The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader, Fred I. Greenstein, JHU Press, 1994, 0801849012, 9780801849015, 286 pages. Drawing on extensive interviews and archival research, Fred Greenstein reveals that there was great political activity beneath the placid surface of the Eisenhower White House. In a new foreword to this edition, he discusses developments in the study of the Eisenhower presidency in the dozen years since publication of the first edition and examines the continuing significance of Eisenhower's legacy for the larger understanding of presidential leadership in modern America.

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Eisenhower: the President nobody knew , Arthur Larson, 1968, Biography & Autobiography, 210 pages. Having an insider's viewpoint because he served as Eisenhower's chief speech writer, Larson scores Ike well in international affairs, but less well in domestic affairs.


Eisenhower , Geoffrey Perret, 2000, Biography & Autobiography, 685 pages. A study of the life of Dwight David Eisenhower sheds new light on his military and political career, including his alleged affair with Kay Summersby, his rise to commander of ....


Ike the soldier as they knew him, Merle Miller, 1987, Biography & Autobiography, 859 pages. Based on interviews with Dwight D. Eisenhower's closest associates, this biography follows Ike from his Kansas childhood to his station as Supreme Allied Commander during World ....

The modern American presidency , Lewis L. Gould, Sep 1, 2009, Biography & Autobiography, 318 pages. "The Modern American Presidency" is a lively, interpretive synthesis of 20th century leaders, filled with intriguing insights into how the presidency has evolved as America ....

Pretty Bubbles in the Air America in 1919, William D. Miller, 1991, History, 232 pages. William Miller's absorbing chronicle of life in the year following World War I re-creates the mood of ebullience that characterized the Unites States in 1919. The country had ....


Eisenhower the President crucial days, 1951-1960, William Bragg Ewald, 1981, , 336 pages. Ewald portrays Eisenhower as a complex, somewhat intellectual man who was determined to preserve world peace and promote economic prosperity.

Drawing on extensive interviews and archival research, Fred Greenstein reveals that there was great political activity beneath the placid surface of the Eisenhower White House. In a new foreword to this edition, he discusses developments in the study of the Eisenhower presidency in the dozen years since publication of the first edition and examines the continuing significance of Eisenhower's legacy for the larger understanding of presidential leadership in modern America.

Some books, like some scientific theories, have the capacity to alter people's whole way of looking at the world. Such a book is The Hidden-Hand Presidency. To read it is to discover, among other things, that everything you ever believed about Dwight Eisenhower as president of the United States is wrong.

Greenstein shows repeatedly that Ike was a deft behind-the-scenes mover and shaker who held all the reins of power in HIS hands. He consistently refused to engage in "personalities" and would deal with political challenges with tact and persuasion, often hidden from public light. His handling of McCarthy, often seen as a do-nothing approach, is re-examined in a new light. Eisenhower is seen pre-empting McCarthy consistently while also refusing to publicly engage him, which in Ike's mind, would have served to legitimize him (McCarthy) in many eyes.

Finally, Ike has been criticized for relying too much on a rigid and formal system of staff and information processing. His background in the Army, many critics contend, made him a stickler for procedure. This much is true. However, he used his considerable charm and intellect to draw on a wide group of people (all white and male) to augment his formal structures. Many blame the dismantling of the formal advising structure by Kennedy to his lack of information during the Bay of Pigs.

In the preface to this landmark book on the Eisenhower presidency, Greenstein talks about how he had begun a project on presidential leadership, with a quick stop at the Eisenhower Library to get confirmation that Eisenhower was as hands-off as possible, a doddering old fool who let his underlings run the country whilst Ike played golf. But as Greenstein looked at the research in front of him, he discovered Eisenhower was much more of a hands-on president than most accepted. He worked behind the scenes, however, hence this "hidden-hand" description.

