## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Editors’ Introduction**  
2

**The Obama Legacy**
- Bruce Miroff – Barack Obama’s Legacy in Foreign Policy  
- Daniel J. Galvin – Barack Obama’s Legacy on Party Building  
- Frances E. Lee – Obama’s Political Legacy: A Playbook for the President’s Opposition?  
- M. Stephen Weatherford - Barack Obama’s Economic Legacy  
- Gregory Koger - President Obama’s Legacy and the U.S. Senate  
12

**President Trump**
- Michael A. Genovese – Trump’s Personality Predicts Self-Inflicted Downfall  
- Richard Kreitner’s Interview with Stephen Skowronek in *The Nation*  
25

**News**
- The Presidency in Blogs: A New Initiative from *Presidential Studies Quarterly*  
26

**Recent Books**  
27
EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION

It is a time of transition in the American presidency, which alone would make these interesting times for our section. Additionally, the contentious and often unprecedented 2016 election has presented presidency scholars with unique challenges as both researchers and educators. This issue seeks to provide all of us with some early efforts to contextualize the Obama presidency in retrospect as well as some novel ways to think about the Trump administration going forward.

This issue of the PEP Newsletter features five remarkably insightful pieces on Barack Obama’s presidential and political legacy. Ranging from the former president’s impact on foreign policy to his legacy in terms of contentious congressional relations. These essays do their best to place Obama in history with attention to what now follows him. We can already observe that many of the issues to plague the presidency of Obama remain even in a unified Trump administration.

Beyond a retrospective look at Obama, we have also included some early speculation as to what kind of presidency Donald Trump will have. Stephen Skowronek’s interview in The Nation provides an explicit link between the two administrations as Skowronek discusses how we can understand Obama and Trump in relationship to one another and also, of course, in terms of political time. Lastly, Michael A. Genovese essay explains how Trump’s personality may very well predict his downfall. This issue ends with some section news and a look at some recent presidency books.

In a further transition, this issue of the PEP Report will be the last from the present team of editors. Our two year term is up by the APSA meeting in San Francisco. In the meantime, we would be happy to discuss our experiences with members who may be interested in taking up these duties. We feel that our time editing has provided us with new perspectives and has encouraged contact with a wide variety of knowledgeable scholars.

In closing, we look forward to seeing everyone in Chicago soon and in San Francisco at the end the summer when we will choose a new group of editors. It has been our pleasure to serve you over the last two years!

Mark Major, Ian Ostrander, and Anne Pluta
Writing in December 2016, it is hard to assess what President Barack Obama’s lasting legacy in American foreign policy will be. President-elect Donald Trump has threatened to undo many of Obama’s foreign-policy achievements, and until we can gauge which of his threats have been carried out, discussions of an Obama legacy will be highly tentative. Yet there is a sense in which the survival of Obama’s foreign policy legacy is not dependent on Trump’s actions. Even if a president’s accomplishments are compromised or completely overturned by a successor, they may survive as a model and an inspiration for future chief executives.

To understand Obama’s record in foreign policy, we need to set it in a larger historical context. In my new book, Presidents on Political Ground: Leaders in Action and What They Face, I show that the insurgent national security doctrines of landslide losers Barry Goldwater and George McGovern eventually prevailed over the Cold War doctrines of the foreign policy “establishment,” so that by the time of the Reagan presidency, Republican and Democratic views on American national security were increasingly polarized. On key issues of international relations—the proper role of the United States in global affairs, the defense budget, military interventionism, the sphere for diplomacy, and the value of multilateral alliances and international organizations—most of the elite and the base of each party viewed the world in either Republican or Democratic terms. Congressional votes on presidential initiatives in international affairs, which had seldom been sharply partisan before Reagan, now commonly divided along partisan lines. Unanimous Republican opposition in Congress to Obama’s nuclear deal with Iran is only the most recent manifestation of the breakdown of bipartisanship in foreign policy.

Of the two Democratic presidents since the onset of partisan polarization in foreign policy, Obama more fully represents Democratic doctrine than Bill Clinton did. Clinton was chief executive in the brief era between the demise of the Soviet Union and September 11, 2001, an era in which foreign
policy had relatively low salience compared to domestic policy. Moreover, Clinton’s foreign policy was largely ad hoc, and if anything it drifted toward larger defense budgets and interventions abroad as it proceeded. By contrast, the Obama approach in international relations, often ascribed solely to his own instincts and worldview, is in fact largely in accordance with what most Democrats believe today.

Profoundly influenced by the nightmare of the Vietnam War, compounded more recently by George W. Bush’s fiasco in Iraq, contemporary Democrats are skeptical of a self-righteous, aggressive, and militaristic foreign policy. The Democratic worldview tends to the dovish, with a powerful preference for multilateralism and diplomacy over armed interventions abroad. President Obama has given voice to the core assumption behind Democratic foreign policy: restraint. As he put it in a 2014 commencement address at West Point: “Since World War II, some of our most costly mistakes came not from our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences, without building international support and legitimacy for our action, without leveling with the American people about the sacrifices required.”

Especially in his second term, Obama’s proudest achievements in global politics bear the marks of the Democratic preference for diplomacy. If he has advanced beyond most Democratic leaders in this regard, it has because he has been bolder in taking risks, conducting negotiations with several of the nation’s longstanding adversaries. Both his triumphant opening to Cuba and the alliance of great powers that he forged and steered to a hard-fought nuclear agreement with Iran stand as signposts of what the Democratic commitment to diplomacy can accomplish. Obama’s third major foreign policy accomplishment during his second term was the central U.S. role in the Paris Climate Change Conference of 2015. If the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in 2009 was a disappointment, the Paris conference six years later was a success in large part because Obama had obtained the vital agreement of China in advance.

Although Obama’s preference for diplomacy is clear, what of his uses of armed force? His decisions for a “surge” in the American military presence in Afghanistan and an expanded use of deadly drone warfare, each supported by most conservative Republicans and opposed by most liberal Democrats, would seem inconsistent with contemporary Democratic doctrine in foreign policy.

However, the inconsistency is mitigated when we take into account two considerations. First is a realist imperative that knows neither Democratic nor Republican doctrines. Because presidents are charged with responsibility for Americans’ safety, they are likely, in political philosopher Michael Walzer’s phrase, to have “dirty hands,” soiled by the use of violence that they order. Pacifism is not an option for the leader of a nation-state that has real, violent enemies.

