Beyond the Modern Era?: An Analysis of the Concept of the Postmodern Presidency

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Over the past two decades, the term postmodern has crept into presidential studies. Despite this, the notion of applying the term to the presidency may obscure more than it reveals. Throughout this period, various political scientists such as Rose, Barilleaux, Schier, Bruce Miroff, and others, as well as communications scholars like Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles have merged the term postmodern with the study of the presidency; yet there continues to be no agreement on what exactly the postmodern presidency is or represents. For some, the postmodern presidency signifies a distinct era, fundamentally different from those of the past. For others, the postmodern characteristics and leadership style necessary to govern in a changing political and social landscape define the contemporary presidency. Thus, despite being used for nearly two decades, the term postmodern continues to be mired in ambiguity. With the many differing views that make up the literature of the postmodern presidency, numerous questions arise. Is the onset of the postmodern presidency a result of a fundamental shift in the presidency, occurring regardless of who occupies the Oval Office, or is it better characterized as a shift in the individual traits of presidents necessary to govern during a newly emerging era? Does the core of the postmodern presidency center on foreign policy as a reflection of the end of the Cold War, or can it be better attributed to the rise of public politics, the decline of political parties, and the onslaught of media coverage that surround the contemporary presidency? The following chapters attempt to analyze the concept of the postmodern presidency, comparing the many definitions and timeframes that surround the term as a means of critically examining the existing work on the postmodern presidency.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

The end of the Second World War not only spawned a prolonged period of domestic and international upheaval and readjustment, it also served as a catalyst for an already developing transitional period in the office of the presidency. For many, Franklin Roosevelt’s election in 1932 and subsequent handling of the war effort as well as the Great Depression “marked the beginning of a new political era.”\(^1\) While some of the alterations that produced the modern presidency began during the presidencies of Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt fortified the institutional changes that marked the onset of the modern presidency. Not only did the United States emerge as a powerful world leader, the president essentially rose to the top of American politics, representing the nation’s political system as well as its citizenry. “What marked the twentieth-century transformation of the executive was the emergence of the president, rather than Congress or the party organizations, as the leading instrument of popular rule, ‘the steward of public welfare.’”\(^2\) In essence, the president came to signify the core of American government, representing the center of the U.S. political system as well as American society as a whole. While Roosevelt’s death marked the end of his administration, it did little to foster an end to the modern presidency. Numerous presidents have followed Roosevelt, governing during what has become known as the modern era. For the better part of the twentieth century, the

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\(^2\) Milkis and Nelson, 279.
notion of the modern presidency originally solidified by Franklin Roosevelt has evolved within the parameters of the American political system.

During the modern era, the presidency continued to evolve, developing through a process of political, as well as social, ebbs and flows. Everything from presidential authority to the influence of the mass media to the sheer size of the federal government has fluctuated during the modern era. According to many, the primary reason for the continuous evolution of the presidency can be traced to the Constitution. Ambiguous as to the boundaries of executive power as well as the formal duties of the president, much of the president’s authority has developed over time both as a reflection of the moment as well as a result of the leadership of individual presidents. “The Constitution’s lack of clarity in a number of issues about the presidency, including its powers, has allowed the presidency to change over time.”

Unlike the traditional presidency, a period often categorized as running from George Washington to Herbert Hoover, in conventional analysis the modern era is marked by the president’s more active role in government. With the emergence of the modern presidency came four major elements pertaining to the expansion of the executive office: 1) a more profound role in policy-making, 2) a stronger, more influential role with the populace, 3) the growth of the presidential staff, and 4) a dominant presence in international affairs. While these alterations did not occur instantly or simultaneously, they did culminate during the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, resulting in the onset of the modern era of the presidency. With these changes, the president rose to become the primary actor in the American political system.

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4 Cohen and Nice, 53.
Scholars have advanced numerous reasons for the evolution of the modern presidency as well as the legitimacy of presidential power. Despite these varying opinions, the existence of the modern presidency is widely accepted among presidential scholars. Beginning in the late 1980s, however, a new concept, labeled the postmodern presidency, began to emerge in the study of the presidency. Overall, the term postmodern has been applied in diverse ways within the study of politics. As Stephen White writes, “the term ‘postmodernism’ is one that elicits both enthusiasm and distrust.” White goes on to note that “to be postmodern in any sense means to stand away from, or in opposition to, something modern.” While White is referring to the literary or philosophical notion of postmodernism, his words can also be used to describe postmodern as it relates to presidential research. In the most basic sense, the postmodern presidency is defined as something beyond modern. However, this does little to transform the ambiguity or answer the many questions that surround the notion of the postmodern presidency. In effect, much of the ambiguity and confusion that surround the use of the term in political theory has continued as the term has come to also represent aspects in presidential scholarship.

According to some presidential scholars, over the last two or three decades, various changes have merged to create a new fault line within the presidency. Labeled the “postmodern” presidency, scholars such as Richard Rose and Ryan Barilleaux developed a new analysis, which allegedly reflects the emergence of a new presidential epoch that has replaced the era of the modern presidency. In effect, this perspective claims that the modern presidency has been transformed into the postmodern presidency and, in turn, the roles and duties of the president have been altered, resulting in the need for changes in the overall study

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of the presidency as well. With this claim, the question arises, what evidence has led scholars to believe that the presidency has undergone such a fundamental shift as to lead to the conclusion that the modern presidency has ended? In order to assert that this is the case, the four major factors mentioned above that constitute the core of the modern presidency must be seen to have changed significantly, rather than simply shifted with the ups and downs of presidential evolution.

In addition to the notion of a postmodern presidential era, the term postmodern has also been used in presidential studies to describe the individual traits of presidents themselves as well as the contemporary social and political structures that presidents operate within. Most often used to describe the presidency of Bill Clinton, this idea of the postmodern presidency, as opposed to the theses of Rose and Barilleaux, suggests that various “postmodern” traits are necessary to govern in the continually developing modern presidential era. In a work edited by Steven Schier, several authors assert that Bill Clinton’s personality, political fortitude, and style of leadership warrant the label of a postmodern president. While this line of thought does not imply that the institution of the presidency has been forever altered, it does suggest that the presidency is entering a preemptive era, resulting in the need for presidents to develop postmodern traits and leadership qualities. Unlike those who contend that the presidency itself has entered a specific postmodern era that has evolved regardless of individual presidents, this second view of the postmodern presidency, while not wholly disconnected from the ideas of Rose and Barilleaux, centers on the idea that the individual characteristics and goals of presidents themselves, beginning with Bill Clinton, translate into a postmodern

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6 In using the term “preemptive” to describe a developing era in the presidency, Schier borrows the term from Skowronek. See Stephen Skowronek. The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1993).
style of leadership that must be contemplated in order to understand the contemporary presidency. In effect, this second view of the postmodern presidency begins with the notion that the political system has entered a preemptive era, thus forcing contemporary presidents to acquire and utilize various postmodern characteristics.

Over the past two decades, the term postmodern has crept into presidential studies. Despite this, the notion of applying the term to the presidency may obscure more than it reveals. Throughout this period, various political scientists such as Rose, Barilleaux, Schier, Bruce Miroff, and others, as well as communications scholars like Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles have merged the term postmodern with the study of the presidency; yet there continues to be no agreement on what exactly the postmodern presidency is or represents. For some, the postmodern presidency signifies a distinct era, fundamentally different from those of the past. For others, the postmodern characteristics and leadership style necessary to govern in a changing political and social landscape define the contemporary presidency. Thus, despite being used for nearly two decades, the term postmodern continues to be mired in ambiguity.

With the many differing views that make up the literature of the postmodern presidency, numerous questions arise. Is the onset of the postmodern presidency a result of a fundamental shift in the presidency, occurring regardless of who occupies the Oval Office, or is it better characterized as a shift in the individual traits of presidents necessary to govern during a newly emerging era? Does the core of the postmodern presidency center on foreign policy as a reflection of the end of the Cold War, or can it be better attributed to the rise of public politics, the decline of political parties, and the onslaught of media coverage that surround the contemporary presidency? The following chapters attempt to analyze the concept
of the postmodern presidency, comparing the many definitions and timeframes that surround
the term as a means of critically examining the existing work on the postmodern presidency.

In order to examine the origins of the literature pertaining to the postmodern
presidency, Chapter Two analyzes the works of Richard Rose and Ryan Barilleaux. In The
Postmodern President and The Post-Modern Presidency: The Office after Ronald Reagan,
Rose and Barilleaux contend that the office of the presidency has moved beyond the
parameters of the modern presidency and has entered a new stage in its continuing
development. While the two authors share the opinion that the presidency has entered a new
era, they disagree about the timeframe, effects, and reasoning behind the emergence of the
postmodern presidency. By examining these particular analyses, the origins of the concept can
be analyzed. More specifically, what are their definitions of the postmodern presidency?
When did it begin? How do the theories of Rose and Barilleaux differ with regard to the onset
and particulars of the postmodern presidency? Overall, the writing of Rose and Barilleaux
represents the core of the analysis of the postmodern presidency as a new presidential epoch.
By analyzing these particular works, one can gain a better overall understanding of the
ambiguity that surrounds the term.

Focusing on more recent work, Chapter Three centers on analyzing literature with
alternative definitions of the postmodern presidency. In other words, rather than seeing it as a
separate presidential epoch, others view the postmodern presidency as represented by the
personal traits and governing characteristics of individual presidents or as a necessary
response to the contemporary environment that surrounds the presidency. Works by Steven
Shier, Bruce Miroff, Peri Arnold, and Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles focus on the
presidency of Bill Clinton and its postmodern characteristics. Rather than arguing that a new
postmodern presidential epoch has emerged, these scholars assert, in varying ways, that the presidency of Bill Clinton or his individual characteristics can best be described as postmodern. While many of these ideas are not entirely disconnected from the work of Rose and Barilleaux, they do pursue a different line of reasoning concerning the postmodern presidency.

As a means of further analyzing the range of definitions as well as the prevalence of the concept of the postmodern presidency in the presidency literature, Chapter Four will examine scholarly journals in political science in order to gain a better understanding of the extent and the nature of the concept’s use. Looking specifically at the general political science journal literature as well as the more specialized presidency literature, a better sense of the concept’s usage along with its overall direction and importance can be ascertained. In short, by looking for signs of the postmodern presidency in contemporary scholarship, conclusions can be drawn as to the concept’s general direction and influence.

