a parliamentary system. Before a British, French, German, or Japanese politician becomes Prime Minister, he or she must go government, gaining policymaking experience as a Cabinet minister, a civil servant in a major government department, or both. This is far more useful for policymaking than a presidential candidate's experience in playing the national media or baiting the executive branch as a Congressman. A newly installed Prime Minister has already learned how to govern; a President usually enters the White House an absolute beginner.

Once elected, a President must maintain popularity by continuously campaigning for support. Winning an election every four years is not sufficient in Washington, whereas in a parliamentary system a Prime Minister expects the governing party in the legislature to support difficult decisions throughout a term of office. Chapter 7 examines three reasons why the President must campaign continuously. First, there is no party system offering reliable support in Congress or public opinion. Second, a President must court the media, for TV newscasters can put the White House on trial any night of the week. A third need, courting Congress, is not a major problem in a parliamentary system, for party discipline normally leads the legislature to endorse what the Cabinet does. In Washington, legislation

requires cooperation between Congress on Capitol Hill and the White House at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Once elected, the first priority of a President is to take over the White House. A newly elected President is expected to hit the ground running, using his fresh popular mandate to get legislation endorsed by an often recalcitrant Congress. This is easier said than done, for unlike a Prime Minister, a President is usually a stranger to the task of giving direction to government. Chapter 8 examines the problems the President has in taking and keeping control of the White House. A President needs staff to act as his eyes and ears, but staff members also have egos. Failure to control staff actions can lead to such abuses of presidential authority as Watergate and the Iran-*contra* affair. The strategic problem facing the President is organizing the White House so that he is kept informed about what concerns him without becoming buried in details and in political quarrels.

The President is a chief without an executive. Whereas a Prime Minister collaborates with Cabinet ministers and civil servants to steer the ship of state, the President is in charge of a collection of inexperienced campaign aides, strangers, and potential enemies. Only a few Cabinet ministers—in State, Defense, Treasury, and Justice—have much contact with the President. The rest are consigned to the bush leagues of the Outer Cabinet. However much zeal presidential appointees show, they often lack expertise in the programs and procedures of government. Hence chapter 9 examines how a President comes to terms with his political appointees and with expert civil servants. One way to do this is to use staff to keep him out of trouble, for keeping out of trouble is as important as acting effectively. In the course of a four-year term, a President cannot expect to alter the organized anarchy of the nation's capital; his aim is to intervene selectively in accord with his imperative responsibilities.

The President's problem in managing the economy is that the institutions of economic management often appear unmanageable. Chapter 10 examines the President's problem in holding the reins of a bucking bronco of an economy. Economic theories do not provide the White House with the certainty that astrophysics offers the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Making the budget is a problem when tax revenues fall more than $100 billion short of spending commitments. In assisting the White House in meeting the deficit, the government's banker, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, must walk a tightrope between White House pressures and pressures from the international system. Whereas in a parliamentary system the Cabinet's budget is endorsed because it is a vote of confidence in the government as a whole, in Washington the President and Congress can disagree endlessly about how the federal government should spend more than a trillion dollars each year.

All Americans share a common interest in the nation's security in a troubled world, but a President finds no agreement about what should be

done and who should be in charge. Many different agencies want to get into the act: the State Department, the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Congress, and representatives of public opinion. By contrast, in a parliamentary system government has the collective authority to respond to other nations with a single voice. Chapter 11 shows the President often relies heavily on his national security adviser, who can end-run Cabinet secretaries. By having his own foreign policy staff in the White House, the President can distance himself from bureaucratic infighting. The Iran-*contra* affair demonstrates the risk of an inexperienced White House operating without the warning signals provided by professionals in foreign policy.

As long as the United States was the only superpower in the world, the President could export many difficulties. Other countries were forced to adapt to whatever was done by the world's leading military and economic power. Today, America is no longer the sole power dominating the international system. Chapter 12 shows that the international system is collectively stronger than any President. There is interdependence between America and the Soviet Union in today's balance of power. The rise of other economies and the increasing difficulties of the American economy ended an era of American hegemony. The rise of Japan to international economic eminence has created American-Japanese "bigemony," in which the United States guarantees Japan's national security while Japan finances America's trade deficit. The postmodern President must now bargain in an open market, for there are insufficient common interests to encourage other nations to sacrifice their economic well-being for the sake of the United States. In a posthegemonic world, all major nations find that the international system is stronger than any national leader.