If the issue for Democratic doctrine is not presidential use of armed force per se, the second consideration becomes the kinds and degree of violence that are legitimate and that do the least harm to the peaceful settlement of international conflicts. To the surprise of many observers, President Obama addressed this issue on an unlikely occasion: his Oslo speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2009. Acknowledging the fact that he was the commander in chief of a nation currently at war, Obama turned to “just war” theory for principles to delimit the uses of violence. “Where force is necessary,” he said, “we have a moral and strategic interest in binding ourselves to certain rules of conduct.” By these rules, for example, torture is impermissible and the amount of violence applied must
be proportional to the measures deployed by an enemy. Coming on the heels of President Bush’s invasion of Iraq, Obama’s own decisions about violence, as disturbing as they might be in the case of drones, aimed to steer national security policy toward methods that produced fewer of the casualties of war.

Because Obama’s foreign policy is the exemplary instance so far of Democratic doctrine put into practice, it is likely to hold appeal to future presidents from his party. His foreign policy legacy may also look more attractive to a future generation if the alternatives to his approach fall flat. Woodrow Wilson’s vision of collective security through international organization was renounced by isolationist successors but revived by Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War II. Dwight Eisenhower’s prudent avoidance in 1954 of American military engagement in French Indochina received greater appreciation after John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson marched American troops into the Vietnam quagmire. Historical cases such as these remind us that the full measure of Barack Obama’s legacy in American foreign policy will not be taken for a long time to come.
Barack Obama’s Legacy on Party Building

Daniel J. Galvin
Northwestern University

President Obama has devoted most of his energies over the last eight years to building a policy legacy. He will leave office with many durable successes, from the economic recovery to the revived auto industry to the killing of bin Laden to new administrative rules and rulings that will be difficult to reverse.

But President-elect Donald Trump and the Republican Congress have vowed to undo many of Obama's other major accomplishments. Reports suggest they will move quickly to dismantle his legislation (Affordable Care Act, Dodd-Frank), reverse his executive orders (gun control, immigration), renegotiate his treaties (climate change, TPP, Iran), and block his regulations (deportation enforcement, environmental regulation). Democrats will have few ways to stop them (all hopes hang on the survival of the filibuster).

Clearly, policy accomplishments are only as durable as their political supports are strong. And President Obama, like most modern Democratic presidents, did not do enough to build up those political supports.

Democratic presidents often shortchange their party

As I discuss in my book on presidents and party-building, presidents can decide whether to invest their time and resources in building a policy legacy, a party legacy, or both. Republicans have historically pursued both assiduously, while Democrats have almost exclusively gone the policy route.

For example, Republicans raised money for their party and helped to fund down-ballot races. They helped to strengthen state parties. They helped to recruit quality candidates. They directed resources to voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives. They worked to cultivate and train a new generation of activists and campaign operatives.

Democratic presidents in earlier eras had different priorities. With deep and durable majorities in Congress, state and local politics, and national party identification, they focused on policy accomplishments and left the party-building project to others, especially out-party chairmen during Republican administrations. Kennedy exploited his party while making precious few investments in its capacities; Johnson undercut his party and drained it of its resources; Carter neglected and exploited it.
Bill Clinton followed the same pattern until his second term, when in response to his party’s flagging electoral fortunes, he launched a number of party-building programs. But the startup costs were high and the downstream gains were gradual, with the biggest steps forward taking place during Howard Dean’s tenure as DNC chairman a few years later (2005-2009).

**Obama's limited party-building**

Obama, like Clinton before him, also responded to his party’s weakened competitive electoral position by making a handful of party-building moves in his second term. Not enough, though, to prevent the decimation of his party’s electoral standing or equip it to resist the rapid rollback of his policy legacy.

Obama does have two months left in office. But there is enough of a public record to begin taking stock:

- Obama campaigned hard for Clinton and several congressional candidates in 2016 and helped raise money for them as well as state parties in earlier years, as Brendan Doherty has shown. But campaign chairman John Podesta evidently found Obama to be “prissy” when it came to fundraising for Super PACs, which have become increasingly important to party campaigns.

- His team launched the nonprofit group Organizing for Action (OFA) in 2013, which as Sidney Milkis and John York have discussed, may very well may endure as a force for promoting progressive policies in the future. But Obama appears to have done little to help build a progressive organizational network at the state level, which Alexander Hertel-Fernandez and Theda Skocpol have demonstrated is woefully lacking on the left. Nor has he done much to help revitalize dying labor unions.

- And after years of delay, Obama finally handed the technological infrastructure and analytic tools of his presidential campaign over to the DNC (“Project Ivy”) in 2014, which is one crucial party-building move no Democratic president had ever done in the modern era. At the same time, OFA did “hoard” the campaign’s key data on small donors, volunteers, and activists, leading to an awkward division of informational assets between the party and OFA. And of course by failing to address deeper problems at the DNC earlier, the national committee has become a laughing stock.

Clearly, the Democratic Party’s diverse coalition was not so fractious to deter Clinton or Obama from doing at least some party-building. And some of Obama's efforts could still pay off in the long term, as Clinton’s did. The problem was that neither Obama nor Clinton did enough of it to make much of a difference in the near-term.

Moreover, they both treated policy successes as tantamount to political successes. Both Obama and Clinton argued that successful health care reform would create supportive constituencies that would reward the party at the voting booth in the long run. But policies don’t always generate their own political supports, which is the main difficulty Obama is confronting now.

As he leaves office, the Democratic “bench” is weak and its “farm team” is virtually nonexistent.

*The PEP Report – Spring 2017 – 7*
Democrats are already scrambling to rebuild, as the out-party always does. They’ll do well to rebuild from the bottom up.

One thing, however, is clear: with Donald Trump in the White House, Democrats will no longer be able to benefit from White House largess, presidential fundraising prowess, or the power of presidential persuasion. Yes, eventually Democrats will win a greater share of elective offices. But it will be an uphill battle.

This, too, will be one of Obama’s legacies.
Obama’s Political Legacy: A Playbook for the President’s Opposition?

Frances E. Lee
University of Maryland

As 2017 ushers in a new Congress with Republicans in full control of national government, President Obama’s legislative legacy is very much in doubt. All of Obama’s policy achievements stand at least some risk of reversal. But, ironically, one of the Obama presidency’s most salient legacies may be political, rather than legislative or administrative: a how-to guide for a presidential opposition party in a 50-50 nation.

The political backdrop throughout Obama presidency was strong, sustained party competition for control of American national government. Every election during Obama’s presidency featured widespread speculation about the possibility of a change of party control of one institution or another. As I argue in Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign (2016), close competition for majority control focuses members of Congress on the quest for partisan political advantage. A party seeking to retake political power must articulate how it can offer a superior alternative to the party in power. Such a party needs to make a case that the party in power is doing a bad job and that it could do better. Making this case requires partisan confrontation, both in rhetoric and in votes.