Next, in Chapter Five, attention turns to how and to what extent ideas about the postmodern presidency are included in undergraduate political science courses on the presidency. The research will attempt to determine whether notions of a postmodern presidency have gained a foothold in undergraduate presidency courses. Since time constructs such as the “traditional” and “modern” presidencies often are used in the teaching of the presidency, examining whether the postmodern presidency is focused on in undergraduate presidency classrooms is another means of exploring its general use and importance. Both course syllabi and a sample of presidency textbooks are examined in an effort to explore the general acceptance of (or lack thereof) the idea. Examining the syllabi for selected undergraduate courses permits me to address several questions. Are any of the dimensions of
the postmodern presidency being taught in presidency courses? If so, in what form is the concept being used? Is it presented as a presidential epoch, to explain the presidency of Bill Clinton, or to explain a social or cultural period overlying the modern presidency? Given that different forms of the postmodern presidency continue to pop up in presidential studies, it is important to ascertain whether teachers in presidency courses are using the term in their classrooms or if the idea of the postmodern presidency is without an audience.

Those who have used the term postmodern to describe aspects of the presidency have done so with little reference to past usage. In doing so, they have created numerous definitions of the postmodern presidency, along with varying timeframes, thresholds, and reasoning. As a result, the question arises yet again, what defines the postmodern presidency? Does it deal specifically with the end of the Cold War as some believe, or does it deal with the president’s status within the United States government as others would contend? Does postmodern simply mean that the president has too much to do? In this new era, can presidents focus on grand purposes or must they remain in constant flux? These are dissimilar yet important questions that deal with the concept of a postmodern presidency. In short, numerous theories and arguments make up the literature on the postmodern presidency. While the aforementioned questions are important, the more significant questions for the purpose of this research center on how the concept of the postmodern presidency has been used over the past fifteen years as well as whether the concept has been advanced and utilized in contemporary presidential study.

There is no denying the power of globalization, the media, and the growing reliance on international interdependence. In response to these changes, the presidency has continually adjusted throughout the modern era, but it is not clear whether these changes are substantial
enough to warrant the declaration of a new presidential epoch or the creation of a new term describing the traits necessary for contemporary executives to succeed. During the last fifteen years, various scholars have contended that the changes that have occurred in the contemporary presidency are profound enough to warrant the declaration of a new presidential era. In the process, however, numerous definitions and timeframes have signified the core of the postmodern presidency. How has the postmodern presidency been used over the past two decades? Has the concept garnered significant attention, therefore becoming a legitimate aspect in the study of the presidency? Have the various versions of the postmodern presidency influenced scholarship and teaching, and if so, which strands of the postmodern presidency seem to be the most important? Overall, the use of the postmodern presidency construct has elicited varying definitions and theories, resulting in a muddled picture of what the concept is and represents.
In the late 1980s, two works emerged that proclaimed the end of the modern presidency and the emergence of a new presidential epoch, referred to as the postmodern presidency. In their books *The Postmodern President* and *The Postmodern Presidency: The Office after Ronald Reagan*, Richard Rose and Ryan Barilleaux took a bold stance, asserting that the modern era of the presidency had been replaced by an entirely new presidential epoch. At face value, the term postmodern does little to elicit confusion or debate. In its simplest form, the word simply means beyond modern, a fitting label for the period these scholars believed had replaced the modern presidency. However, the term postmodern as it is applied to the presidency carries with it a considerable degree of ambiguity and disorder. Although the first editions of their books were published in the same year (1988), the theories of Rose and Barilleaux regarding the birth of the postmodern presidency are substantially different. While the two produced competing arguments about a postmodern presidency, they did agree on one very important aspect: the modern era of the presidency had run its course and was replaced by a postmodern presidential epoch.

**Richard Rose and the End of American Hegemony**

In *The Postmodern President*, Richard Rose writes, “the way in which the President meets the world has changed greatly in the past half century.” During the modern presidency, beginning with Franklin Roosevelt, the United States enjoyed a dominant position in the

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world, able to rule with an iron fist as a result of both the nation’s military and economic might. According to Rose, “modern” presidents were able to govern with the knowledge that the vast majority of countries throughout the world would simply smile and follow. Beginning with the Vietnam War, however, other nations began to choose a different path, developing initiatives that were dissimilar to those of the United States. No longer willing to operate at the mercy of the U.S., many nations began to compete with America, rather than be dominated by it. “The responsibility gap between what the President would like to do and what he can do has widened. International responsibilities remain great, but the United States can no longer be sure that other nations will fall into line once decisions are taken in Washington.”

For Rose, the postmodern presidency emerged as a direct result of this changing international arena. As other nations have grown stronger, the military and economic hegemony that the United States enjoyed throughout the world following World War II became a thing of the past. As Rose continually asserts, the world had closed in on the White House, since “interdependence characterizes an international system in which no nation is the hegemonic power.” With this in mind, the modern presidency was replaced by the postmodern presidency primarily because the rules that once governed the international system changed dramatically over the past quarter of a century, resulting in an entirely new global order in which the president must now be an active participant rather than the leviathan.

According to Rose, the presidency has experienced three epochs, “a traditional President, who had little to do; a modern President who had a lot to do at home and abroad;
and a postmodern President who may have too much expected of him." Overall, the difference between the modern and postmodern presidencies centers on the fact that postmodern presidents can no longer dominate the international system. As a result, “the line between domestic and international politics is dissolving.” While the Constitution was the primary check on the traditional and modern presidencies, the primary constraint facing the postmodern presidency is other nations. In order to govern effectively, a postmodern president must not only bargain and cooperate with Congress, but also must use those same skills to deal with foreign leaders. Adapting to a world without hegemony, “the success of the postmodern president depends on cooperation with leaders of other nations.” In effect, the world has grown smaller as other nations have grown stronger, resulting in the entanglement of domestic and international affairs. As a result of the changing international landscape, a new set of presidential duties and priorities emerged, altering the environment of the presidency and creating a distinct presidential epoch.

The onset of the postmodern presidency is marked by a decline in presidential power compared to that of the modern presidency. No longer able to dominate other nations, a contemporary president must now openly cooperate with them if he intends to succeed. “The defining characteristic of the postmodern President is simply stated: The resources of the White House are not sufficient to meet all of the President’s international responsibilities.” While the initial signs of the postmodern presidency can be traced to Vietnam and Watergate, according to Rose, the first truly postmodern president was Jimmy Carter. While not a

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9 Rose, 3.
10 Rose, 2.
11 Rose, 3.
12 Rose, 5.
13 Rose, 25.
reflection of Carter himself, Rose characterizes him as the first postmodern president because he was the first president governing in an environment of world interdependence. As Jimmy Carter took office, the hegemonic authority of the U.S. was ending. While the United States was still a powerful and influential nation, other nations were able to exercise their power and influence as well. “Although America remains a world power, it is no longer the dominant power that it once was.” 14 This is the essence of Rose’s postmodern presidency. The world had undergone a pronounced shift in power, resulting in the elimination of hegemonic authority balanced with the proliferation of international interdependence. As a result, American presidents must recognize the changes in the international landscape, “start[ing] from the assumption: To govern is to cooperate,” rather than clinging to the “modern” mantra of American power and control. 15

Over the last three to four decades of the twentieth century, the world continually got smaller, as countless events had great significance in the United States. For Rose, it is this shift that runs parallel to the emergence of the postmodern presidency. As the gap between domestic and international politics closed, presidents were forced “to respond to two very different audiences: the domestic audience on which popular authority rests, and the international system that influences the effectiveness of major White House policies.” 16 Whereas a traditional president did not have to address a particular audience and a modern president thought primarily in terms of domestic appeals, a postmodern president must now always contemplate the existence and attention of a diverse, worldwide audience.

Whatever a postmodern President would like to believe, he soon recognizes

14 Rose, 4.
15 Rose, 4.
16 Rose, 18.
that there are now few problems of significance to him that can be resolved by unilateral American action. The traditional President did not need to bargain with anyone, for his was a do-nothing role. The modern President had to bargain with Congress, for active White House leadership required the active support of Congress. The postmodern President must also bargain with leaders of other nations, for his success in an interdependent world depends on measures taken in a number of national capitals.\textsuperscript{17}

While the president first developed a major global role during the modern era, it was best characterized by an ability to dominate the international system. “When President Kennedy in his inaugural address boasted that he would ‘pay any price’ to advance American aims, he assumed that the United States had the money and the military might to do so. That era is now part of the past.”\textsuperscript{18}

For Rose, the postmodern presidency is best defined by the president’s changing role in international affairs. In an attempt to explain these changes and justify his ideas about the onset of a new presidential era, Rose offers several examples of how the president’s role in world affairs has changed. First and foremost, the United States is no longer the pinnacle of world power, operating through a system of hegemony. During the later half of the twentieth century, various other nations around the world have succeeded in leveling the playing field in terms of economic, diplomatic, and military power. Due to the fact that the United States can no longer dominate the international system, postmodern presidents must instead learn to see the world in a different light, operating through a system of interdependence and cooperation. “The emergence of the postmodern Presidency reflects a process of change in the postwar international system … The transition from the modern to the postmodern Presidency is now complete. The United States can no longer dominate the world economy or use force to

\textsuperscript{17} Rose, 28.
\textsuperscript{18} Rose, 25.
First, Russia developed into a military superpower, promoting its interests around the world in ways similar to the United States. Secondly, Japan rose dramatically on the world stage, developing an economy that can now compete with America’s. Finally, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) solidified itself as an entity powerful enough to influence American policy by holding oil for ransom. In effect, these major changes, along with various other changes in the international system, altered the framework of global politics, thus creating the environment for a new presidential era.

Analysis of Rose’s Postmodern Presidency

Throughout his book, Rose continually notes that the international system changed so dramatically during the 1960s and early 1970s that the presidency was essentially forced into a new era. In the process, Rose concludes that the United States is no longer the dominant force in the international system. As other nations and global institutions grew stronger, the balance of power that existed in the world after the Second World War shifted to create a multinational power structure. As the world closed in on the White House, influence became a two-way street, as other nations gained the ability to influence and persuade American leaders on the same level as the United States was influencing them. Subsequently, presidents beginning with Jimmy Carter were forced to assume a new role within the international system, cooperating and bargaining with other nations as a means of effectively implementing policy both at home and abroad. While there is no doubting that the world has undergone tremendous change since the end of World War II, numerous questions do emerge as to the

19 Rose, 26.
extent of these changes and their impact on the United States and the presidency. Most importantly, have changes in the international system created an environment that thrust the presidency into a new era? Have the major parameters of the modern presidency been replaced by a new set of standards, thus creating the necessity for a new presidential epoch?