Greenstein's book on Eisenhower is significant for all students of Eisenhower. Most revisionist scholars of Eisenhower were also Stevenson supporters in the '50s, and have come away with a better understanding of how Ike worked, and his handling of major crises. (Anyone who thinks the 1950s was "Leave it to Beaver" or "Happy Days" is poorly mis-informed and needs to take himself to the public library to look at all the brinksmanship reported in the newspapers and newsmagazines of the time.)
This was a path-breaking book when it first appeared more than twenty years ago, reflecting a rehabilitation of Dwight D. Eisenhower as president. It is an example of "revisionist history," something that should not be considered a negative term. Greenstein argued that the image of Eisenhower as an amiable "do-nothing" president who smiled and played golf while crises threatened to destroy the nation was incorrect. He worked hard behind the scenes while giving the appearance of inaction, and in most instances his indirect approach to leadership was highly effective.

I have found this study valuable in my own work on the history of the U.S. space program. While Greenstein did not spend much time exploring the history of the space program in this study his analysis can be extended to that arena. In the context of the Sputnik crisis of 1957 and the development of early U.S. space policy, Eisenhower was almost alone in concluding that the Soviet American competition in space was a non race. He didn't see the need to treat it as a crisis. And there is much to recommend this position. But if the former image of Eisenhower as a "do-nothing" president was inaccurate, the revisionist interpretation of Greenstein and others of him as a master of hidden-hand politics is somewhat wide of the mark. With American prestige clearly at stake in the Cold War, it is puzzling that the chief executive should have been so reluctant to recognize this fact of life.

At a moment in time when the debate over "leaks" of government activities and the value of transparency are pitted against the value of security, it is well to be reminded of the fact that every call for "balance" continues to fall on deaf ears in both camps. Differences between the parties are ideological and thus "political" in the most deadly sense of the word: opponents are viewed as enemies and their views are considered threats to the very existence of our" way of life. One has reason to wonder if open debates will result in any mutually satisfactory compromises. In light of the mental set of the "debaters," one also has reason to wonder if anyone could be an effective mediator. If there is someone who could play that role, would not the mediator require some allowance to punish those who remain recalcitrant, so that whatever agreements are made can be maintained?

Having been a teenager when Eisenhower was President, my memories him were dominated by how often he appeared aloof from the daily operations of government. What I did not know until reading this book was how much in control he was. He took responsibility for approving or disapproving every important decision made in his Administration. The Eisenhower I discovered through this book was his ability to design an effective organizational structure that had a clear chain of command and how he successfully managed decision-making in such a structure.

A second reading of this book, nearly 20 years later, has given me a sense of what an asset President Eisenhower would be in today's political and social environment. Unlike many biographies of past Presidents, which presume that knowledge of a person's private life can be a key to the person's public life this book focuses on Eisenhower the leader and reveals that in that role, he was Janus-faced: his public face and his private strategies differed substantially, because Eisenhower was concerned with succeeding in his political missions, as he had been concerned more directly with succeeding in military missions earlier in his life.

The challenge facing every President was best expressed by in a story told about President Truman as he handed over the office to in-coming President Eisenhower. According to Richard Neustadt, author of Presidential Power (1960), Truman old Eisenhower that his greatest challenge would be that, unlike as a General, as President, he could issue all the orders he wished; few if any of them would be followed. There was, in Truman's view, a natural entropy built-into the Executive Branch. Greenstein's magnificent book reveals how Eisenhower utilized his military experience as a rising officer and as a war-time general to organize the Executive Branch and centralize Presidential decision-making, and to make it work effectively, in the face of that fact. The central premise of the Eisenhower strategy was to control the degree to which he was transparent in his political maneuvers.
No clearer example of President Eisenhower's brilliance exists than in the strategy and tactics he used in undermining the influence and power of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Instead of attacking the Senator directly and exposing himself to a counter attack, the President indirectly used the Senator's flamboyance and publicity seeking tendencies to let others expose his abuse of power in lobbying the Army for special treatment of one of his staffers who was in the service. Eisenhower used a technique that Chris Matthews, in his book Hardball, described as jiu-jitsu - using one's opponent's own strength to "take him down." Having been successful in indirectly exposing the Senator, the President was able to restore the courage of McCarthy's Senatorial colleagues, who openly censured him, leaving him in disgrace and powerless.

His leadership genius extended to the way he responded to issues that were embarrassing and even scandalous. The Soviet Union's success in shooting down a spy plane piloted by Gary Powers was one; the scandal involving his Chief of Staff Sherman Adams receiving gifts from Boston financier Bernard Goldfine was another. Greenstein's book provides great insights into how President Eisenhower managed each of these crises and reveals a model of Leadership that we may have lost sight of.

