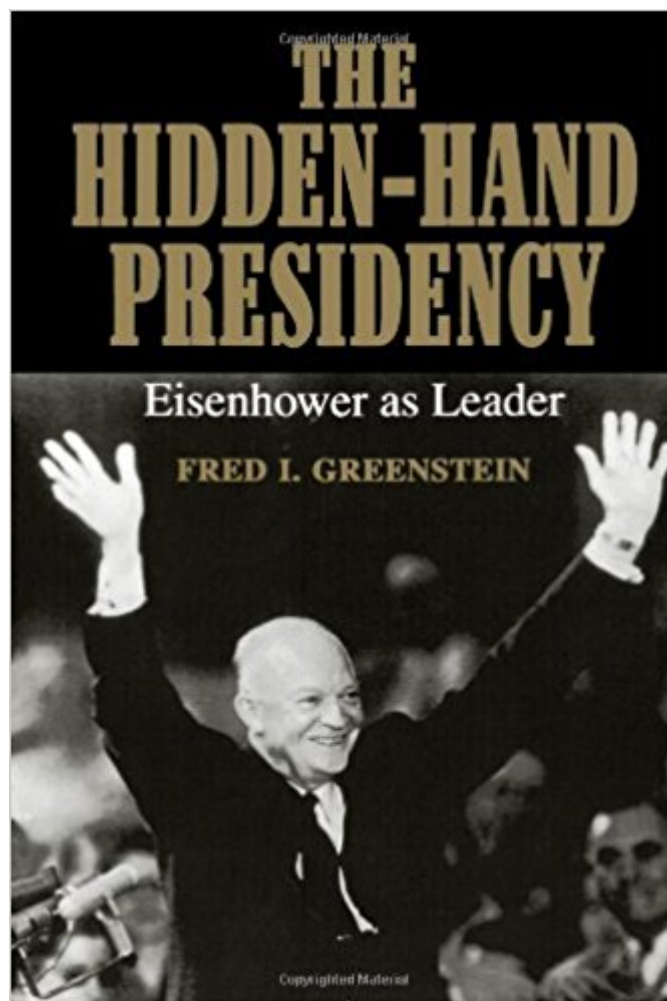


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# The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower As Leader



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"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." (Economist)"A fascinating exposition of Eisenhower's leadership techniques." (Political Science Quarterly)"An important corrective to standard treatments of Ike as president." (Journal of Politics)"A deliberately circumscribed book, but the sharp focus serves its intellectual intensity." (National Review)"By his painstaking analysis, Greenstein should convince even the most unrelenting critic of Eisenhower's that the man had greater skills as Chief Executive than have been recognized." (New Republic)

Prof. Greenstein has created a great and insightful observation of President Eisenhower. I have

read different biographies of the earlier presidents, but nothing of a postwar president like Ike who became a major historical and influential figure during WWII and a president during a decade that has been remembered as a socioeconomic transition period with enormous influence on the future of the US and the world.

Good book.

Very good book.

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? While thinking about those questions, I remember reading this very powerful book on President Eisenhower in 1995. Published originally in 1982, it was updated in 1994, while Bill Clinton was President. Having been a teenager when Eisenhower was President, my memories of 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 Janus-faced nature of President

Eisenhower's presidency reveals both the rationale for "secrecy" in government and the strong desire for transparency and why it would take an Eisenhower type President to create a structure for mediating a conflict before it goes public. 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 told 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'être*, 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.

There are a number of very good books available about Dwight Eisenhower. This one unfortunately isn't one of them. While the book does provide some insight into how Eisenhower ran the country, I found it very boring. If you want a great insight into Eisenhower's presidency then I suggest obtaining the book written by Stephen Ambrose.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th President of the United States, left office with a high approval rating and a legacy of 7.5 years of peace. He exhibited a leadership style that balanced his ideals with realistic outcomes and with a desire to foster good relationships with those he came in contact.

Drawing on extensive interviews and archival research, Fred Greenstein describes Eisenhower's approach to leadership with examples of success and examples of failure. It shows a President who was a statesman vs. a partisan. It helps that Eisenhower didn't come up the ranks through either party. Apparently this book is a major surprise to those who lived through the Eisenhower days - as I gleaned from the author - the reviews and people a generation older than me. People seemed to consider him "not too bright and not political". I was born after Eisenhower's presidency - and understanding his success as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in World War 2 - don't find it surprising at all. Some key nuggets: Didn't worry about what he said yesterday moved toward "attacking the future" • Not overly concerned about critics or detractors that didn't have such a big picture view Stayed above the fray Was passionate about his mission; and as such learned to curb his own temper before quietly proceeding

This book highlights Eisenhower's hidden leadership during his terms as president. He was savvy, knowledgeable and aloof. His policies were not always clear or well publicized. The problem with this book is that it reads more like a college thesis; the prose is very dull, mostly quoting verbatim from original documents. This book should have had a different style, mixing original documents and, at the same time, provide a narrative that made it easier to follow, and to care about Eisenhower's time during his presidency.

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