Similar to the onset of the modern presidency, Rose asserts that the postmodern presidency did not emerge with a particular president or single event, but matured during several administrations before blossoming during the Carter administration. However, unlike the emergence of the modern presidency, Rose cites no significant event or series of events, analogous to the Great Depression and World War II, which led to the birth of the postmodern presidency. In effect, no threshold signifies the end of the modern era and the beginning of the postmodern presidency. Rose’s theory of the postmodern presidency rests on the notion that the international system along with the roles and structure of the presidency changed so significantly between Vietnam and the inauguration of Jimmy Carter that a new era of the presidency emerged. This leads to the obvious question: what changes occurred that would lead one to believe that a new environment was created for presidential leadership? Did these changes alter the framework of the modern presidency, thus creating a new set of standards by which the presidency must now be measured?

Throughout his book, Rose suggests that changes in the hierarchy of world power and authority ultimately led to the emergence of the postmodern presidency. Above all, beginning in the 1960s, the dominance that the United States enjoyed in world affairs began to disappear. “The difference between the modern and the postmodern Presidency is that a postmodern President can no longer dominate the international system.”

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20 Rose, 3.
state that the world is characterized by interdependence and “in an interdependent world, what happens in the United States depends on what happens in other countries.”\textsuperscript{21} In short, the international system had grown to be stronger than the president, with the result that a “postmodern President must work in a postimperial world in which the United States is not the only elephant in the international system.”\textsuperscript{22}

Throughout his discussion of the postmodern presidency, Rose makes the case that the president is simply an actor within a much larger international system. In explaining the emergence of a new postmodern presidential epoch, Rose attempts to make numerous distinctions between the eras of the modern and postmodern presidencies as well as between the “modern” world and the “postmodern” world. Above all, Rose contends that the United States and the president can no longer dominate and control the international system.

Upon reflection of Rose’s views, numerous questions arise. What has changed so dramatically as to warrant the label of a new presidential era? Has the international system changed substantially, providing a necessary environment for the emergence of the postmodern presidency? Finally, has America’s place in the world changed, thus changing the status of the president and forcing the office into a new era? These questions are important because they aid in determining why Rose chose to introduce a new concept to the study of the presidency. Moreover, it is the answers to these questions that led to Rose’s acceptance of a postmodern presidency and that has ultimately led to how the concept has been used and incorporated into contemporary scholarship on the presidency.

While it is true that the contemporary international system can be characterized by a growing need for interdependence, as new forms of technology and the process of

\textsuperscript{21} Rose, 3.
globalization have altered the economic and power structures of the world over the past two to three decades, Rose’s assertions concerning the power of the United States, Japan, Russia, and the influence of OPEC have not withstood the test of time. Rather than having grown weaker during the past two decades, the United States has grown stronger and more influential within the international system. Moreover, Rose’s three world indicators regarding the changing global power structure have failed to develop. Russia has experienced a major downfall since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both economically and militarily, Russia has fallen far below the United States. In addition, the economic crisis that occurred in Japan has severely damaged the nation’s ability to compete on the same level with the United States. Finally, the power and bargaining capability of OPEC was highly overemphasized by Rose. OPEC is only as strong as the nations that make up its membership. While OPEC does wield substantial bargaining power within the international system, it has never garnered the power to control the actions of the U.S. government. As will be seen in later chapters, in retrospect, the central ideas behind Rose’s postmodern presidency have failed to develop.

Throughout his discussion of the “new” international system, Rose contends that postmodern presidents must “learn to live with other elephants,” referring to the fact that the United States was no longer in the position of the ultimate power holder. While the modern presidency is characterized by a proactive presidency and leadership in foreign affairs, it is not characterized by the president’s ability to dominate the international system in the ways that Rose contends. While it is true that the Allied victory in World War II propelled the U.S. to the forefront of world affairs, the United States did not stand as the sole hegemonic power in the world as Rose believes. For over four decades following the end of the Second World

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22 Rose, 237.
War, the United States became immersed in the Cold War. Competing with the Soviet Union on every level, the world was represented by competing superpowers rather than U.S. hegemony. The Korean War, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Vietnam represent America’s attempt to thwart Soviet hegemony and maintain, if not sway, the balance of power that existed in the world. In effect, the president’s role in international affairs did indeed evolve throughout the mid-twentieth century, but not in the ways that Rose would like to believe. Rose is correct in his contention that contemporary presidents cannot dominate the international system alone, but modern presidents were not afforded this luxury either. The international system has always been stronger than the president, regardless of changing presidential epochs. In effect, it is Rose’s overemphasis on a changing international system to describe the onset of a postmodern presidency that has aided in creating a sense of ambiguity around the concept.

Beyond “learning to live with other elephants,” presidents also face new challenges at home according to Rose. Beginning in the 1960s, the presidency faced several changes that have in his view paved the way for the emergence of the postmodern presidency. These changes include the continued rise of the public presidency, the advent of the “permanent campaign,” and the demise of the “two presidencies” theory. In essence, a postmodern president “must go Washington, go public, or go international. Otherwise, his political career, the country, or both are wiped out.” For Rose, these three things have become so intertwined that the president can no longer afford to contemplate one without examining the ramifications on the other two. This, according to Rose, separates the modern presidency from the postmodern presidency. Modern presidents had the luxury of appealing only to Congress

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23 Rose, 31.
if it served their needs or going over the heads of Congress to the populace as a means of furthering their agendas. Postmodern presidents cannot ignore the international audience, for this audience now plays a part in the president’s decision-making.

An important aspect of Rose’s definition of the postmodern presidency centers on the demise of the “two presidencies,” first introduced by Aaron Wildavsky. According to this hypothesis, the president’s duties and authority are separated into two distinct arenas, domestic affairs and international affairs. Possessing greater constitutional authority in the area of international affairs, foreign policy has historically been the president’s territory. As a result, a division formed between the president’s work in domestic affairs and foreign policy. According to Rose, however, the division between domestic and international affairs is not as profound as it once was. The postmodern presidency is distinguishable by the growing irrelevance of the two presidencies theory. In short, the two have become so intertwined that they are now one and the same. In the contemporary international system, “the President must influence what happens in other countries because what happens abroad affects what happens at home … There is no sharp distinction between domestic and international affairs.”

While others have also made this point, it is hard to associate the merging of the “two presidencies” with the development of an entirely new presidential epoch. In many respects, contemporary presidents must still govern under the constraints of international affairs as well as domestic affairs. In effect, it is impossible for presidents to ignore the differences between domestic affairs and international relations. Overall, voters continue to separate one from the other as was seen in the presidency of Lyndon Johnson as well as the presidency of George H.W.

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24 Rose, 38.
Bush. Overall, the public presidency, constant campaigning, and the dilemmas associated with balancing domestic and international agendas have been evolving for nearly a century.

One of the first scholars to attach the term postmodern to the presidency, Rose suggests that major aspects of the presidency changed during the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in an entirely new era in the development of the presidency. While at the time Rose’s theory of a postmodern presidency was at odds with the established notion of presidential evolution that recognized only the traditional and modern eras, hindsight reveals that many of Rose’s observations that led to his classification of the presidency as postmodern have either failed to develop or were simply overstated. While establishing a pattern of right and wrong is not the primary intention of this research, Rose’s missteps are important nonetheless, for they serve as the foundation for the ambiguity that has surrounded the concept of the postmodern presidency for nearly two decades. In other words, given that Rose’s perspective for the postmodern presidency was at odds with how other scholars used the term, such as Barilleaux, along with the fact that his ideas were never truly accepted by presidency scholars, disagreement as to the existence and makeup of the postmodern presidency is logical and continues in contemporary presidential study.

Ryan Barilleaux and the Reemergence of Presidential Power

Similar to Richard Rose, in the late 1980s Ryan Barilleaux wrote of a new presidential epoch in his book, *The Post-Modern Presidency: The Office After Ronald Reagan*. However, unlike Rose, Barilleaux asserted that the post-modern presidency was not defined by a decline or weakening in the office of the presidency, but rather by a reemergence of presidential power that had dissipated during the 1970s. A result of cumulative effects, this post-modern
presidency began with the presidency of Ronald Reagan. “The contemporary presidency is distinctive. The office occupied by Ronald Reagan and his successors is not merely an extension of the modern presidency created by Franklin Roosevelt, but is sufficiently different to warrant a new label.”25 In effect, the presidency was substantially altered as Reagan halted the decline of presidential power that had defined the previous decade. Once again a position of respect, power, and leadership, according to Barilleaux the presidency entered a new stage in its development, defined primarily by the president’s growing role within the U.S. government.

Substantially larger and more complex than during the 1960s and 1970s, the office Reagan inherited was both diminished and on the verge of change. While Barilleaux classifies Reagan as the first post-modern president, he is quick to point out that Reagan alone did not create the post-modern presidency, but did succeed in “consolidat[ing] changes that have been building for years.”26 The actions of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon weakened the office of the presidency in both the international and domestic arenas. In the wake of the “failed” presidencies of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan emerged to revive the collapsing power of the president, while in the process, governing in an entirely new presidential epoch.

Since the post-modern presidency did not emerge immediately or as a result of a singular event, Barilleaux lists six characteristics that make up the foundation for a new presidential epoch: 1) the revival of presidential prerogative power, 2) governing through public politics, 3) the president’s general secretariat, 4) vicarious policymaking, 5) the


26 Barilleaux, 7.
president as the chief whip in Congress, 6) new vice-presidency. Although the “changes in the presidency over the last several years are complex and do not always complement each other,” these six features, in conjunction with the leadership qualities of Ronald Reagan, thrust the presidency into a new era. As the “impossible presidency” of the 1970s was replaced by the reemergence of presidential authority, a post-modern presidential era emerged; according to Barilleaux, this was not merely a reflection of the Reagan administration, but would shape future administrations as well.

As a result of Vietnam, Watergate, and “the apparently chronic secrecy and lying that had marked the Johnson and Nixon presidencies,” presidential prerogative power declined substantially during the 1970s.\textsuperscript{27} The combination of these events “stimulated Congress to try to rein in the Chief Executive through limits on his autonomy.”\textsuperscript{28} Following the perceived “abuses” of presidential power during the Johnson and Nixon administrations, Congress passed a number of laws in an attempt to limit the president’s prerogative power.\textsuperscript{29} According to Barilleaux, these actions aided in seriously wounding presidential power, creating an imperiled environment for successive presidents. As a result, the “imperial” presidency was effectively replaced by the “imperiled” presidency during the administrations of Ford and Carter. According to Barilleaux, these events marked the decline of the modern presidency, substantially weakening the president’s prerogative powers, while effectively setting the stage for a new era of the presidency.