A party’s political imperative to define differences with its opposition trades off against bipartisan participation in governance. Minority parties in Congress and parties not controlling the presidency can usually exercise significant policy influence by engaging in bipartisan deal-making. On the other hand, across-the-board opposition reduces an out party’s ability to shape policy. If an out party will not trade its support in exchange for policy concessions, it gives up the opportunity to modify legislation. Its only influence will come in blocking policy change and forcing the government to “kick the can down the road” on pressing issues.

Any bipartisan deals an out party strikes come at some cost of being able to clearly say how it is able to offer voters a meaningful alternative. As such, parties that participate in governing as junior partners tend to suffer a loss of identity. Bipartisan deals also saddle them with political responsibility for outcomes – outcomes that in a world of limited resources will often be disappointing to voters.

1 Based on news media coverage referencing the possibility of a change of party control, both chambers of Congress were seen to be “in play” in 2010; the presidency and Senate were “in play” in 2012; the Senate in 2014; and, to some extent, all branches of government in 2016. See Lee (2016, 28-31).
Bearing policy responsibility frequently entails electoral liability—the “penalty of governance” well-known in the comparative politics literature (Powell and Whitten 1993; Rose and Mackie 1983; Stevenson 2002). Rather than agreeing to policy compromises that will demoralize its supporters, a party seeking to retake power needs to rally the troops and avoid responsibility for disappointing outcomes.

These political calculations cut against bipartisan negotiation. To some degree, such considerations carry weight in party politics at all times, but they will stamp a heavier imprint under conditions when majority control is in play, as it has been in recent decades. By comparison to most of the 20th century, the contest for control of national government has been remarkably competitive since 1980 and especially since 1994. When Democrats seemingly held a permanent majority in Congress—as they did for almost half a century—members of both parties gave little thought to how they might better wage a battle for majority status. But today’s conditions of fierce competition contribute to the tough, confrontational partisanship that characterizes the contemporary Congress.

From the start of the Obama presidency, both House and Senate Republican leaders have explicitly embraced a strategy of avoiding bipartisan compromise. At a Republican strategy session the night Obama was first inaugurated, then House Minority Whip Kevin McCarthy told his colleagues: “If you act like you’re the minority, you’re going to stay in the minority. We’ve gotta challenge them on every bill” (Draper 2012, xiv). Beginning with the stimulus package in early 2009, Republicans marshaled themselves in unified opposition to the Obama agenda. In March 2010, then Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell reflected back on the strategy Republicans had pursued since 2009: “It was absolutely critical that everybody be together, because if the proponents of the bill were able to say it was bipartisan, it tended to convey to the public that this is O.K., they must have figured it out…. It’s either bipartisan or it isn’t.” He then went on to tell the New York Times congressional correspondent: “I think the reason my members are feeling really good is they believe that the reward for playing team ball this year was the reversal of the political environment and the possibility that we will have a bigger team next year” (Hulse 2010). In other words, congressional leaders perceived a direct link between their party’s ability to play “team ball” in resisting an opposition party president and their success in the upcoming elections.

Republicans persisted with this strategy of confronting Obama even after they won majority control of the House of Representatives in 2010 and then of the full Congress in 2014. There were few bipartisan deals struck on presidential priorities, except under conditions of extreme duress, such as to prevent government shutdowns, avoid breach of the debt limit, or prevent across-the-board tax increases with the expiration of the Bush tax cuts. Instead, the Obama presidency was generally characterized by brinkmanship on must-pass matters and stalemate on presidential priority initiatives. In an unprecedented move, the Senate opted not even to hold a hearing on Obama’s nominee to the Supreme Court, despite nine months remaining in the president’s term. Throughout the Obama era, congressional leaders devoted a significant share of floor time to holding “messaging” votes designed not to succeed legislatively but to highlight the party’s differences with their opposition—most prominently the approximately 60 roll-call votes Republicans held after 2010 to repeal or cripple the president’s signature health care reform.

A strategy of opposition to Obama even shaped the presidential race. As a candidate in the Republican primary, Trump distinguished himself among a large field of contenders for his
exceptionally tough treatment of Obama, including years of questioning even the president’s legal eligibility to serve. Senate Republicans’ refusal to accept Obama’s compromise appointment of a moderate judge like Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court by holding open the vacancy also likely assisted the party with voter mobilization of religious conservatives during the general election.

At this juncture, these Republican strategic choices have been thoroughly vindicated. To varying degrees, all the elections since 2008 testify to the political benefits a party not controlling the presidency can achieve in a closely divided U.S. electorate by clearly differentiating itself from the president and rallying its base in opposition. In the 2010 midterms Republicans won a landslide, then held onto most of their gains in 2012, won control of the Senate in 2014, then retained nearly all of those seats in 2016. With Trump’s improbable victory, Republicans now stand at the peak of their post-New Deal power, in full command of national government with their largest margins since the 1920s.

Looking forward, it seems likely that future out parties will adopt this highly effective playbook, at least as long as the balance between the two parties remains so tightly competitive. Looking toward the 115th Congress, it is not yet clear that Democrats intend to pursue a strategy of across-the-board opposition. But the same political incentives that were present for Republicans under Obama are present for Democrats under Trump. Indeed, Trump enters office less popular and more politically vulnerable than most new presidents. Democrats will certainly be optimistic about gaining seats at the midterm, though they face a very unfavorable set of Senate contests in 2018. Looking to 2020, they are surely going to want to make Donald Trump a one-term president and, given the narrowness of the 2016 outcome, will believe it is possible to do so. Meanwhile, if they work with Trump to help him achieve his policy agenda, they are likely to make him a more popular president. Given low levels of split-ticket voting, Trump’s popularity would then harm Democratic candidates in the congressional elections and help Republican candidates. It is hard to foresee how such an environment can or would facilitate bipartisan cooperation.


President Barack Obama faced three economic problems when he entered the White House: the recession and its impacts on jobs and businesses, the financial crisis and its imperative to repair the system and avoid a similar calamity in the future, and the growing inequality of income and wealth. Each problem had its own characteristic trajectory, and coping with them would require calling on different constellations of policy ideas and confronting different interests, but the first two presented more manageable challenges: they were unambiguous emergencies, and there was a good deal of sentiment among elites and the public in favor of quick action.\(^2\) As a policy problem, rising economic inequality is more difficult in a number of respects. Where democratic governments are quite good at acknowledging and addressing crises, they are notoriously bad at dealing with slowly-developing conditions.