Evaluations of the Presidency involve a paradox: Everyone should consent to how the country is governed, yet voters disagree about who should govern. If the electorate is expected to approve of a President who is successful, then the majority ought to show disapproval when the President is unsuccessful. Thus, chapter 13 asks: How popular should a President be? Presidents usually enjoy the approval of a majority of Americans, and a significantly higher level of approval than Prime Ministers. But approval ratings go down as well as up. One reason is that approval depends on fluctuating conditions in the economy; another is that events, such as a military engagement, scandals, or a presidential initiative, cause popular evaluations to change. Even when a President is subject to widespread disapproval, a high level of support remains for institutions of government. But a President who does badly in going public is handicapped in Washington and the international system, whereas a Prime Minister can continue to exercise power without popularity.

As the world closes in on the White House, is the best President we've got good enough? The next President of the United States will not start with a fresh slate. Instead, he will inherit the Reagan legacy, including a budget

deficit and a trade deficit that make the United States dependent on foreigners to finance the standard of living of American citizens by lending tens of billions of dollars to the United States. Chapter 14 outlines this legacy as it looks to foreign nations as well as to Washington. There is an asymmetry of knowledge, for foreign nations understand Washington far better than we understand them. The postmodern President must learn how to make interdependence work if the United States is to travel in the fast lane in the international system rather than on a collision course.

The Author's Perspective

There are many different ways of painting a portrait of the Presidency. A biographer may stress the life history of individuals; a political scientist, the impact of the President upon the institutions of Washington or the electorate; a social psychologist, the impression that a President makes on others; a legal historian might examine how the Presidency fares in the courts; and a public policy expert, the impact of the President on American society. A leading bibliography of writings about the Presidency divides the literature into twenty-one different headings and more than one hundred subheadings; the final section is headed "Additional Aspects of the Presidency" (Greenstein et al., 1977; see also Edwards and Wayne, 1983).

While conventional studies of the Presidency recognize that the President is not the only political animal in town, the Washington National Zoo is regarded as the only zoo that counts. The federal government is depicted as a menagerie of proud animals, each worthy of careful attention. To understand the postmodern Presidency we must learn to think in terms of comparative zoology and ecology, for there are many big beasts in the international system today. The author is a both a FONZ (a Friend of the National Zoo) and a traveler familiar with the behavior of political animals and institutions on other continents. The postmodern President must become familiar with these politicians and their political habitats too.

The author's starting point is that of a Missourian, a Truman Democrat who first visited Washington as a student in 1951, walking the whole length of the Mall from the Capitol to the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials. Washington has changed greatly since. One symbol of change was the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960. The rhetoric of Kennedy's inaugural address was a call to action in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa as well as the United States. It made clear that Washington was becoming imperial in its political vision as well as its architecture. America was the champion of the world series of politics and of baseball for the same reason: Not many other countries played. Today, the record for most home runs in a lifetime is not held by Hank Aaron but by a Japanese slugger, Sadaharu Oh, and the record for most consecutive games played is not held by a first baseman for the New York Yankees but by a third baseman for the Hiroshima Carp in the Japanese Central League.

In keeping with the conventions of presidential scholarship, this study draws on the experience of the Presidency since World War II. Reflecting the author's experience in moving back and forth between America and Europe since 1953, it also draws on knowledge of government in other countries, and of how Washington looks to foreign leaders. This is appropriate when a postmodern President must spend as much time thinking about foreign countries as a candidate spends thinking about Iowa and New Hampshire.

As long as we understand how the world is changing, we can understand how the Presidency must change. The changes required are not so much institutional as intellectual. Just as we expect other nations to know what the White House wants, in an interdependent world we must learn how other governments think and what their interests are. We must also recognize that other nations can influence events in which the United States has an interest. A successful President learns to bargain in Washington. In an interdependent world, bargaining can also satisfy the mutual interest of all participants. Adapting to a world without hegemony does not require a postmodern President to sacrifice wealth or influence; it only requires a sacrifice of out-of-date illusions. This book seeks to contribute to this process by following the injunction of a Presidential candidate who never won the White House, Adlai Stevenson: "Let's talk sense to the American people."