\textsuperscript{27} Barilleaux, 8.
\textsuperscript{28} Barilleaux, 8.
\textsuperscript{29} Some of the laws passed by Congress in an attempt to weaken presidential prerogative power included the War Powers Resolution, the Case Act, the Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, and the National Commitments Resolution, which stated that all “significant” foreign policy commitments would be made with the agreement of Congress.
While the prerogative powers of the president did not disappear entirely in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, attempts to corral the powers of the president did lead to a weakened office. When Ronald Reagan took office in 1980, he succeeded in reestablishing and expanding the scope of presidential power. Although the War Powers Resolution was never accepted by presidents or enforced by Congress, it did serve as a deterrent against large-scale military operations conceived by the president. In 1983, President Reagan dispatched U.S. troops to Beirut, which according to Barilleaux was the first major step in reestablishing the president’s foreign policy prerogative. “Post-modern presidents may need to be more circumspect in their use of force, but they now possess an effective license to commit U.S. troops without congressional approval. Earlier presidents had no such license.”

Moreover, beginning with Carter, presidents have ignored attempts to restrain their prerogatives in the area of arms control. While the Arms Control and Disarmament Act and the Case Act were “constructed to restrict the president’s ability to commit the United States to international agreements without the acknowledgement of Congress,” Reagan took advantage of several loopholes in the laws as a means of observing the SALT II treaty. Subsequently, in 1986, Reagan ended U.S. compliance with the SALT II treaty, thus resulting in unilateral presidential policymaking regarding arms control. “In the process, American arms control policy became in effect a presidential prerogative … The presidency of the 1980s possess[ed] an apparent license to engage in limited military action, to determine arms control policy, and to end treaties. These are new prerogatives.”

In essence, with regards to the president’s foreign policy prerogatives, the presidency of the 1980s was substantially different than that of a decade earlier. Unlike Presidents Ford and Carter, Reagan was able to wield effective

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30 Barilleaux, 10.
prerogative power in a number of areas related to foreign policy, resulting in what Barilleaux defines as a substantial alteration in the operation of the presidency.

Yet another important presidential prerogative power that is a feature of the post-modern presidency centers on budgetary policymaking. According to Barilleaux, the Balanced Budget Act of 1985 and the use of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) “have won for the president expanded prerogatives in the executive budget process.”

Whereas presidential budgets were once products of departments and agencies within the executive branch, the White House now dominates budgetary prerogatives. While this centralization of the budget process began during earlier administrations, “for President Reagan to advance his ambitious goal of domestic spending reductions and defense increases, [he] was able to impose a ‘top-down’ budgeting system on the traditional executive budget process, [which] has given the White House the ability to dominate executive budget making.” In essence, Reagan solidified the president’s position as the leading actor in all aspects that deal with the executive budget process.

Overall, according to Barilleaux, the state of the president’s prerogative powers changed dramatically during the administration of Ronald Reagan. The weakened presidency that existed as a result of perceived abuses of presidential power during the Johnson and Nixon administrations and continued throughout the 1970s had been replaced by a stronger, more powerful office, which was able to exercise greater amounts of power and influence than at any other stage in its development. As a result of the reinstitution of various powers along with the leadership of Ronald Reagan, the revival of the president’s prerogative powers

31 Barilleaux, 10.
32 Barilleaux, 11.
33 Barilleaux, 12.
is the single most important factor relating to the onset of the post-modern presidency. Quite simply, “prerogative power is back. From military force and arms control to budgeting and regulation, the post-modern presidency possesses powers not held earlier in the twentieth century. These prerogatives do not guarantee a president success in achieving his goals, but they will give future Chief Executives additional leverage and autonomy in their efforts to shape public policy.”

Beyond the revival of the president’s prerogative powers, governing through public politics is another feature of the post-modern presidency for Barilleaux. More specifically, contemporary presidents place a heavy reliance on public politics as a means for legitimizing their agendas and subsequently influencing the direction of public policy. Beginning with Woodrow Wilson and the development of the “rhetorical presidency,” instances of governing through the public have played a role in presidential politics. However, for most of the twentieth century, the primary means by which presidents promoted their policies was though bargaining and persuasion techniques directed at members of Congress and others within the government. According to Barilleaux, beginning with Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter, presidents moved away from the bargaining/persuasion theory expressed by Richard Neustadt and instead focused on governing through public politics. “This practice of ‘going public,’ as Samuel Kernell terms it, involves presidential appeals to the American public for support for himself and his policies. Rather than relying on bargaining, these presidents have appealed to the public to “tell your senators and representatives by phone, wire, and Mailgram that the future hangs in balance’ and that Congress should support the president’s policies.”

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34 Barilleaux, 13.
35 Barilleaux, 15.
While this type of public politics resembles the “rhetorical presidency” allegedly created by Woodrow Wilson, it goes far beyond the appeals of Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy. Changes in the political environment, the increased number of political “outsiders” elected to the White House, and the rise of television have made the use of public appeals a necessity rather than a useful tool. “Post-modern presidents not only use public politics to govern, but also realize that the entire public face of the presidency affects their ability to do so.”36 While the use of public politics does not guarantee success, as is evident in the presidency of Jimmy Carter, contemporary presidents cannot shy away from the use of public appeals as a means of furthering their political goals and agenda. Using this medium effectively, Ronald Reagan created a distinctive approach for utilizing the public presidency and, in turn, aided in pushing the presidency into a new era.

A third characteristic of Barilleaux’s conception of the post-modern presidency centers on what he calls the president’s “general secretariat.” Defined as the central staff that surrounds the president, the general secretariat enables the president to direct and supervise the work of the executive branch. Better known as the Executive Office of the President (EOP), the EOP has played a significant role in the actions and duties of the president since its creation under Franklin Roosevelt. Unlike past administrations, however, “the contemporary Executive Office occupies a much larger role in contemporary government than it did in earlier years. It is now a powerful, bureaucratic, and politicized extension of the president.”37 For Barilleaux, the larger role and size of the Executive Office in the U.S. national government has aided in fostering the onset of the post-modern presidency. The continued

36 Barilleaux, 17.
37 Barilleaux, 17.
growth of the president’s general secretariat has created an environment that is necessary for the president to manage his numerous objectives and policy goals.

The institutionalization of the presidency, then, is what the development of this “general secretariat” is all about. The EOP is big, bureaucratic, and powerful, but it has become so in order to support the president. For better or worse—and the choice between them is not clear—the presidency now possesses a greater capacity for controlling Executive Branch policymaking … So, the post-modern presidency has a general secretariat to advance presidential interests. 38

In effect, the overall size of the executive branch in conjunction with increased presidential policymaking and administrative duties create the necessity for an active general secretariat in the post-modern presidential era.

The fourth characteristic of the post-modern presidency is vicarious policymaking. Barilleaux defines vicarious policymaking as the influence that occurs through the decisions and actions of the president’s appointees. In effect, the president not only creates policy through his own actions, but also makes policy through the appointment of judges and members of independent regulatory commissions. “Vicarious policymaking occurs when a president’s influence is felt through the actions and decisions of his appointees, particularly those who have independent power to make authoritative governmental decisions.” 39 In short, Barilleaux contends that beginning in the late 1970s the power of the federal judiciary and regulatory agencies expanded. As a result, the appointment powers of the president have become more important, leading to the type of vicarious policymaking that helps define the post-modern presidency.

Yet another characteristic of the post-modern presidency as defined by Barilleaux centers on the president’s position as the “chief whip” in Congress. “If [the president] is to

38 Barilleaux, 20.
39 Barilleaux, 21.
succeed in his relations with Congress, a post-modern president must go farther than his predecessors to develop his influence in that body. He must act in effect as the chief whip in Congress.”^40 While modern presidents were expected to take a leading role in presenting and defending their legislative agendas in Congress, post-modern presidents must now work within a very different situation. A place of greater decentralization and more fragmented power, the contemporary Congress is characterized by the absence of the traditional “old centers of power.”^41 In effect, a post-modern president cannot rely on powerful members of Congress to deliver votes or sway decisions. Instead, contemporary presidents must now act as the chief whip, building their own coalitions and bargaining at all levels of Congress in order to pass their policies. Through both bargaining and public politics, post-modern presidents must involve themselves in the lobbying process. “As chief whip, he must actively involve himself in politicking with Congress … More of the president’s limited time than before must now be spent in ‘working’ Congress.”^42

The sixth and final characteristic is the new vice-presidency. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the vice-president transformed from a minor figure in the American political system into an important presidential advisor. Citing Vice-Presidents Walter Mondale and George H. W. Bush, Barilleaux contends that the “the vice-presidency has become a position that offers its incumbent an opportunity to be among that small circle of senior presidential aides and counselors.”^43 Once ridiculed for its unimportance, the contemporary office of the vice-presidency has become a valuable asset for the president. As a result of being better connected to the White House, post-modern vice-presidents are better prepared to act in times

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^40 Barilleaux, 24.
^41 Barilleaux, 24.
^42 Barilleaux, 25.
of emergency as well as better suited to becoming president. In effect, the vice-presidency of the post-modern era can be characterized by its activism and counsel. “The vice-presidency now offers greater rewards than it once did. It offers the chance of making a real contribution to the workings of the post-modern presidency.”44

The combination of these events and changes created an environment that has forced the presidency into a new era. While a number of the factors described above occurred during the modern era, their cumulative effect served as a catalyst for overarching change. For Barilleaux, “the modern presidency is now a thing of the past, for the contemporary office is post-modern in nature. It is no longer the extension of FDR into the future, but has transformed into something different.”45 Confronted with individualized politics, fiscal stress, and institutional change, “presidents after Mr. Reagan would be sure to occupy a different position than the one assumed by the modern presidents from the 1940s to the 1960s.46 In the wake of the weakening of the “two presidencies,” a more complex institution has emerged, as the “president is now able to deal with Congress from a position of greater strength than his modern predecessors” as well as exert greater command and influence over public policy.47

The presidency has become more Hamiltonian in nature: the post-modern presidency combines aggressive exercises of presidential prerogatives with vigorous public politics, in order to compete with an assertive legislature whose members are themselves skilful at public relations.48

Occupying an office that is much more demanding than in the past, contemporary presidents must learn to effectively promote themselves and their policies to Congress as well as the

43 Barilleaux, 26.
44 Barilleaux, 28.
45 Barilleaux, 43.
46 Barilleaux, 43.
47 Barilleaux, 84.
48 Barilleaux, 94.
general public. For Barilleaux, the days of the New Deal and the Great Society are gone, as presidents now must concentrate on management and fiscal restraint rather than grand plans for the future. The president now exists in an age “in which governing means regulating, budgeting, and summity, rather than legislating and administering.” Unlike their modern predecessors, according to Barilleaux, post-modern presidents must combine classic powers of persuasion with the power of coercion.