Inequality of income and wealth directly implicate the deepest ideological fissure between the parties, thus exacerbating polarization and raising the stakes of putting the issue on the agenda. And the fact that the condition centers on economic outcomes complicates the policy connection, both because Americans’ taken-for-granted belief in markets makes us hesitant to intervene, and because domestic policy is, some argue, powerless in the face of larger causes such as technological change and globalization. Given this configuration of policy challenges, a polarized environment that became

\(^2\) The responsibility to combat recession was accepted by both parties decades earlier; and the impression that the activities of financial institutions themselves had caused the crisis mobilized populist pressures from both sides of the ideological continuum for strengthening regulations.
increasingly hostile over the course of Obama’s presidency, not to mention the spotty record of presidential attempts at persuading (Edwards 2009), it would not be surprising to find that economic inequality dropped off the agenda. Most commentators, surveying the monumental difficulties Obama faced with the “manageable challenges” of enacting the 2009 stimulus and the 2010 financial reform, and emphasizing the absence of legislation directly taking on the issue, have concluded that the President, reluctantly to be sure, abandoned the quest to do something about economic inequality.

My current project takes another look at this surmise, focusing respectively on the story and the actions. Did the president work on framing a “usable narrative,” one that would elevate the salience of economic inequality, but do so in a way that was realistically crafted to navigate the public’s complicated and sometimes contradictory beliefs (Page and Jacobs; Kenworthy)? And did the administration back up its rhetoric with policy changes that worked to diminish the growth of economic inequality?

The role of stories is crucial to defining policy problems (Kingdon, 2011 [1984]) and to motivating support for reform (Mayer, 2014); Democrats are frequently faulted on this score (Ricci, 2016), especially when it comes to economic policy (Smith, 2007; Weatherford & McDonnell 1996); and Obama’s subscription to bipartisanship early in his term muffled the articulation of a distinctive narrative. One can nevertheless trace the President’s rhetorical efforts, beginning with the purposeful framing of inequality by rejecting the image of unstoppable economic forces, and placing both the cause and the solution in politics and policy. His pre-presidential writings and his Inaugural Address, for instance, studiously avoid redistribution and focus on equal opportunity as the means to the goal of faster and broader economic growth. The “bubble economy” had resulted in an investment deficit that hollowed out American productivity, and reversing this must start with building human capital. Education and research have a special place in Obama’s story, because they strengthen both markets and equality, making workers more productive and their companies more competitive, and at the same time enhancing workers’ bargaining leverage to even out the gains from growth. Later, at Georgetown University in April 2009, Obama elaborates the inequality frame in an unabashedly normative fashion, invoking the conservative idea of responsibility by contrasting the traditional norm of families’ steady savings and banks’ lending on the basis of the borrower’s reputation, to the pursuit of “short-term profits” and “reckless speculation.” Invoking a story from the Sermon on the Mount,
Obama emphasized the value of building the American economy on the “rock” of producing useful goods, rather than the “sand” of financial manipulation. The 2015 State of the Union Address elaborates the policy implications of the norm of responsibility, countering Reagan’s “trickle-down economics” with a policy philosophy Obama dubbed “middle-class economics,” the idea that “this country does best when everyone gets their fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules.” And Obama’s speech at Osawatomie, Kansas in December 2011, invoked Theodore Roosevelt’s 1910 address to recall the role of government. While the weight of earlier addresses had been on material outcomes and economic opportunity, the emphasis shifts now to politics, highlighting equal voice and the need for collective action that uses government to circumscribe concentrated economic power. The political effects of rising inequality are multiple and insidious: economic concentration amplifies the voice of the rich; undermines the hope of upward mobility, “giving the lie to the promise… that this is a place where you can make it if you try;” and spawns suspicion that “the system in Washington is rigged against” ordinary citizens. The political implications might lead toward alienated resentment and competitive individualism, but the President lays out a different path, calling to mind the way “we’ve always come together, through our government” as the best route forward, specifically citing tax reform to ensure that “a teacher or a nurse or a construction worker [would not] pay a higher rate than somebody raking in $50 million,” and improving public goods such as infrastructure and education. The narrative touches on the deep American tradition of limiting the political power of concentrated wealth, but the perspective that propels the story is forward-looking, optimistic, focused on collective action, through government, to improve opportunity.

If there is evidence that the President’s narrative sought to connect the visible symptoms of rising inequality with government policies to regulate markets and allocate taxes and benefits, what actions supported these words? Crucial but easily overlooked actions came in the construction of Obama’s signature legislative accomplishments, where the most distinctive – and often most hard-fought – provisions take steps toward equality. For instance, the stimulus combined aggressive fiscal action with significant long-term initiatives intended as “down payments” on Obama’s

---

3 Obama and Vice President Biden previewed this frame in setting the mission of the “Middle Class Task Force” in January 2009.
substantive agenda, including education, research, and infrastructure spending. The Affordable Care Act provides insurance that improves the health security of millions of citizens, but marries this to a 3.8% tax on high incomes. And the Dodd-Frank reform includes provisions to reverse the information asymmetries that gave financial institutions the advantage over consumers and investors (e.g., capital requirements and regulations on derivatives); but its most visible component (and essential narrative element) is establishing the Consumer Financial Protection Agency.

Once the 2010 election restored divided government, the range of tools narrowed. By the autumn of 2011, Obama realized that there was little chance of moving his agenda forward in Congress, and, in a speech in Las Vegas in October and in a notable segment of the 2014 State of the Union, he called out “an increasingly dysfunctional Congress” and resolved “Whenever I can take steps without legislation to expand opportunities for more American families, that’s what I’m going to do.” The pace of executive orders and regulations rises noticeably in 2014, and many of these actions are directed toward ameliorating economic inequality. Several initiatives were packaged to make the federal government and its contractors “model employers,” including raising the minimum wage for contract workers, allowing employees to take sick days, and banning discrimination against LBGT workers. The model employer trope carried two narrative messages. The first was an explicit change from a causal model in which profitability hinged on minimizing employee costs, to one in which better working conditions would improve the bottom line by attracting and retaining better, more productive workers. The second was the belief that the administration’s initiatives would be picked up by private companies and spread broadly through the economy. The impact on economic inequality of other changes is less direct, but such initiatives as extending minimum wage and overtime protections to home health aides, increasing the number of workers eligible for overtime pay, guidelines for classifying workers as employees or independent contractors in the “gig economy,” and even net neutrality are consistent with the theme of Obama’s image of “middle-class economics” viewed from the perspective of workers and consumers.

---

4 Executive branch activism slowed in 2012, out of concern for the electoral impact of announcing new regulations, and the President’s victory appears to have re-awakened the White House’s hopes for forming legislative coalitions, but after the shut-down in October 2013, the conclusion was inevitable that enacting legislation would be impossible.

5 CEA head Betsy Stevenson, calling on earlier research by Akerlof and Yellen, made this case.

6 Several private sector companies, including Ikea, Gap, Disney, and some airlines did in fact announce minimum wage increases just after the administration’s move.

