



Effective Presidency: Lessons on Leadership from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush

Erwin C. Hargrove

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Every four years the American public goes to the polls in hopes of electing a hero to the presidency, trying to find someone larger than life. But heroes are hard to find and sometimes they turn out to be villains. Senior presidential scholar Erwin Hargrove recommends that we shift our sights to electing an effective president instead, and here he shows us how to assess effective presidencies. To address the central question of whether presidents make a difference, Hargrove asks about the most important things each president attempted. He finds that much of the time, "eventful" leadership prevails, but that some presidents may be judged to be "event-making" for good or ill. As George W. Bush has demonstrated, event making leaders run great risks-sometimes challenging the Constitution-even as they attempt greatness. By contrast, effective presidents combine eventful leadership with a modulated sense of personal ambition. Hargrove examines this winning combination in light of historical context and a fine gauge of personal skills and attributes. Reviewing eventful and event-making presidencies of the last fifty years, Hargrove comes down on the side of effectiveness over the special effects of pyrotechnic presidencies like the current one.

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