Analysis of Barilleaux’s Post-modern Presidency

Like Rose, Barilleaux fails to develop a distinct threshold that separates the modern era of the presidency from the postmodern presidency. While calling Reagan the first postmodern president, Barilleaux continually cites examples of “postmodern” governance from administrations of the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout his discussion of the postmodern presidency, Barilleaux seems to forcefully defend the emergence of a new presidential era at some points, while being more cautious in other instances. For example, at one point he states: “the changes have not been so drastic as to suggest that an entirely new phase of the presidency has begun, but there have been alterations in the office.” By this line of reasoning, it seems that Barilleaux is asserting the presidency of the 1970s and 1980s was undergoing changes that occur over time in the development of the presidency. However, in the preceding chapter, Barilleaux made an entirely different point: “The modern presidency is now a thing of the past, for the contemporary office is post-modern in nature. It is no longer the extension of FDR into the future, but has transformed into something substantively

49 Barilleaux, 94.
50 Barilleaux, 28.
It is these types of wavering statements that create serious doubts about Barilleaux’s ideas concerning the emergence of a postmodern presidency. There is little doubt that the presidency has changed significantly over the last three decades. The advent of television and new forms of worldwide media, the rise and fall of the Cold War, and fluctuations in presidential power have created different governing environments for virtually every president. The majority of changes in the presidency that Barilleaux enumerates cannot be denied, yet their combination as a means of defining a new presidential era remains in question.

As a whole, the ideas that Barilleaux uses to formulate his analysis of a post-modern presidency fail to accurately describe the state of the presidency during the 1980s or convincingly define the emergence of a new presidential era. In fact, the characteristics that Barilleaux uses as the foundation for describing the post-modern presidency seem to more accurately describe the presidency of the two to three decades before the “failed” presidencies of the 1970s, rather than to define an entirely new era in the evolution of the presidency. The “revival of presidential prerogative power,” which Barilleaux lists as the primary reason for the emergence of the post-modern presidency, is just that: the revival of powers that were weakened with the presidencies of the 1970s, but ultimately were regained during the administration of Reagan. In other words, presidential prerogative power, as described by Barilleaux, while weakened by administrations of the 1970s, returned to form with the presidency of Ronald Reagan. In addition, public politics and presidential policy-making were not new characteristics of the presidency. As a result, it is difficult to use these characteristics as evidence of a new presidential era.

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51 Barilleaux, 43.
Much like the evidence Rose uses to describe the development of a postmodern presidency, Barilleaux’s characteristics have simply not met the test of time, thus making it easier to ignore the analysis of a postmodern presidency altogether. In other words, Reagan’s presidency was not so different from his predecessors of the twentieth century to generate a new era in the evolution of the presidency. His use of presidential prerogative power, while weakened during the 1970s, is similar to that used by other presidents during the modern era. Moreover, presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson formed the mold for being the “chief whip in Congress.” In many ways, Reagan’s role as the chief whip in Congress follows the lead of many presidents before him. In effect, time has made it possible to reflect on Barilleaux’s theory of a postmodern presidency. As a whole, the characteristics that Barilleaux uses to define the postmodern presidency do not seem all that dissimilar to the characteristics that describe the modern presidency.

Publishing his work at the same time as Rose, Barilleaux takes a much different stance on the birth of a postmodern presidency. Basing his ideas on the reestablishment of presidential power rather than on its demise, Barilleaux’s analysis of the postmodern presidency is quite different than that of Rose. Again, like Rose, Barilleaux fails to make a distinction between the modern presidency and what he terms the postmodern presidency. In doing so, along with the confusion that is created between Rose’s and Barilleaux’s different theories, the deficiencies in Barilleaux’s ideas has further aided in the ambiguity of the postmodern presidency over the past fifteen years. In hindsight, Barilleaux’s analysis of the postmodern presidency is shaky at best, which has in turn led to the fact that the work is virtually unmentioned in other scholarship dealing with the postmodern presidency. Given the
limitations and incompatibility of their respective works, it is easy to see why the postmodern presidency has remained an ambiguous concept in presidential scholarship.

Steven Stark and the First Postmodern Presidency

In April 1993, an article written by Steven Stark appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled, “The First Postmodern Presidency.” In it, Stark asserts that Bill Clinton assumed a smaller, diminished office than had his predecessors in the modern era. As a result, Clinton was forced to play a substantially different role than many of his predecessors. Without the Cold War to fall back on, the president does not possess the automatic international power, authority, or presence that he once did. In effect, the lack of a continuing crisis lessened the demand for a strong presidency.

Because of the end of the Cold War and recent changes in mass communication, the role Clinton assumes in the government and culture is far different from that played by Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, or even Ronald Reagan. Though politicians, the media, and the public continue to treat the presidency as the cynosure of American life, in important ways Clinton has inherited a diminished office.\(^2\)

Following logic similar to Rose’s, Stark concluded that the end of the Cold War dramatically changed the role of the president on both the domestic and international fronts. At home, the president could no longer rely on the backdrop of the Cold War as a means for defending his policies and actions. Abroad, the president’s role as the “leader of the free world” had receded. As a result, according to Stark, presidents must adjust and learn to govern under new circumstances. Bill Clinton was the first president of this “postmodern” era.

For Stark, the major dilemma that Bill Clinton faced was the absence of the Cold War and the threat of communism. “From the end of the Second World War until roughly the
middle of the Bush presidency, the threat of communism and nuclear war created a sense of continuing crisis, fueling demand for a strong presidency. Just as other wars led to increases in executive power throughout our history, so did the Cold War.”

In essence, Stark’s notion of the postmodern presidency centered on the decline of presidential power after the Cold War. Unlike Schier et al., Stark did not see Clinton himself as possessing certain postmodern qualities. Instead, Stark’s reasoning seems more similar to that of Rose, centering on the notion that circumstances have created a diminished office and, in turn, dictated that the president must change. Overall, in this view the presidency no longer revolved around foreign policy. “Since Franklin Roosevelt’s third term our Presidents have been primarily foreign-policy Presidents. Those days are now fading.”

Presidents now faced new challenges, the most important of which was globalization and its many effects. In meeting these challenges, Stark contends that Clinton and subsequent presidents must realize that they are no longer in the position to dominate the international landscape, as the power of the modern presidency has been replaced by the limitations of a postmodern era.

Along with his inability to control the international system, another significant challenge facing Clinton was the president’s ability to reach a mass audience through rhetoric. According to Stark, Samuel Kernell’s notion of “going public” is undergoing a substantial shift in focus. While Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan all utilized the “bully pulpit” to reach large audiences, this mode of appeal is no longer viable in an era of decentralized and fragmented media. “The ability of a President to draw the mass audience that broadcasting once afforded has been dramatically diminished by the rise of cable

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53 Stark, 26.
54 Stark, 26.
television.”55 Today, with the exception of the State of the Union Address and special circumstances such as times of war or unrest, the major networks no longer cover presidential speeches and news conferences. “In this environment, it becomes far more difficult for a president to mobilize the nation. The once all-powerful national megaphone of the presidency competes with many amplified voices in a diverse, atomized culture.56 In effect, the president no longer has the ability to lead everyone together. He must instead rely on the idea of constant campaigning, which focuses on targeting different groups of citizens at different times, with different messages.

Overall, Stark does not paint an altogether positive view of the presidency beginning with Bill Clinton. In an era of fragmentation, Stark asserts that the presidency is in a period of perpetual decline, where rather than being the overarching symbol of the nation, “the President will kind of [be the] ‘governor of the fifty states.’ The President will become more of an irrelevancy.”57 In an era that lacked a singular international rallying cry such as the Cold War, in conjunction with the scarcity of a mass audience, according to Stark, the presidency lacks the importance and responsibility of an earlier era. “There are no centers of the universe anymore: if Dan Rather is no Walter Cronkite, and Jay Leno is no Johnny Carson, it’s not necessarily because the people got smaller; it’s because, metaphorically speaking, the pictures did too. It’s no coincidence that George Bush was no Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton is no Jack Kennedy. Their successors won’t be either.”58 With a pessimistic view of the state of the U.S. presidency, Stark sums up his overtly negative view of the postmodern presidency.

Using much of the same reasoning that Rose did five years earlier, Stark sees the presidency

55 Stark, 27.
56 Stark, 27.
57 Stark, 38.
as a wounded institution that must either learn to adapt to a new world or simply run helplessly through the motions.

Conclusion

At the least, the works of Richard Rose and Ryan Barilleaux succeeded in introducing the postmodern concept into presidential studies. While Rose and Barilleaux present strikingly dissimilar views as to the causes and effects of the postmodern presidency, both fail to identify a clear threshold that signifies the end of the modern presidency and the onset of the postmodern presidency. According to Barilleaux, the ability to think strategically, engaging in public politics, setting legislative priorities, and using enhanced management capabilities are the major skills that are necessary for a president to be successful in the postmodern era. For Rose, the major responsibilities of a postmodern president center on guardianship, compromise, restraint, and fiscal responsibility.

Yet, one wonders how these duties and responsibilities are different from the modern era. While there is no denying the many changes that have occurred in the presidency, the United States, and the world over the past several decades, none of the changes that Rose and Barilleaux mention seems to have fundamentally changed the structure of the modern American presidency. Contrary to Rose’s views, the United States continues to be the premier power in the international system, while the president has maintained his status as the world’s primary actor. Moreover, although the institution of the presidency continues to move with the ebbs and flows of the U.S. government and society at large, the revival of presidential prerogative powers and the continued growth of public politics seem nothing more than a

58 Stark, 38.
continuation of the modern presidency. Discussing George H.W. Bush’s “postmodern” presidency, Rose makes the following observation at the conclusion of his work. “On the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November 1992, the American people will not judge President Bush by his personality or his intentions: He will be judged by results.” Is this a “postmodern” phenomenon? George H.W. Bush was judged by the results of his administration, as were Roosevelt, Johnson, Carter, and Clinton. Modern or postmodern, presidents are always ultimately judged by their accomplishments.

Again, while not the primary focus of this analysis, reflecting on the merit of Rose’s and Barilleaux’s work is important because it sets the stage for the ambiguity that continues to cloud the idea of the postmodern presidency. Fifteen years after Rose initially published his book on the postmodern presidency, the majority of his ideas have been outdated for a decade. As will be seen in the remaining chapters, the postmodern presidency that Rose imagined has never become a significant addition to presidency scholarship. Meanwhile, Barilleaux’s analysis of the postmodern presidency does not stray far from many of the aspects that make up the core of the modern presidency. As a result, it is easy to understand why his ideas have never been seriously incorporated into presidential studies. Moreover, the fundamental differences in the theories of Rose and Barilleaux have further served to foster a sense of ambiguity around the concept of the postmodern presidency from its earliest beginnings.

