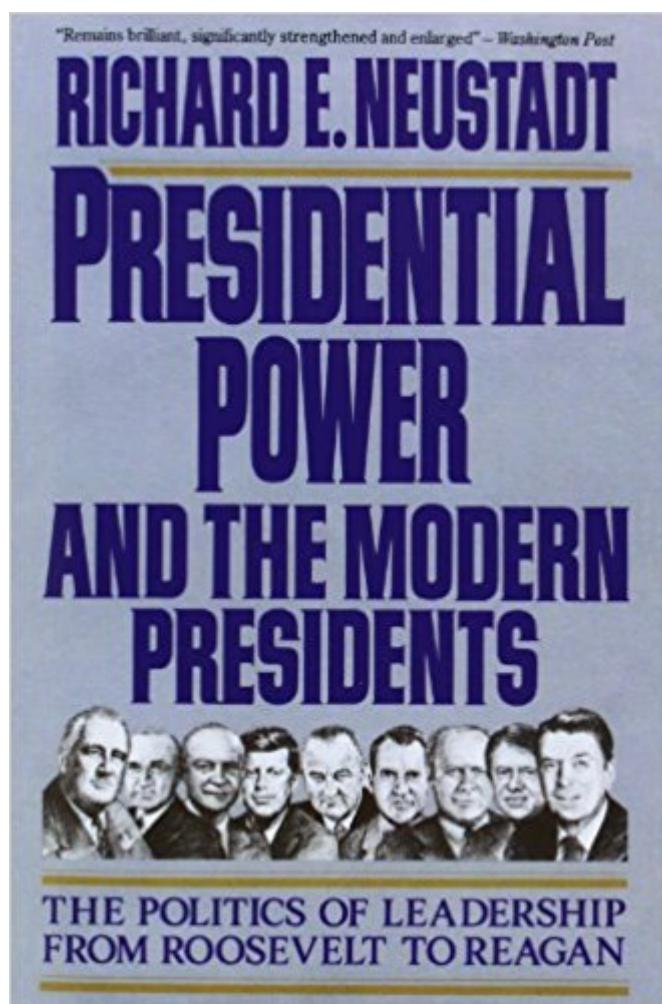


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# Presidential Power And The Modern Presidents: The Politics Of Leadership From Roosevelt To Reagan



## **Synopsis**

Thirty years ago Richard Neustadt published *Presidential Power*, which became a widely studied book on the theory and practice of presidential leadership. Presidents themselves read it and assign it to their staff for study, as did the instructors of hundreds of thousands of students of government. Now Richard Neustadt re-examines the theory of presidential power by testing it against events and decisions in the administrations of the later modern presidents who followed FDR, Truman and Eisenhower. To the original study of presidential power, Neustadt has added a series of chapters appraising the presidential styles and skills of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan in the light of his guiding belief that the President must consider the effect a decision will have on his prospects for the successful exercise of presidential power in the future.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Twenty-nine years ago Neustadt wrote *Presidential Power* ( LJ 6/1/61), a classic on the modern American presidency. This is the fourth revised edition of that work, in which his thesis continues to be that U.S. presidents who lead by persuasion are more successful than those who rely on the formal executive powers of command found in the Constitution. Although this edition doubles the length of the first, Neustadt is still unable to explain why some presidents ignore the tenets of democratic leadership. James David Barber's *Presidential Character* ( LJ 7/72) is a vastly more readable and predictive classic which, in a sense, builds on Neustadt's thesis. This latest edition

continues a patched-on quality, with the addition of new chapters for each administration after Eisenhower's. Older editions will be sufficient for most libraries.- William D. Pederson, Louisiana State Univ. in ShreveportCopyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Washington Post Remains brilliant, significantly strengthened and enlarged.Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Our most brilliant commentator on the Presidency brings his diagnosis up to date in this witty, inclusive and stylish book.Aaron Wildavsky University of California, Berkeley Savvy, insightful political portraits of recent presidents, including Ronald Reagan, in relation to what is still the contemporary classic on the Presidency.Representative Stephen J. Solarz New York An operational Bible for Presidents and their staffs, and an indispensable Baedeker for those who seek to understand both.Fred I. Greenstein Princeton University Neustadt's book remains the classic account of presidential leadership, and the latest edition has a bonus -- two fascinating new chapters.Paul E. Peterson Harvard University The discussion of Iran-Contra reveals how profound was Dick Neustadt's original interpretation of Presidential power.Charles O. Jones University of Wisconsin He is so much in command that he doesn't have to tell all. A personal characteristic, a response, an insight -- and soon you see what he sees.Clark M. Clifford For thirty years, Presidential Power has influenced students of the Presidency -- from the quiet comers of the White House to college and university campuses across the nation.