7 This rule is currently being litigated and has been stayed by a federal judge in Texas.
The conclusions we can draw from this history are mixed. The economic effects of Obama’s actions sum to a notable but largely unrecognized achievement: they improved economic conditions and opportunities for the less well-off, constrained corporations’ advantages vis-à-vis workers and consumers, and increased taxes on the wealthy. Without the 2009 stimulus, for instance, the Great Recession would have pushed the poverty rate up by 4.5 percentage points, rather than the actual 0.5. Obama’s regulatory initiatives distinguish his legacy not so much for their number (the trend toward more independent action was already visible with earlier presidents) as for the programmatic change they produced – “a domestic legacy that now rivals Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society in reach and scope.”

The Economist calculates that the Obama administration’s actions will “by 2017 have boosted the after-tax income of the bottom 20% of Americans by around 18%, relative to the policies that obtained at the start of his presidency.”

The political outcomes tell a less favorable story. The bulk of President Obama’s actions on economic inequality add to the “submerged state.” This doubtless makes sense, whether because other policy instruments were unavailable or because of a strategic calculation to avoid triggering opposition, but it meant that it was impossible to explain, justify, or build support for government action. Moreover, the bulk of the changes result from executive orders and agency regulations, and thus are more or less reversible by a new president with different political economic views. Finally, a policy story is successful if it nurtures lasting changes in perspectives and processes, and Obama’s neglect of party-building weakened the potential that his hard-fought legacy of policy reform would be institutionalized in the Democratic Party’s organization or candidates.

---

8 Appelbaum and Shear, NYT, 8/13/2016.
9 Economist, 12/10/2016.
At the outset of the Obama Presidency, the U.S. Senate was already struggling to reconcile its tradition of supermajority decision-making with the growing partisanship of its members and American society. Since 1960, senators institutionalized the right of a minority to filibuster so that a coalition of 60 or more senators is necessary to end debate on most bills and nominations, a process known as “cloture.”[1] Ideally, this supermajority requirement promotes policy stability, open deliberation, and compromise. However, it also empowers the minority party to obstruct the nominees and legislative agenda of the majority party and presidents of the opposing party.

The Senate’s treatment of nominations—especially judicial nominations—was a particular flashpoint during the Bush Presidency. From 2003 to 2005, the Republican majority expressed increasing frustration at Democratic filibusters against judicial nominations, culminating in a 2005 agreement that such filibusters were only justified in “extraordinary circumstances.” More subtly, any nomination was vulnerable to a secret filibuster-by-threat known as a “hold,” by which any senator could express his or her willingness to filibuster a nomination on the floor of the Senate. Sometimes senators used this power to block nominees they found especially objectionable, but they were more likely to block nominees to obtain bargaining leverage with the executive branch and other senators. Dozens of nominees were kept in limbo for reasons that had little to do with their personal qualifications and everything to do with individual senators’ personal agendas.

**Republican Obstruction and the 111th Congress**

During the Obama Presidency these tensions increased and led to new limits on obstruction by the minority party. In the first year of Obama’s presidency, any hope that Obama’s strong victory in 2008 and the Democrats’ large majorities in the House and Senate would usher in a new era of bipartisan concord was quickly dashed. The first landmark bill of the 111th Congress was a $787 billion stimulus bill that barely passed the Senate with 60 votes (including three Republicans) even though the
nation was at the bottom of a deep recession.

Opposition to the stimulus bill was the opening act of a strategy of determined opposition by the Senate Republicans. Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) engineered a pattern of near-total resistance on major measures: rejecting efforts to negotiate bipartisan compromises, denouncing the Democratic agenda, and rallying Republican votes against Democratic bills. By forcing the Democrats to govern without the political cover provided by bipartisan agreement, McConnell hoped to make the Democrats appear to be governing by fiat without any Republican contribution to or responsibility for their “liberal” agenda. More subtly, McConnell sought to slow the Senate down by dragging out debate on bills and nominations, big and small, to run out the clock. For example, the Senate’s cloture allows up to 30 hours of debate after 60 senators vote to end debate. In the past, obstructionist senators who had lost a cloture vote would usually use as much debate time as they actually needed and then relinquish the rest. In the 111th Congress, Republicans demanded to use all of their time, even though they did not necessarily want to give speeches. This led to hour after hour of dead time on the Senate floor as the Senate kept the lights on and the chamber running to use up the Republicans’ “debate” time in quorum calls.

When the Senate Democrats regrouped after a net loss of six seats in the 2010 elections a significant portion of the caucus pushed to improve the way the Senate runs. In 2011 and 2013 these reformers succeeded in ensuring that senators must take responsibilities for their holds. This publicity deters many senators because they become subject to mockery by the media and lobbying by organized groups that wish for their preferred bills or nominations to move forward. There were also some modest reforms to streamline consideration of bills and nominations.

Modest Reforms, 2011-2013

In 2012 and 2013, however, the long-simmering argument over presidential nominations boiled over. In January 2012, President Obama used his recess appointment power to make Richard Cordray the Director of the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection, and to fill three vacancies on the National Labor Relations Board. This incited Republican opposition, and the Supreme Court subsequently ruled that Obama exceeded his authority by making the appointments when Congress was still (technically) in session.

In 2013, Senate majority leader Harry Reid (D-NV) twice extracted promises from McConnell that the Republicans would not obstruct nominations. However, under Senate rules any senator could initiate a filibuster, and there were some Republicans (e.g. Ted Cruz, R-TX) who would not abide by an agreement to allow Obama’s nominees to gain approval when they had the power to slow it down. They continued to force cloture votes on nominations, which slowed down the chamber and forced moderate
Republicans to publicly vote with the Democrats for Obama’s nominees. This exposed them to accusations that they were collaborators, “squishes,” or fake conservatives, and it became increasingly difficult for any Republican to cross party lines on a nomination.

**Going Nuclear**

By November 2013, Senate Democrats were out of patience. On November 21, Reid called up a cloture vote on a stalled nomination. Reid made a parliamentary point of order that this nomination, and any nomination except a Supreme Court nomination, only required a simple majority for cloture. The Democrats supported Reid’s point and it passed, 52-48. In doing so, Reid and the Democrats did not change the cloture *rule* of the Senate but they made a lasting change in how the rule is *interpreted*.

![Cloture Votes and Post-Nuclear Votes Graph](image)

Since 2003, the tactic of reinterpretation of the cloture rule by simple majority has been known
as the “nuclear option.” This term developed because minority party senators (then the Democrats) threatened massive retaliation to a rules change; they would make the majority pay for its abrogation of Senate norms by using their remaining parliamentary rights to filibuster anything they could. Indeed, from 2013 to 2014 the Senate Republicans did retaliate by forcing cloture and approval votes for many nominees who what have been approved without roll call votes in normal times. In doing so, they forced the Democrats to invest a lot of time if they wanted to use their newly-gained power to approve Obama’s nominations. As an illustration, the figure above shows the number of roll call votes to invoke cloture on nominations from 2001 to 2014.