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Rose, 338.
Chapter 3  
Bill Clinton and the Postmodern Presidency

Along with the works of Barilleaux and Rose, the term postmodern has also been used to describe other, more recent changes in the institution of the presidency as well as to describe the individual characteristics of Bill Clinton. While the majority of these authors do not contend that the presidency has entered a wholly postmodern era, they do assert that various individual characteristics of presidents as well as the contemporary environment surrounding the presidency can be classified as “postmodern.” For the most part, this notion of the postmodern presidency, much like Stark’s, has centered on the administration of Bill Clinton. In essence, this chapter examines works that argue that the Clinton presidency possessed a distinctive feature or set of features that separated it from administrations of the past.

In a work edited by Steven Schier entitled *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton’s Legacy in U.S. Politics*, many of the contributing authors contend that Clinton’s personal traits can be classified as postmodern and may have had an important impact on the future of the office. Yet another reference to the postmodern presidency comes from a book by Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, who argue that the contemporary presidency, beginning with the Clinton administration, exists within a state of postmodern politics, thus creating a type of postmodern presidency. As a whole, these works are a second pillar of the postmodern presidency, applying a more philosophical notion of postmodernism, focusing on individual presidents, character traits, and the image of the president rather than on the notion of an entirely new presidential epoch.
The Postmodern Legacy of Bill Clinton

Published more than a decade after Rose and Barilleaux first wrote of a postmodern presidency, *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton’s Legacy in U.S. Politics* begins with the assertion that the presidency of Bill Clinton can be classified as “unique,” as it “was marked by an unusual number of firsts.” While the editor, Schier, is quick to point out in his introduction that every presidency “is in some sense one of a kind … the Clinton presidency produced several remarkable and consequential political events: in electoral results, policy enactments, and presidential and congressional behavior.” While most of the contributing authors do not specifically lay out Clinton’s role and legacy as a postmodern president, their collective attempt to assess various aspects of his style and leadership lead them “to label his presidency as ‘postmodern’.” The book centers on numerous aspects of Clinton’s presidency, ranging from foreign policy and public opinion to scandal, impeachment, and racial politics, focusing on Clinton’s goals and achievements as well as his failures. Beyond simply describing various aspects of Clinton’s leadership and personal characteristics, the overarching theme concerns the uniqueness of Clinton’s presidency.

In an introduction entitled “A Unique Presidency,” Steven Schier briefly outlines the purposes of the book, while laying the groundwork for Clinton’s label as a postmodern president. In the turbulent politics of the 1990s, “characterized by ‘weak partisan loyalties, divided government, and widespread distrust of the political process,’” Schier concludes, “Bill Clinton’s presidency was indeed no ordinary time.”

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60 Schier, 1.
62 Schier, 1.
63 Schier, 3.
reinvent himself in such threatening circumstances earns him the label of ‘postmodern’ president—one able to successfully alter his identity as the political context shifted." As a result, Schier concludes that Clinton’s leadership style as well as his personal characteristics were significantly different from those of his predecessors. Moreover, rather than simply summarize the events of the Clinton presidency, the authors strive to examine the impact of Clinton’s “postmodern” presidency on the future of the office. In short, while Clinton may have been the first president to utilize certain postmodern characteristics and governing tools, successive presidents may need to adopt many of his postmodern skills in order to govern effectively in a changing political climate, a “postmodern culture.”

Not every author contributing to this particular work directly labels Clinton a postmodern president. Instead, many simply discuss the individual marks that Clinton himself left on the office of the presidency. Given this, I will not attempt to cover every contribution in detail, but will instead focus primarily on those authors who directly referenced Clinton as a postmodern president. In Chapter 1, “Bill Clinton and the Institutionalized Presidency,” Peri Arnold covers Clinton’s leadership and autonomy. Arnold describes Clinton’s “postmodern” identity, but does so without directly labeling Clinton a postmodern president. Essentially, Arnold reflects on the “extreme paradoxes” that signified the Clinton presidency. “His blunders were huge, but his ability to recover was remarkable.” Despite Arnold’s unwillingness to directly label Clinton a postmodern president, this ability to survive the paradoxes that became interwoven into Clinton’s presidency is a primary reason for the title

64 Schier, 15.
66 Arnold, 19.
of the book as well as Schier’s overall characterization of Clinton as a postmodern president. For Arnold, Clinton’s legacy is one of major successes coupled with major embarrassments.

In Chapter 4, “A Clouded Mirror: Bill Clinton, Polls, and the Politics of Survival,” John F. Harris examines an important aspect of Clinton’s presidency, his ability to survive the numerous pitfalls that continually haunted his administration.

Clinton’s presidency should be understood as an exercise in perpetual reinvention—a constantly evolving response to new circumstances and to new emergencies threatening his political survival. He executed this feat by using, to a degree unmatched by any predecessor, the modern techniques for managing public opinion: polling, advertising, and constant recalibration of presidential rhetoric. … This president has been a signal innovator in the ways he has merged his political tactics with his governmental strategy, and he has prospered as a result.67

Beyond the primary message of Harris’ statement concerning the Clinton presidency, the significance of this passage is twofold. First, Harris uses the term “modern” to describe the techniques that he believes Clinton mastered as a means of survival and innovation. Whereas Schier and some of the other authors might describe Clinton’s governing “techniques” as well as his ability to survive the many blunders of his presidency as postmodern, Harris concludes that Clinton simply used numerous modern techniques better than any of his predecessors. Second, the final sentence of the above passage explains Clinton’s innovations in the area of merging political tactics and government strategy. Once again, Schier uses this type of thinking in his introduction to support the idea that Clinton can be classified as a postmodern president.

In an essay entitled “Courting the Public: Bill Clinton’s Postmodern Education,” Bruce Miroff focuses on Clinton’s ability to maintain high job approval ratings despite the

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public’s distaste for his perceived character and morality. Without a solid identity and prone to move from one position to another, Clinton “thrived as a public performer because he is a postmodern character attuned to a postmodern moment in American political history.” By consistently reinventing himself in order to seize the moment or dodge an issue, Clinton’s public governing strategy represented a postmodern style of leadership. For Miroff, the philosophical idea of postmodernism fits Clinton’s presidency. The multiple images that define Clinton’s personal and political persona became mired in ambiguity, to the point where it grew difficult to separate truth from fiction.

Overall, Miroff defines Clinton’s postmodern education as the personal characteristics that he honed throughout his life, which culminated in his eight years in the White House.

The political style that has characterized Bill Clinton’s presidency was evident early in his life. Both the charm and the slickness in courting followers were on display in Clinton’s races for office in high school, Boys Nation, and college. Many of the specific media techniques employed in the Clinton presidency were honed in his five terms as governor of Arkansas. Clinton entered the presidency already marked by the chief sign of the postmodern character: a readiness to reinvent the self to match the moment.

In effect, Miroff considers Clinton’s ability to court the public, mold himself to individual situations and issues, and survive any situation to be postmodern characteristics. While Miroff mentions no singular postmodern era that began with Bill Clinton, his postmodern skills may prove to have a lasting impact on the office of the presidency. “While Clinton’s approach to the public is unlikely to evoke open expressions of admiration in the short run, his long-run impact on the public presidency is likely to prove substantial,” for “Clinton’s postmodern techniques can be covertly copied and employed.” In this instance, the postmodern

68 Bruce Miroff. “Courting the Public: Bill Clinton’s Postmodern Education.” Schier, 106.
69 Miroff, 113.
70 Miroff, 122.
presidency is not represented by a new epoch, globalization, foreign affairs, or the end of the Cold War. Instead, it is defined by Clinton’s ability to constantly reinvent himself as an effective means of courting public opinion. “That a president can reinvent himself to please the public will be the postmodern legacy of Bill Clinton.”

According to Schier, “the absence of a stable, supportive political establishment throughout his presidency” in combination with a unique public governing style produced a postmodern style of presidential leadership that may have important effects on the future of the office. In his conclusion, employing Skowronek’s emphasis on political time, Schier states, “Bill Clinton is perhaps the first president of this preemptive era.” This is an important classification, particularly when examining the idea of a postmodern presidency. Unlike previous writing on the postmodern presidency, Schier and the other contributing authors do not subscribe to the idea that the presidency has entered a singular postmodern era. Instead, they used the term to describe various personal characteristics that Bill Clinton used throughout the course of his presidency. For them, the presidency continues to evolve and Clinton may very well be the first in a line of presidents that utilize various postmodern characteristics to successfully navigate the turbulent Washington system. Yet the postmodern presidency is not characterized by distinct changes in the institution itself, but is represented by a changing political environment.

Clinton’s ability to maneuver and mold himself to public opinion better than any of his predecessors represents a new kind of chief executive and, in the process, left an indelible mark on the office for future presidents.

71 Miroff, 123.
72 Schier, 255.
73 Schier, 255.
Governing as campaigning, employing modern communication and polling technologies, can save a president from lasting defeat in the institutional combat of Washington. In return, however, the president must restrict his agenda to keep the poll ratings up. Hence the Clinton-inspired formula for future presidents: public popularity and reelection through agenda construction aimed at targeted swing voters, informed polling and focus groups and ensured by sophisticated use of campaign technologies. We might, following Bruce Miroff, call this the postmodern political style. ⁷⁴

In other words, Clinton may have created the mold for governing in a preemptive era through the use of a postmodern political style. In order to succeed in an era of preemption, a president must be both “ideologically and tactically flexible.” ⁷⁵ With his postmodern style of leadership, focused on public politics and flexibility, Bill Clinton created a distinctive style of leadership. For Schier, the legacy of Bill Clinton centers on the fact that future presidents must recognize Clinton’s postmodern style of governance, for “successful presidential politics in our era of permanent preemption will have to be … increasingly postmodern in personal style.” ⁷⁶

Clinton and the Hyperreality of Postmodern Politics

In Constructing Clinton: Hyperreality & Presidential Image-Making in Postmodern Politics, Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles examine the volatile political scene of the 1990s, “a time when politics, both nationally and internationally, was in a state of constant flux and transformation.” ⁷⁷ A major factor in the decade’s political turmoil was Bill Clinton, who served as president in a postmodern America, represented by what the authors call hyperreality, “a condition created by the dominance of representation and the explosion of

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⁷⁴ Schier, 259.
⁷⁵ Schier, 259.
⁷⁶ Schier, 260.
media.” Hyperreality centers on the idea that “because of the saturation of images in contemporary life, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between that which is ‘real’ and that which is represented or mediated.” As a result of the hyperrealistic state of American politics and culture during the 1990s, it becomes difficult to uncover the “real” Bill Clinton, rather than his hyperreal political image. The essence of postmodern political culture, image, has come to dominate numerous facets of the presidency. For Clinton, in light of the numerous scandals and political mishaps that occurred during his presidency, image became an invaluable asset. As the authors of this work reiterate, postmodern political culture is grounded in image creation, which is therefore an essential aspect of the contemporary presidency.