Greenstein's politically excellent analysis of President Eisenhower stands in sharp contrast to the multiple books, magazine articles and seminars on "Leadership" that have accompanied, predictably, the latest economic and political crisis in America. Written and promoted mostly by entrepreneurs of one kind or another, for all the advice about managerial success in business made available to the public, the roadblocks to successful governmental leadership seem to have expanded as have the expectations, among citizens of all political persuasions, about what is possible for political leaders to do.

One reason for the gap between business leadership and political management seems to have been ignored or denied: principles of business management depend on the entrepreneur to control his or her employees. That is not easily accomplished, when one's employees are the voters. Furthermore, those principles cannot readily be used to address the requirements necessary to succeed in a complicated system of checks and balances, whether it governs the relationship between the three branches of our Federal government and/or the relationship of our National government and the States.

Perhaps the least transparent change taking place in American society is the deleterious effect business models have had on the non-profit sector of our society, which constantly seeks funding from our various levels of government. The imposition of quantitative "bottom line" measures of success often force non-profit managers to weaken their ability to remain focused on their organization's raison d'etre, especially when that organization's success is only truly measured by qualitative changes in the recipients of service.

Having completed a third reading of this book about President Eisenhower's leadership, I was reminded of having earlier in my life played the Japanese Board game, Go. The board consists of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines. Each player, holding either white or black stones, moves by placing a stone on an intersection. The strategy and tactics of this game is to totally surround an opponent's stone as the method of capture. The game requires deep concentration on the whole board, since multiple centers of struggle to surround and capture one's opponents "soldiers" develop as the game continues. Success depends on a player's ability to simultaneously develop offensive and defensive strategies in multiple locations.

Greenstein's book points to President Eisenhower's capacity to design separate strategies for dealing with each separate issue without losing sight of the whole picture. At a time when electronic media make every political opinion transparent, Americans of all persuasions can profit from being reminded of what true leadership can be and why knee-jerk expressions of disappointment and disagreement do nothing to ameliorate the problems created by a too rigid application of the chain of command mentality those created by naiveté about the unambiguous value of transparency. Read more &rsaquo;
When Eisenhower left office more than twenty years ago, he was generally regarded as the very model of an ineffective president, a benign but politically indecisive leader who reigned but did not rule. Only now, five unsuccessful presidents and a disastrous war later, are we beginning to wonder how this seemingly bumbling and inarticulate man was able to get so much done while appearing to do so little.

In The Hidden-Hand Presidency, Fred I. Greenstein, one of the country's leading political scientists, shows that behind Ike's blank "statesmanlike" exterior there was a distinctive, self-consciously articulated style of leadership. Drawing on recently declassified confidential diaries, letters, and memoranda -- including evidence of a secret Eisenhower campaign to terminate Joe McCarthy's political effectiveness -- Greenstein shows us an intelligent and articulate leader who knew exactly what he wanted and was prepared to work hard to get it. Time and again, in the way he rallied subordinates and isolated political opponents, in his maneuvers to win support among both isolationist right wingers and liberal Republicans, Eisenhower proved himself a skilled politician while self-consciously projecting an uncontroversial public image.

Really outstanding book for political types. Shows just what an effective leader Eisenhower was and why he was terribly effective. It was, in part, because he eschewed the spotlight and came off like he wasn't doing much and wasn't very involved. Ironically, he was involved in almost everything and was constantly pushing and prodding, but he used his "above the fray" reputation to actually be much more involved in the nitty gritty then anybody else would dare.

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The author, a pacesetter in the fashionable movement to reassess the Eisenhower presidency in a favorable light, sees his subject as shrewd, confident and self-aware. Although there is a long illustrative chapter on Eisenhower's calculated use of the "hidden hand" in bringing down Joseph McCarthy, the book deals primarily with method and style at the expense of substance.

The "hidden-hand Presidency" was the term used by Princeton political scientist Fred Greenstein to describe the Presidency of Dwight David Eisenhower. During his term most historians and political scientists viewed Eisenhower as a political amateur who reigned but did not rule. This man neither liked the game he was engaged in nor had gained much understanding of its rules, argued political scientist Richard Neustadt in 1960.