From 1917 (when the cloture rule was first adopted) to 2000, there were a total of 32 cloture votes on nominations, with the first one occurring in 1968. During the eight years of the Bush presidency, the Senate held 38 cloture votes on nominations. And from January 2009 to November 2013, senators voted 42 times on Obama nominations. After the nuclear option “exploded” in November 2013, the Senate voted 131 times on cloture for nominations, so more often in 13 months than the previous 96 years. This was the retaliation the Republicans meted out for the Democrats’ action.

For presidential scholars, the effects of these reforms is probably a net positive. The reduction in Senate holds reformed a system in which senators used would-be public servants and the agencies they would serve as bargaining chips. The imposition of simple-majority cloture reinstated a norm that executive nominees were rarely obstructed and senators showed some deference to presidents staffing the executive branch. The loss, however, is that senators lost a mechanism by which a single senator could keep agencies accountable to Congress. And while federal judges serve life terms, the extent to which interest groups became intensely involved in blocking appellate-level nominations contributed to the politicization of the judicial branch.

The manner in which Reid and the Democrats reformed the Senate has further lasting implications. Reid did not make an elaborate Constitutional, legal, or parliamentary argument for the notion that “three-fifths of the senators duly chosen and sworn” should be interpreted as a simple majority. They just did it. And this opens up the possibility that future majorities will apply this precedent to Supreme Court nominations or to legislation that is otherwise vulnerable to a filibuster. This would make it easier for Presidents to get their agenda through the Senate with the help of an allied majority party.

The Garland Nomination

The last Senate parliamentary dispute of the Obama presidency was over the nomination of Merrick Garland for the Supreme Court. Antonin Scalia, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, passed away on February 13, 2016, opening a vacancy for Obama to fill. Obama nominated Merrick Garland
for this position on March 16, 2016. The Republican majority, however, ignored Garland’s nomination, preferring to keep the slot open for the winner of the 2016 presidential election. In 1968, senators filibustered a Supreme Court nomination announced in late June, but there was no precedent for blocking a nomination made so early in an election year. The Democrats’ outrage did not sway the Republican majority, however, who kept the seat open for President Donald Trump to nominate Neil Gorsuch. This inaction contributed to a long-term trend toward politicizing Supreme Court nominations and decisions.

**Final Thoughts**

Did Obama fail? Eight years later, it is fair to say that we do not live in a “Purple America” in which both major parties work together to solve the nation’s problems. The Senate, in particular, has continued to struggle with the contradictions between its rules and its members. In the early months of the Trump administration it appears the Democrats seem to be following the McConnell playbook of slowing down the Senate and uniting against the main items of the Republican agenda.

This is Obama’s fault if one thinks that polarization is the result of Presidential actions and rhetoric rather than long term trends in demographics, party coalitions, media, and campaign finance. In the 2016 election, both Trump and Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton avoided similar promises of bipartisan cooperation. They may have learned, as Obama did, that bipartisanship requires cooperation from actors who see politics as a zero-sum game.

[1] The 60-vote threshold was established by a change in Senate rules in 1975. From 1959 to 1975, the threshold was two-thirds of those voting. For more on the institutionalization of the Senate filibuster, see Gregory Koger, *Filibustering: A Political History of Obstruction in the House and Senate*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
Trump’s Personality Predicts Self-Inflicted Downfall

Michael A. Genovese
Loyola Marymount University

President Donald J. Trump will not serve out a full two-terms as president. He probably will not serve out one full term.

Wishful thinking? For some, perhaps, but I base this prediction on history, theory, and evidence.

In 1972, political scientist James David Barber published his influential book The Presidential Character. It was a study of presidential psychology and it received a great deal of attention at the time of its publication.

Barber reduced complex human (presidential) behavior down to several key categories. To Barber, the most revealing elements in presidential behavior were a person’s “style” and “character”. By style, Barber meant “the President’s habitual way of performing his three political roles: rhetoric, personal relations, and homework” (pg 7). By character, Barber meant “the way the President orients himself toward life,” or is the person secure, mature, self-aware, does he have high or low self-esteem? A president could have an active or passive style, and a positive or negative character.

Barber then combined style and character, yielding four behavioral types: active-positive, active-negative, passive-positive, or passive-negative. The active-positive president shows “consistency between much activity and the enjoyment of it, indicating relatively high self-esteem and relative success in relating to the environment… shows an orientation to productiveness as a value and an ability
to use his style flexibly, adaptively.” A key example of an active-positive president is Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The active-negative’s “activity has a compulsive quality, as if the man were trying to make up for something or escape from anxiety into hard work... seems ambitious, striving upward, power-seeking... stance toward the environment is aggressive and has a problem in managing his aggressive feelings.” President Nixon is an active-negative, as well as Woodrow Wilson and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Most presidents have an active style, but a few exhibit more passive characteristics. A passive-positive president is a “receptive, compliant, other-directed character whose life is a search for affection as a reward for being agreeable and cooperative... low self-esteem (on the grounds of being unlovable).” Ronald Reagan and Warren Harding are, to Barber, passive-positives.

The passive-negative type, rare in politics, has “low self-esteem based on a sense of uselessness... in politics because they think they ought to be....tendency is to withdraw, to escape from the conflict and uncertainty of politics by emphasizing vague principles (especially prohibitions) and procedural arrangements.” Calvin Coolidge is the classic example of a passive-positive president.

Barber’s book became something of a national sensation when in early 1972, he publicly predicted that based on his study, the Nixon presidency would end in disaster and it would be a self-inflicted wound that would bring Nixon down. When the Watergate crisis erupted and Nixon resigned, Barber was seen as something of a prophet.

Does James Barber’s study of presidential personality offer insight into the fate of Donald J. Trump? While it is always tricky diagnosing someone from a distance, the president’s mental state is of such international importance that cautious efforts to do so might be justified if always circumspect. It seems clear that Trump is a classic active-negative personality. He displays all the symptoms of an insecure narcissist. He is obsessed with size, be it of his inaugural crowd, the make-believe margin of his popular vote “victory,” or his hands. He is so insecure he must constantly puff himself up, talk about himself, and be the center of attention. This is not a clinical diagnosis, nor is it an attempt to claim that Mr. Trump is mentally ill. On the contrary, Trump’s narcissism works “for” him, not (as yet) against him.