Recognizing that political image construction has always been a central aspect of the American presidency, Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles seek to distinguish between the past and contemporary America. In today’s postmodern political era, image consumes daily politics, creating a hyperreal or exaggerated view of leaders and their voices.

To characterize contemporary U.S. politics as “postmodern” is to recognize that our politics is dominated by the image and is primarily hyperreal in its depiction of individual candidates and leaders. Postmodern politics challenges existing image expectations, interrogating that which is assumed normal and natural. It exists within a postmodern culture “grounded in ambiguity, confusion, and irony…. It is a politics that deconstructs historicized narratives of presidential leadership as it constructs new narratives and new images.”

Unable to ignore the changes that have fostered a postmodern political age, Bill Clinton engaged in the politics of hyperrealism, constructing an image through the use of media,

78 Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 1.
79 Parry Giles and Parry-Giles, 1.
80 Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 5.
polling, and pluralized rhetoric. “In terms of political culture, then, and for the vast majority of U.S. voters and citizens, there was no ‘real’ Bill Clinton, only a postmodern ‘Bill Clinton.’”\(^{81}\) This work seeks to analyze image as a means of governing during a postmodern political era. The Clinton presidency, according to the authors, left a distinct and important imprint on postmodern culture as well as on the office of the presidency. “Because of Bill Clinton and the images he has created and that have been created about him, the American political culture will forever be altered.”\(^{82}\)

After detailing Clinton’s various political images throughout his presidency, the authors conclude by examining the current state of postmodern presidential politics. Again linked to the notion of hyperreality, they stress that Clinton embodied American politics during the contemporary postmodern era. Overall, Clinton’s presidency was critical, given what it “reveals about the evolution of the presidency—the rhetorical means by which the culture enacts and performs its construction of the nation’s chief executive. Attending to Clinton’s images also offers lessons about the state of presidential politics in the postmodern United States.”\(^{83}\) In effect, in a postmodern political era, image is everything. Emphasizing and often exploiting the aura that surrounds the presidency, Clinton used hyperreality, or the art of image-making, to survive in a postmodern political climate. In the process, Clinton also significantly contributed to the development of a postmodern political culture. “The result, for postmodern U.S. presidents, is an increasingly complex negotiation of symbolism, visual imagery, and institutional ethos…. At bottom, both voters and presidents have come to know that seeing is no longer believing, that visual images are controlling political discourse, and

\(^{81}\) Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 5.
\(^{82}\) Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 16.
\(^{83}\) Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 188.
that a successful postmodern presidentiality is as much about appealing to the eye as it is informing and enlightening the mind.”

Although somewhat connected to the thinking of Miroff, Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles present a distinct perspective on the postmodern presidency. On some levels, their ideas resemble different aspects of the works already outlined; yet the main premise of *Constructing Clinton* is substantially different. At times, it seems as though the authors contend that the presidency has entered a new, postmodern era. However, their reasoning and timeframe are unlike those of Rose and Barilleaux. Moreover, the idea of a postmodern presidential epoch is not the focal point of the authors’ understanding of the postmodern presidency. Rather, the postmodern presidency centers on the combination of a diverse and disseminated social framework, a hyperrealistic political culture, and a president who strove to mold himself to these features. As a result, the emergence of a postmodern presidency is defined by the combination of several elements, which include American society as a whole, the political system, and the ideals and achievements of the president himself. Here, the postmodern presidency is defined by the sum of its parts. In varying ways, the postmodern presidency is personified by Bill Clinton, a postmodern political culture as well as postmodern social constructions, which include the media and voting behaviors. As these things meet at the pinnacle of U.S. government, the postmodern presidency is formed, both out of necessity as well as through the personal touch of Bill Clinton. In short, Bill Clinton was a postmodern president who served during a postmodern political age.

84 Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, 191.
Conclusion

Much like the literature on the postmodern presidency as a distinct presidential epoch, the ideas expressed in this chapter vary. Although all of the above examples of the postmodern presidency deal in some way with the presidency of Bill Clinton, a singular notion of the postmodern presidency falls on the eye of the beholder. Is the postmodern presidency best defined by the political climate of the 1990s, by Clinton’s unique and personal governing style, or by his ability to play on the many levels of the ideological spectrum? The answer to this question depends largely on which particular work one reads. The answer to the seemingly simple question of what scholars have meant by the postmodern presidency could be answered in a variety of ways.

Furthermore, in the literature dealing with Clinton as a postmodern president, there also exist small doses of a postmodern presidential epoch as originally expressed by Rose and Barilleaux. This makes it all the more difficult to pinpoint the definition and threshold of the postmodern presidency. In the end, when looked at as a whole, the literature that connects Clinton to a form of the postmodern presidency is just as ambiguous as previous literature on the subject. Each author who writes about a postmodern presidency does so in a unique way, meaning that Schier’s ideas differ from those of Miroff, whose ideas are different than those of Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles. Regardless of the differences that emerge in the authors’ individual views, their combined effect suggests that the concept of the postmodern
presidency does not refer to a new presidential era, but instead reflects a more philosophical understanding of postmodernism.
Chapter 4

The Postmodern Presidency in Contemporary Journal Literature

In order to further examine the impact of ideas of the postmodern presidency on presidential studies, this chapter explores various political science journals in order to get a better understanding of the concept’s general application and prevalence. The journal search engine J-STOR was used to search twenty-six political science journals. Any finding of the “postmodern presidency” or “postmodern president” in the title, abstract, or full text of articles was noted and subsequently examined further in order to gain a fuller sense of the concept’s influence in presidential studies. In addition, two specialty journals not included in J-STOR, Presidential Studies Quarterly and Congress & the Presidency, also were examined for evidence of the concept of the postmodern presidency. In conjunction with a search of general political science journal literature, looking at the titles and abstracts of articles within these more specialized journals provides the necessary link toward examining specific articles dealing with the U.S. presidency. Overall, an examination of the literature pertaining to the postmodern presidency in this particular set of journals aids in further determining if and how the idea of the postmodern presidency has been used.

The Postmodern Presidency in Political Science Literature

Searches were conducted of the twenty-six political science journals in the J-STOR database for the terms “postmodern presidency” or “postmodern president” in the abstracts,

85 For a full list of the journals explored in J-STOR, please see Appendix 1.
body, or titles of articles published between 1985 and 2003. Overall, only seven articles used either the “postmodern presidency” or “postmodern president” in the body of the articles. Most notably, in nearly thirty journals over the past two decades, not one article contained either of these phrases in the title or abstract. Substantively, the simple fact that only seven articles were found and none contained the term in the title or abstract conveys the message that the idea of the postmodern presidency has not been significantly intertwined into presidency studies. Furthermore, none of the articles found used the idea of the postmodern presidency specifically or in depth. In effect, the postmodern presidency is mentioned in passing or not at all. Moreover, some articles cite Rose’s work on the postmodern presidency, but never actually apply the concept in the context of their work. Nevertheless, the seven articles found were published between 1989 and 1998 and provide additional information regarding the analysis of the postmodern presidency.

Chronologically, the earliest article found in the search that mentions the postmodern presidency appeared in the November 1989 edition of *Political Theory*. In “The Mirror of Reproduction: Baudrillard and Reagan’s America,” Diane Rubenstein explores Reagan in the context of Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreal politics. Noting the existence of a postmodern presidency only in passing, Rubenstein nevertheless sets the stage for later work done on the postmodern presidency by Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles. Stating that Reagan’s hyperreal “two-headed, doubly synecdochal” image and mode of rhetoric are “emblematic of the postmodern presidency,” Rubenstein refers to the concept as though it were a fixed aspect of presidential study. In other words, Rubenstein uses the idea of the postmodern presidency in a way that

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86 All articles are available at http://www.jstor.org.
assumes the reader will automatically know its definition and reasoning. Despite making the
assertion that Reagan’s rhetoric and image are “emblematic” of the postmodern presidency,
she uses the term only once in the article. In addition, neither Rose nor Barilleaux is cited at
any point, leading to the conclusion that their work had little impact on Rubenstein’s notion of
the postmodern presidency. Even so, this particular work, which linked postmodern and
Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality to the presidency of Ronald Reagan, reads as a precursor
to the work of Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles on the hyperreal, postmodern presidency of Bill
Clinton. Despite the fact that the similarities between these works center more on the ideas of
Baudrillard and hyperreality, a link to the idea of the postmodern presidency does exist. With
that said, Rubenstein’s article has little to do with the postmodern presidency, but may have
served to influence the work of Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles on Clinton, the politics of
hyperreality, and the postmodern presidency.

Written in 1991, Darrell West’s article, “Television and Presidential Popularity in
America,” appeared in the British Journal of Political Science. Focusing on the presidencies
of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, West examines the impact of television on presidential
popularity. In his conclusion, West notes that television has a substantial impact on
contemporary politics. As a result, presidents who are skilled orators and have a better
aptitude for “going public” can be more effective leaders than those who do not possess these
necessary skills. In this argument, West states that “‘post-modern’ presidents have an ability
to generate news coverage favourable to themselves and that this coverage will convince
viewers to believe the presidential message.” Like Rubenstein, West uses the term
postmodern in passing as though it were a familiar concept. Using the term only once in the
body of the article, West asserts that postmodern presidents are better prepared to handle the problems associated with television and going public. Despite citing the work of both Rose and Barilleaux when using the term, West makes no effort to connect his ideas regarding television and presidential popularity to those of the two authors. Instead, West employs the term loosely, assuming that the work of Rose and Barilleaux is similar in nature. Since Rose and Barilleaux disagreed about many of the features of the postmodern presidency and considered going public to play only a small role, West’s cursory use of the term does little to aid in creating a viable definition for the concept or tracing its usage in the discipline. Again, while West’s primary, or even secondary, intention was not to focus on the idea of the postmodern presidency, his usage of the term only aids in adding to the ambiguity that surrounds the analysis of the concept, while doing little to describe its origins or provide a context for future use.

