



The Modern American Presidency: Second Edition, Revised and Updated

By Lewis L. Gould

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When the first edition of this book appeared in 2003, it was chosen as a Main Selection of both the Book-of-the-Month Club and History Book Club and quickly became the standard work on the modern American presidency—from William McKinley through William Jefferson Clinton. In that original edition, Lewis L. Gould argued that, while the president may be the most powerful man in the world, most presidents have fallen well short of the daunting challenges that confronted them while in office.

During George W. Bush's two administrations, as Gould discusses in a substantial new chapter, those challenges grew in scope and ferocity, encompassing two intractable wars, natural disaster on an inconceivable scale, and a near-meltdown of the national and global economies. Unfortunately, Gould argues, President Bush was woefully unprepared for those challenges, failed spectacularly as a leader, and ultimately lost the public's trust. His failures further reinforce and underscore Gould's previous conclusions.

This new edition, like the first, offers a lively interpretive synthesis filled with intriguing insights into the presidency's evolution during America's rise to global prominence. Gould traces the decline of the party system, the increasing importance of the media and its role in creating the president-as-celebrity, and the growth of the White House staff and executive bureaucracy. He also shows us a succession of chief executives who increasingly have known less and less about the business of governing the country, observing that most would have had a better historical reputation if they had contented themselves with a single term.

Gould's sharply critical new chapter on George W. Bush's presidency notes how he and his associates extended the troubling trends of continuous campaigning, media manipulation, celebrity politics, and inattention to governance so characteristic of the modern presidential office. Gould also amplifies his commentary on the Clinton presidency and lays out the treacherous terrain that President Obama must now traverse.

Engagingly written for general readers and students in the classroom, but

rigorous enough for the most demanding scholars, this book remains a must-read for everyone who cares about the future of our nation and the presidents who lead it.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1896, the White House employed just six stenographers and a handful of clerks and secretaries. A century later, the staff had swelled to thousands. How this change occurred—and what it did to the presidency—is the subject of Gould's astute primer in executive power and privilege. The focus is on bureaucracy: how each president assembled a staff, coordinated with Congress and projected his agenda (and image) to the press. Gould (*The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt*) sees William McKinley as the unrecognized father of the modern presidency: the first to appear on film, build a war room and use commissions to avoid congressional oversight. He was also the first to appoint a de facto chief of staff, a position that would become one of the most powerful in Washington. Gould has similarly illuminating insights on most of McKinley's successors. He shows that the staged "photo op" of today has its roots with Franklin Roosevelt, whose handlers were forced by his disability to make elaborate preparations for public appearances. Gould also notes that Woodrow Wilson was the first president to deliver the State of the Union address in person and that Richard Nixon installed the "continuous campaign" long before Dick Morris instructed Bill Clinton to do it. To be sure, this is strictly an introductory text; moreover, not every president has the goods to provoke worthwhile analysis. Nonetheless, this is a concise, intelligent survey of the transformations of the White House over the past century. 36 b&w photos.

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From [Booklist](#)

Gould is emeritus professor of history at the University of Texas and has written books covering the administrations of William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. If there is a common theme in his survey of presidents from McKinley to George W. Bush, it may be that the demands of the office have become too broad for anyone to be truly successful. As Gould indicates, a president is expected to act as a political leader and infighter while simultaneously serving as a moral example and national symbol. In Gould's view, presidents who come to power with sweeping agendas are likely to be frustrated by an essentially conservative system. Even if Congress does enact much of a president's legislative agenda, the law of unintended consequences frequently turns solutions into disasters. Besides, the press of media scrutiny and campaign financing cause presidents to devote an inordinate amount of time planning for and campaigning for reelection. This is a valuable and provocative examination of the office and the men who have strived to be effective in it. *Jay Freeman*

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Review

"Stylishly prepared and elegantly served up by one of America's most thoughtful, and thought-provoking, scholars."—**Richard Norton Smith**, noted PBS political commentator "Should be required reading at the White House."—**Steven M. Gillon**, author of *The American Paradox*

Users Review

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Willis Harrington:

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