As a serial agitator, he thrives on chaos and confusion, and as an insult machine, feeds off belittling others. This man-child, whose apocalyptic dystopian horror story of a carnage-filled America (see his inaugural address) that only he can save, demands that you accept alternative facts to fit his alternative reality (“all negative polls are fake news,” he wrote in a recent 4am tweet). When confronted, he attacks; when questioned, he seethes. He plays to the worst in us by bringing out the smallest in himself.
Trump is a classic narcissist. Preston Ni, author of How to Successfully Handle Narcissists, wrote that the key signs of Narcissistic Personality Disorder are:

1. Grandiose personality
2. Charmer
3. Rule breaker
4. Incites negative emotions, especially through tantrums
5. False image projection
6. Conversation hoarder
7. Conversation interrupter
8. Sense of entitlement
9. Boundary violator
10. Manipulates other by using them as an extension of the self

That pretty much sums up Donald Trump. Trump is and will continue to be a high energy president (style), but his energy will be distorted by his negative character.

Lyndon Johnson’s advisor George Reedy in Twilight of the Presidency notes of the presidency that:

The office neither elevates nor degrades a man. What it does is provide a stage upon which all of the personality traits are magnified and accentuated. The aspects of his character that were not noted previously are not new. They were merely hidden from view in lesser positions, where he was only one of many politicians competing for public attention. (p. 41)

Not all active-negative presidents self-destruct but Wilson, Johnson, and Nixon did. Thus, based on theory (Barber), history (Wilson, Johnson, and Nixon), and the evidence (Donald Trump’s narcissistic personality) one might conclude that Trump will at some point bring about his own destruction. He wouldn’t be the first active-negative president to do so.
Since it’s publication 20 years ago, Stephen Skowronek’s *The Politics that Presidents Make: Presidential Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton* has provided invaluable historical context to our understanding of the presidency. In an intriguing interview with *The Nation* reporter Richard Kreitner, Skowronek provides insight into the Obama presidency and Trump’s “shocking but not surprising” election through his lens of political time. As scholars and teachers, this piece gives us another way to conceptualize and consider the election of 2016 and what may follow. Please follow [this link](#) for the interview in its entirety.
The Presidency in Blogs: A New Initiative from *Presidential Studies Quarterly*

Many of our members have begun to rely upon a flowing stream of excellent presidency blog postings as a means of keeping up both with current events and recent research. These posts are a new component of scholarly work and many of our fellow PEP members are frequent contributors. Beyond keeping up with research, such blog posts can also make for timely and accessible additions to presidency course reading lists.

One difficulty with this newfound source of intellectual wealth is that there are a great variety of venues in which scholars publish their thoughts. Prominent examples may include *The Washington Post*’s *Monkey Cage* or the *Mischiefs of Faction* blog on *Vox*, but there are dozens of other outlets for accessible academic material related to executive politics. While these posts are public and available to all, the scattered nature of their publication suggests that not everyone who is interested in a particular post may find it.

To help deal with this problem, Presidential Studies Quarterly has created a page on their website where you can find recent blog posts related to the presidency. The link to the page is: [http://psqjournal.com/psq/?page_id=1307](http://psqjournal.com/psq/?page_id=1307) and the content is coordinated by Julia Azari.

To further help members find posts of interest the entries are organized not only by recently added posts but are also categorized by content into subsections such as: Congress, Current Events, Elections, Foreign Policy, History, Law, and Rhetoric.

As noted by George C. Edwards III in a recent PEP listserv post, the page is looking for members to alert them to useful content and relevant blog postings. So if you happen to author a blog post about the presidency or your recent scholarship, remember to share it here.
**Bruce Miroff** (University at Albany, SUNY)

*Presidents on Political Ground: Leaders in Action and What They Face* (University Press of Kansas)

Most observers of presidents over-personalize praise and blame, ascribing the results of presidents’ actions to the range of their abilities and the quality of their judgments. What draws too little notice is what presidents face: the multiple contexts within which they have to maneuver to reach their objectives. Each of these contexts has distinctive features, with shifting parameters of opportunity and constraint. What Machiavelli wrote about princes contemplating fields of battle—that prospects for success vary with each terrain—applies to presidents contemplating their unique political ground.

Among the crucial contexts that affect presidential leadership, Congress is the most familiar and has been extensively studied by presidency scholars. Yet we know much less about other contexts, particularly those that lend themselves to historical investigations in the mold of APD. In my new book, *Presidents on Political Ground: Leaders in Action and What They Face*, I focus on five of these political grounds: media and spectacle, political economy, coalition politics, domestic policymaking, and foreign policymaking. For each of these, I depict the features of the political ground and then turn to the stories of presidents from FDR to Obama who met divergent fates in attempting to prevail there. Observing presidents in action, I argue, we need to keep our eyes on both the figure and the ground.
Fang-Yi Chiou (Academia Sinica; Taipei, Taiwan)
Lawrence S. Rothenberg (University of Rochester, New York)

The Enigma of Presidential Power: Parties, Policies and Strategic Uses of Unilateral Action
(Cambridge University Press)

With gridlock, presidents increasingly rely on unilateral actions - means not requiring legislative statutes - which many view as tantamount to power. Using a variety of approaches, Chiou and Rothenberg show that this need not be the case as, under many conditions, the chief executive's employment of such tools is constrained. Rather, presidents contemplating issuing executive orders are often constrained by worries about challenging the legislature and the courts. Most notably, the ability of Congress to employ extra-statutory means, involving efforts by legislators and their parties that don't require passing a law, limit how presidents utilize their discretion. Additionally, political parties can influence presidential choices and actions both by restricting the ideological direction in which presidents can push policy via discretionary authority and by agenda-setting and disciplining members in the legislative process. Nor are all presidential actions equal, as the policy area involved and the importance of an action condition presidential power.
Amnon Cavari (Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, Israel)


By bringing together two bodies of literature - the presidency and political parties - this book makes two important contributions. First, it addresses the gap between presidential public actions and the perceived limited effect they have on public opinion. By examining the short-term effect of speeches of presidents on the entire public, the long-term effect of the speeches on their partisans, and on the reputations of their parties for handling policy, the book shows that presidents are effective leaders of public opinion. Second, the book adds to the scholarly interest in how political parties are viewed by the electorate in terms of policy substance. It suggests that Americans possess coherent reputations of the parties for handling policy challenges, and that these reputations contribute to the party identifications of Americans. The effect of presidents on the reputations and, in turn, party attachments position them as leaders of the party system.
Michael J. Berry (University of Colorado, Denver)


In *The Modern Legislative Veto*, Michael J. Berry uses a multimethod research design, incorporating quantitative and qualitative analyses, to examine the ways that Congress has used the legislative veto over the past 80 years. This parliamentary maneuver, which delegates power to the executive but grants the legislature a measure of control over the implementation of the law, raises troubling questions about the fundamental principle of separation of governmental powers.

