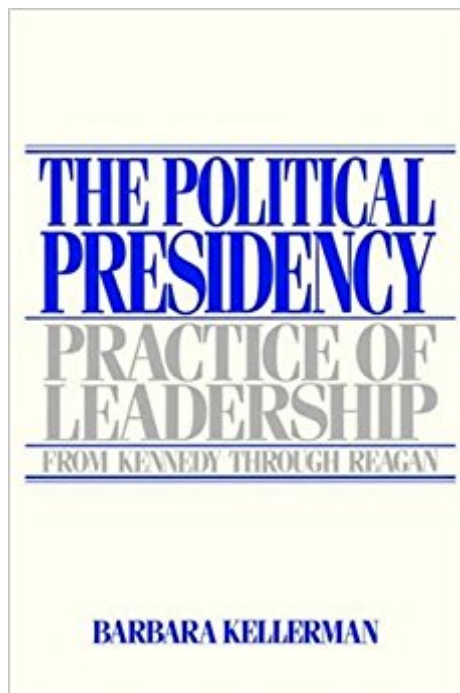




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# The Political Presidency: Practice Of Leadership From Kennedy Through Reagan



## Synopsis

How presidents lead--or fail to--is the central concern of this pointed analysis of political leadership in America. Beginning with a solid theoretical examination of the political leadership, Kellerman moves on to assess the nature of presidential power under America's six most recent administrations and considers the way each president handled the most important item on his domestic agenda.

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"A useful contribution....The book is of clear value as supplementary reading assignment for courses on American politics and the presidency."--American Political Science Review"Required reading for the new crop of presidential hopefuls about to be harvested by the American public and media."--American Politics"Required reading for the next president and for citizens who want to understand the politics of success in the White House."--James David Barber, Duke University"Kellerman has written a book on the presidency that will interest a wide-ranging audience...This book is a very accessible bit of research."--The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences"Penetrating in analysis, clear in focus, wise in judgment, The Political Presidency--from the pen of a rising young leader in the study of leadership--is sure to become a landmark study of our most indispensable and dangerous governmental institution."--James MacGregor Burns, Williams College

How presidents lead--or fail to--is the central concern of this pointed analysis of political leadership in America. Beginning with a solid theoretical examination of the political leadership, Kellerman moves on to assess the nature of presidential power under America's six most recent administrations and considers the way each president handled the most important item on his domestic agenda. She argues that in America there is an equation between leadership and 'politicking,' which is why great politicians and great leaders tend to be one and the same.

"Presidential power is the power to persuade," wrote Richard Neustadt in *Presidential Power* his famous handbook on the presidency (15). But what does it take to effectively use that power in order to become an effective leader in the Oval Office? In her book *The Political Presidency*, Barbara Kellerman did more than merely cite and expound on Neustadt's famous line. Kellerman took his quote a step further in diagnosing the presidencies of John F. Kennedy down through Ronald Reagan in order to develop what works and does not work in each administration. In doing so, Kellerman has not only given the reader a better perspective on the presidency, she has also uncovered strategies for leaders who wish to succeed in any arena besides the presidency. Kellerman's main hypothesis regarding presidential leadership is, "the president who is motivated and equipped to be politically skilled will prove to be a more effective leader in the American political culture than the one to whom politicking is irrelevant or even distasteful" (53). In signifying her thesis, Kellerman focuses on the domestic agendas of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. Her tendency is to make an assertion based on the success rate of the single major domestic objective of each president and show how his political leadership made that agenda a success or a failure. Her major bias is towards the more extroverted presidents who have a personal desire for political influence on the national level. She also asserts that it is these presidents who tend to be more successful in achieving their domestic priorities. That is why Kellerman believes that the two most successful recent presidencies have been those of Johnson whom she titles "the very model of a political president" (124) and Reagan who "brought to the presidency both remarkable personal qualities and a readiness to employ a wide array of political tactics" (252). However, Kellerman's hypothesis is best demonstrated not in analyzing the two most successful presidents, it is best shown in her scrutiny of the factors behind the failure of Carter's energy plan. Her main contention with Jimmy Carter is his abhorrence towards politics. She states that in "playing the manager instead of the politician [he] chose to separate and distance himself from what he saw as little more than a sullied kind of maneuvering" (23). Another aspect of Carter which Kellerman contends with is the fact that

he was extremely introverted and labels him "an inner-directed man" (219). Kellerman perceives that these two factors are the primary explanation for the failure of the national energy policy. She concludes that Carter "was a political failure because, especially in the initial and very critical months, he was very much a failed politician" (219). While Neustadt analyzed each president's persuasive capabilities, Kellerman used *The Political Presidency* to reveal how a president's personal ability to lead is crucial to the success of that president. Kellerman states that while she mostly agrees with Neustadt, she differs in her focus of examination and therefore comes to a different conclusion on the presidency. She observes that Neustadt's tendency to concentrate on the study of power as a limited scope because it does nothing in evaluation of the actual success of a particular president. Kellerman asserts that analyzing leadership as more beneficial area to study because it is more useful in determining the actual ability of a president and also gives a larger picture into the president's character. *The Political Presidency* is significant because it contradicts the typical American bias against politics. As a nation, Americans tend to extol heroes who are not within the political arena because of a national apprehension towards the political arena. However, *The Political Presidency* shows the value of politics and choosing the leaders of our country. Kellerman gives the reader a perspective of looking at the political field as honorable and worthy of recognition. Though Kellerman is limited in analyzing only the key domestic agenda of each president studied, she gives a solid breakdown in which the reader can easily grasp the leadership abilities of recent presidents. For a more thorough understanding one would need to research each presidency in much more detail. This is because *The Political Presidency* cannot extract all of the factors which led to the success and failures of each administration. However, Kellerman's book is an excellent read for a political science student who lacks insight in modern presidencies or even for the scholar wishing to study a leadership approach to some of the most current incumbents of the White House. This book is on par with *Presidential Power* as a useful handbook for observing the nation's most powerful and sacred political offices. Kellerman is excellent in reviewing each president's leadership ability. Furthermore, her study into leadership is useful for improving any leader's own leadership skills. For the up and coming future leaders of America a better a book does not exist for studying political leadership than Barbara Kellerman's *The Political Presidency*.

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