A classic necessity of any presidential scholar.

The first edition of this book, which I read as an undergraduate, will always make the top ten list of books that have influenced my life. I ordered the 1990 edition to bring me up to date before I give a speech that refers to the book. Sadly, the paperback is poorly printed. I believe it is a poorly performed optical scan of the hard-cover edition. Or it may be printed on cheap, absorbent paper that allows the ink to bleed. Or probably both. The edges of the type are soft and tend to plug up, especially in the bold face. The ink is a dark gray, not black. All this will make for a less pleasant reading experience. There is a random, faded image or smudge on the title page and another one on the back cover that I am guessing resulted from careless stacking of the folios before the book was bound, and there are other smudges on the outside edges of the pages.

While I usually study comparative politics and international relations, I've been on this bizarre United

States Presidents kick this summer. Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* is considered a classic within the American politics subfield--specifically the study of US Presidents. At the time Neustadt was writing there was this linear image of the President making a decision on some matter of policy and then marshaling the resources to carry it out. The basic argument of the book is that this image of the President is flawed as few examples of this type of presidential leadership exist. The President to act as ultimate decider on policy actions is constrained by things like Congress, his own prestige and ability to persuade, and the competing interests within his own administration. I thought that *Presidential Power* gave a more realistic and less idealized view of presidential decision-making. I'd like to deal with two criticisms: the focus on policy failures and the perhaps outdated nature of the argument. Some people have taken issue with the focus on policy failures. Well, we often learn more about a president from his failures than his successes. If one looks only at success then are we really getting an accurate view of leadership? The second criticism is that the argument is outdated as Presidents seem to have taken more powers upon themselves from the 1990's onward with Congress and others playing less of the role articulated by Neustadt in the pages of this book. While I was tempted to agree thinking about the Clinton and Bush administrations, couldn't we say that elements of Neustadt's logic help explain the current governmental dysfunction evidenced by the battles between the Obama White House and Congress? A thought provoking thesis on the nature of American presidential leadership that should be read by political science students of all disciplines.

This is indeed one the classics in the field of presidential studies. Neustadt's contribution, although somewhat commonsensical at first glance, is that despite the huge increase in formal powers that the president has acquired over the years, the most fundamental power the president possesses is the power to persuade. The president must persuade other independently elected officials to do as he sees fit. This, in a city such as Washington DC where people have seen powerful politicians come and go over the years, is easier said than done. The president must be attuned to the nuances of political issues and not allow himself to become cut off from the political back and forth by his retinue of aides. He must retain the prerogative of making the final political decision and avoid becoming a clerk and simply ratifying the decisions made form by the staff and the bureaucracy. Further, he must define what is in his political self interest. The president does so by keeping himself informed, by employing a system of information that allows him to be at the center and making real decisions; and by carefully husbanding the power and carefully cultivating the image of the president. While the president does posses the power to command, instances where he must rely

on command are a *prima facie* failure of persuasion. Finally, the president must ensure that others understand his power. He must be able to strike a modicum of fear into both his allies and his foes. In the political sense, this means the ability to hurt someone electorally. If I as the president can campaign against you and make it stick, you will be more likely to fear me and be persuaded by my requests. This is not an easy read, but if you are involved as a student of politics you WILL read this book at some point. A classic and well worth the effort. John C. McKee

Neustadt makes one key argument as it relates to presidential power. Namely, presidential power "is the power to persuade." Neustadt argues that the President does not have an unlimited bounty of power; on the contrary, he argues that the chief executive must treat each decision as a trade-off, for his political capital is expended after every chief decision. Thus, especially given the intense media scrutiny and partisanship of the present, each decision has ramifications that either, very temporarily if at all, enhance the president's capital or permanently erase that capital. As Neustadt argues, the president cannot largely regain capital. This is evidenced by the presidencies of LBJ and Carter, in particular. All in all, this is a must-read for any scholar of the American presidency. This book has been read by every President in office since its publication as a lesson to those in power that each decision carries consequences. While you may not agree with the weak executive theory nor believe that this book still holds true half a century after its original publication, the fact remains that this still is a valuable insight into the modern presidency and should be treated as such. Don't get me wrong, this book is not a leisure read; it's incredibly dry, but you can feel the knowledge and understanding entering you as you read it.

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