Berry argues that, since the U.S. Supreme Court declared the legislative veto unconstitutional in *Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) v. Chadha* (1983), Congress has strategically modified its use of the veto to give more power to Appropriations Committees. Using an original dataset of legislative veto enactments, Berry finds that Congress has actually increased its use this oversight mechanism since Chadha, especially over defense and foreign policy issues. Democratic and Republican presidents alike have fought back by vetoing legislation containing legislative vetoes and by using signing statements with greater frequency to challenge the legislative veto’s constitutionality. A complementary analysis of state-level use of the legislative veto finds variation in oversight powers granted to state legislatures, but similar struggles between the legislature and the executive.

This ongoing battle over the legislative veto points to broader efforts by legislative and executive actors to control policy, efforts which continually negotiate how the democratic republic established by the Constitution actually operates in practice.
Christopher J. Devine (Mount Vernon Nazarene University)
Kyle C. Kopko (Elizabethtown College)

The VP Advantage: How Running Mates Influence Home State Voting in Presidential Elections
(Manchester University Press)

A widespread perception exists among political commentators, campaign operatives and presidential candidates that vice presidential (VP) running mates can deliver their home state's electoral votes in a presidential election. In recent elections, presidential campaigns have even changed their strategy in response to the perceived VP home state advantage. But is the advantage real? And could it decide a presidential election? In the most comprehensive analysis to date, Devine and Kopko demonstrate that the VP home state advantage is actually highly conditional and rarely decisive in the Electoral College. However, it could change the outcome of a presidential election under narrow but plausible conditions.

Sophisticated in its methodology and rich in historical as well as contemporary insight, The VP Advantage is essential and accessible reading for anyone interested in understanding how running mates influence presidential elections.
Daniel Q. Gillion (University of Pennsylvania)

*Governering with Words: The Political Dialogue on Race, Public Policy, and Inequality in America* (Cambridge University Press)

Rather than considering political discussions and rhetoric as symbolic, inconsequential forms of politics, Governing with Words conceptualizes them as forms of government action that can shape institutions and societal norms. Daniel Q. Gillion refers to this theory as 'discursive governance'. Federal politicians' statements about racial and ethnic minority concerns aid the passage of minority public policies and improve individual lifestyle behaviors. Unfortunately, most of the American public continues to disapprove of politicians' rhetoric that highlights race. The book argues that addressing racial and ethnic inequality continues to be a tug-of-war between avoiding the backlash of the majority in this nation while advocating for minority interests. Even though this paradox looms over politicians' discussions of race, race-conscious political speech, viewed in its entirety, is the mechanism by which marginalized groups find a place in the democratic process. Such race-conscious discussions, the book argues, have ramifications both within and outside of government.
Although congressional investigations have provided some of the most dramatic moments in American political history, they have often been dismissed as mere political theater. But these investigations are far more than grandstanding. *Investigating the President* shows that congressional investigations are a powerful tool for members of Congress to counter presidential aggrandizement. By shining a light on alleged executive wrongdoing, investigations can exert significant pressure on the president and materially affect policy outcomes.

Douglas Kriner and Eric Schickler construct the most comprehensive overview of congressional investigative oversight to date, analyzing nearly thirteen thousand days of hearings, spanning more than a century, from 1898 through 2014. The authors examine the forces driving investigative power over time and across chambers, identify how hearings might influence the president's strategic calculations through the erosion of the president’s public approval rating, and uncover the pathways through which investigations have shaped public policy. Put simply, by bringing significant political pressure to bear on the president, investigations often afford Congress a blunt, but effective check on presidential power—without the need to worry about veto threats or other hurdles such as Senate filibusters.

In an era of intense partisan polarization and institutional dysfunction, *Investigating the President* delves into the dynamics of congressional investigations and how Congress leverages this tool to counterbalance presidential power.
Donald A. Zinman (Grand Valley State University)

The Heir Apparent Presidency (University Press of Kansas)

It was during the Depression, with the Republican regime in disarray, that Franklin D. Roosevelt came into office with a mandate to change the role of government. His was one of the presidencies—like Jefferson’s, Jackson’s, and Lincoln’s before his, and Reagan’s after—that transformed the political system. But what of the successors of such transformative figures, those members and supporters of the new regime who are expected to carry forward the policies and politics of those they replace? It is these “heir apparent” presidents, impossibly tasked with backward-looking progress, that Donald Zinman considers in this incisive look at the curious trajectories of political power.

An heir apparent president, in Zinman’s analysis, can be successful but will struggle to get credit for his achievements. He must contend with the consequences of his predecessor’s policies while facing a stronger opposition and sitting atop an increasingly weakened and divided party. And he will invariably alternate between three approaches to leadership: continuity, expansion, and correction. Looking in depth at James Madison, Martin Van Buren, Ulysses S. Grant (an heir apparent as the first genuine Republican to succeed Lincoln), Harry S. Truman, and George H. W. Bush, Zinman reveals how these successors of regime-changing presidents at times suffered for diverging from their predecessors’ perceived policies. At times these presidents also suffered from the consequences of the policies themselves or simply from changing political circumstances. What they rarely did, as becomes painfully clear, is succeed at substantially changing the policies and politics that they inherited.

It is a perilous and often thankless business, as The Heir Apparent Presidency makes abundantly clear, to follow and lead at once. Tracing the ways in which heir apparent presidents have met this challenge, this book offers rare and valuable insight into the movement of political time, and the shaping of political order.
Nearly a week after George Zimmerman was found not guilty of killing Trayvon Martin, President Obama walked into the press briefing room and shocked observers by saying that “Trayvon could have been me.” He talked personally and poignantly about his experiences and pointed to intra-racial violence as equally serious and precarious for black boys. He offered no sweeping policy changes or legislative agendas; he saw them as futile. Instead, he suggested that prejudice would be eliminated through collective efforts to help black males and for everyone to reflect on their own prejudices.

Obama’s presidency provides a unique opportunity to engage in a discussion about race and politics. In The Race Whisperer, Melanye Price analyzes the manner in which Barack Obama uses race strategically to engage with and win the loyalty of potential supporters. This book uses examples from Obama’s campaigns and presidency to demonstrate his ability to authentically tap into notions of blackness and whiteness to appeal to particular constituencies. By tailoring his unorthodox personal narrative to emphasize those parts of it that most resonate with a specific racial group, he targets his message effectively to that audience, shoring up electoral and governing support. The book also considers the impact of Obama’s use of race on the ongoing quest for black political empowerment. Unfortunately, racial advocacy for African Americans has been made more difficult because of the intense scrutiny of Obama’s relationship with the black community, Obama’s unwillingness to be more publicly vocal in light of that scrutiny, and the black community’s reluctance to use traditional protest and advocacy methods on a black president. Ultimately, though, The Race Whisperer argues for a more complex reading of race in the age of Obama, breaking new ground in the study of race and politics, public opinion, and political campaigns.