



The Unbearable Heaviness of Governing: The Obama Administration in Historical Perspective (Hoover Institution Press Publication)

Morton Keller

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We tend to view the character of an administration through the persona of its president, especially that of Barack Obama, with his unique baggage of race, personality, political style, and campaign message of hope and renewal. In this critical look at the realities that have shaped the first stage of Obama's presidency, Morton Keller provides a progress report that rests less on the day-to-day perspective of pundits and politicians and more on the longer perspective of history. His history-focused examination looks at the president's developing style of governing, with particular attention to his signature policies of the stimulus, financial, and health care reforms, and analyzes the Obama presidency in light of historical analogues, contemporary political life, and the nature of key government institutions such as Congress and the bureaucracy.

Comparing our presidents with their predecessors is one way to understand more fully the character and quality of their performance. Keller compares the current president to predecessors such as Woodrow Wilson, FDR, LBJ, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton, and concludes that, as yet, there is no clear consensus on the character or content of Obama's presidential leadership or where he fits in the prevailing typology/classification of America's chief executives. Taking into account the general standing of the president, his program, and his party; the sources of public discontent; and the appeal (or lack thereof) of the opposition, Keller concludes by speculating on the future prospects of Obama's administration in the realms of policy and politics.

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