Four of the final five articles reference Rose in the text or in the references, but fail to mention the postmodern presidency specifically. In an article by Gregory L. Hager and Terry Sullivan, “President-centered and Presidency-centered Explanations of Presidential Public Activity,” Rose’s book on the postmodern presidency is cited in the references, but the authors make no use of the concept postmodern in their study. In fact, although no direct quotes of Rose are used in the text, the authors cite Rose when discussing the public coalition activities of modern presidents. Likewise, in Jeffrey Cohen’s article, “Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda,” Rose is cited in the body of the work, but with no reference to the idea of an emerging postmodern era. Instead, Cohen cites Rose’s suggestion that

“uncontrollable events and crises may push their way to the top of the president’s agenda.”

In each of these instances, it becomes apparent that Rose’s notion of the postmodern presidency, despite being the central focus of his book, is not the aspect that the authors found the most intriguing. In short, while other ideas contained in Rose’s 1991 work were used by Hager, Sullivan, and Cohen, ideas pertaining to the postmodern presidency were all but ignored.

In the December 1995 issue of The Journal of Conflict Resolution, Karl DeRouen, Jr. continually cites the work of Rose in his article, “The Indirect Link: Politics, the Economy, and the Use of Force.” Despite citing Rose’s 1991 book on multiple occasions, similar to the authors above DeRouen never specifically mentions the idea of the postmodern presidency. At the outset of the article, DeRouen examines the relevance of the “perpetual election” in the context of American democracy. Emphasizing that the president never has the full support of his own party, DeRouen uses a quote from Rose to further support his point, writing “the media can ‘put the White House on trial any night of the week.’” In effect, DeRouen uses the work of Rose to help validate a point concerning public opinion and the party system. In doing so, he ignores the central theme of Rose’s book, which centers on the emergence of a postmodern presidential era. In at least two more instances, DeRouen uses Rose to further support his own ideas concerning the president and the public. At no point does DeRouen mention that Rose’s ideas are part of a larger study centering on the postmodern presidency.

Once again, although this application is perfectly legitimate, it gives the impression that

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Rose’s classification of a postmodern presidency is once again ignored in favor of more
detailed portions of his work. Overall, like Hager, Cohen, and Sullivan before him, DeRouen
ignores the overarching theme of Rose’s book.

Another article that mentions Rose’s work in the main text and cites The Postmodern
Presidency in the references, “An Integrative Approach to Modeling Presidential Success in
Congress,” appeared in the March 1998 issue of Political Research Quarterly. Written by
Brad Lockerbie, Stephen Borrelli, and Scott Hedger, the article tests a model for annual
presidential success rates on House and Senate roll calls. Focusing on a variety of challenges
that contemporary presidents confront when lobbying Congress, the authors write that “recent
economic, demographic, and international changes are posing policy challenges more difficult
than those faced by previous presidents and Congresses.”92 In a footnote, the authors add, “see
also Rose 1991.” While this type of statement concerning the difficulties that contemporary
presidents face is at the core of Rose’s argument regarding the postmodern presidency, the
concept is never mentioned by Lockerbie, Borrelli, and Hedger, and only receives a footnote.
Once more, Rose is acknowledged, but the main premise of the work cited is nowhere to be
found, leading to the conclusion that the notion of the postmodern presidency as a legitimate
facet of presidential studies is absent.

The final article found using the J-STOR database appeared in the American Journal
of Political Science in October 1997. Entitled “The Institutionalization of the American
Presidency,” Lyn Ragsdale and John Theis, III focus their attention on the impact that
government activity and presidential and congressional actions have had on the

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91 Karl R. DeRouen, Jr. “The Indirect Link: Politics, the Economy, and the Use of Force.” The Journal of
Conflict Resolution (Volume 39, Issue 4, December 1995), 672.
institutionalization of the presidency between 1924 and 1992. Summarizing the ways that the presidency has been studied over time, the authors affirm that scholars have focused on various historical epochs of the presidency. In listing these different epochs, which also include the public presidency and the modern presidency, Ragsdale and Theis note Rose’s theory of the postmodern presidency. “Scholars focus on historic epochs of the office as defined by the innovations of individual presidents: the public presidency fashioned by Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson (Tulis 1988); the modern presidency commenced by Franklin Roosevelt (Pfiffner 1994); and the post-modern presidency, partly the result of successes and failures of Carter and Reagan (Rose 1988).” In this instance, while the notion of the postmodern presidency is once again mentioned only in passing, it is nonetheless acknowledged. Given that the focus of the authors is not the postmodern presidency or presidential epochs in particular, this is the only time the term appears within the article. Once again, while the notion of the postmodern presidency is used as an accepted stage in the evolution of the presidency, there is little semblance of conceptualization.

Taken as a whole, the articles found by searching J-STOR for evidence of the “postmodern presidency” or the “postmodern president” yielded minimal results. The major finding centers on the fact that not one article focuses specifically on the idea of the postmodern presidency. In fact, none of the articles found even go so far as to explain what the postmodern presidency is, or what it represents. Used in passing, the term is all but a footnote in the vast majority of the articles that mention it. Despite the fact that the majority of the articles cite Rose’s second edition of The Postmodern President, many do not

incorporate the major theme of his writing into their work, leading to the conclusion that the idea of the postmodern presidency as first discussed by Rose and Barilleaux has not been extensively integrated into presidential studies as a whole. In effect, the work of Rose and Barilleaux on the postmodern presidency had little effect on their colleagues or the discipline. Overall, the concept has seldom appeared in the political science journal literature since it was first discussed by Rose and Barilleaux more than a decade ago.

The Postmodern Presidency in Specialized Presidency Literature

In addition to the search of J-STOR, I examined two presidency journals not included in the J-STOR database, Presidential Studies Quarterly and Congress & the Presidency, in order to further assess the influence and usage of the concept of the postmodern presidency. Once again, searching for any mention of the postmodern presidency or postmodern president, both titles and abstracts were examined. Additionally, the number of instances in which the terms “modern” and “traditional” presidencies appeared in article titles and abstracts was also taken into account as a means of comparing the number of times each term appeared in this literature. In some cases, particularly in earlier years of Presidential Studies Quarterly, abstracts were not included in articles. In these cases, along with searching article titles for the term postmodern, introductions were also examined.

In total, between 1988 and 2003, 674 articles were published in Presidential Studies Quarterly. Of those, only two contained the term postmodern in either the title or abstract. In contrast, twenty mentioned the modern presidency, while only one article referred to the traditional presidency. Since only two articles contained the term “postmodern” in fifteen years.

years, it is evident that the idea of a postmodern presidency analysis has not been influential in presidency scholarship since the term was first used by Rose and Barilleaux. By the same token, however, the concept of the modern presidency was also found to be uncommon in PSQ articles despite a seemingly more general acceptance in overall presidency scholarship. While the primary purpose of this research is not to weigh the legitimacy of the modern versus the postmodern presidencies, the low number of articles that contain these types of era distinctions is important nonetheless. Looking at Congress & the Presidency, I found similar results. Between 1988 and 2003, 127 articles appeared. Of these, only two contained the term postmodern in the title or abstract, while six others referred to the modern presidency. Once again, substantively speaking, the low number of articles that contained the term postmodern points to the fact that the concept is not consequential in presidential scholarship. Altogether, after examining the contents of Presidential Studies Quarterly and Congress & the Presidency over the last decade and a half, it becomes apparent that the term postmodern is largely absent from the specialized journal literature on the presidency.

Despite the fact that the concept of the postmodern presidency is a relatively scarce term in these two journals, it remains necessary to examine the usage of the concept in these instances. In “Why Do Presidents Fail,” Richard Pious examines presidential decision making, particularly the failure of interbranch collaborative decision making. Asserting that future research must concentrate on presidential failures as much as their successes, Pious notes in his abstract that such research “might help us to explain the paradoxes of the postmodern presidency: with greater institutional resources, with more delegated powers from

Congress, and with (presumably) more accumulated experience from presidency scholarship, one might expect fewer rather than more spectacular failures.\textsuperscript{94} While the same line is used again within the body of article, this is the only time that Pious uses the term, despite his assertion that such research will aid in explaining the inconsistencies of the postmodern presidency. While Pious recognizes the puzzle that is the postmodern presidency, he does nothing to try and put any of the pieces together. Instead, he uses the term as a backdrop for his article, stating that such research will aid in explaining the postmodern presidency. Nevertheless, Pious writes as though a postmodern presidency does exist, defined by greater institutional resources and more delegated powers. Once again, much like the literature found using J-STOR, the postmodern presidency is used in passing, with little to no explanation as to its origins or setting. In Pious’s case, there is no frame of reference for the idea of the postmodern presidency. He uses the term lightly, with minimal attempts to establish a definition or conceptualization for future research.

Appearing in the Spring 1992 issue of Congress & the Presidency, Joseph Pika’s and Norman Thomas’s article, “The Presidency Since Mid-Century” examines the transformation of the presidency over the second half of the twentieth century. Beginning with Richard Neustadt’s assessment of the presidency in 1960, Pika and Thomas evaluate various changes that have marked the institution over the last fifty years. “Of particular interest are discussions of the presidency’s intensified relationship with the public, the so-called ‘postmodern’ presidency.”\textsuperscript{95} Alluding to the fact that most scholars have accepted the notion of the modern and traditional presidencies, the authors examine whether the emergence of a so-called

postmodern presidency has changed the face of presidential governance or scholarship.

Most scholars have accepted a distinction between the “modern presidency” and its antecedent, the “traditional presidency,” with Franklin D. Roosevelt standing as the dividing line. But just as this analytic convention has undergone increasing challenge from those reexamining the presidency’s first century and a half, so too there has emerged the suggestion that the presidency has moved into a distinctive “postmodern” era consistent with changes in the domestic and international environments.96

From this, the authors ask how the presidency has changed since mid-century and whether new ideas regarding presidential power and leadership, including the emergence of a postmodern presidential epoch, have any merit.

After discussing various ideas related to the presidency since mid-century, including those of Samuel Kernell and Theodore Lowi and comparing them to those of Neustadt, Pika and Thomas briefly address the postmodern presidency. While the authors find some merit in portions of Rose’s work, they are reluctant to accept the notion that a postmodern presidential epoch has emerged, thus altering the understanding of the modern presidency. In the end, Pika and Thomas conclude, “neither Rose nor Barilleaux directly addresses ‘post-modernism’ as it has emerged as a full-blown approach in philosophy, aesthetics, and literature. Thus the term is inappropriately applied to the presidency, at least at this time.”97 In effect, upon reexamining the work of Rose and Barilleaux and questioning the existence of the idea of a postmodern presidency as a viable presidential era, Pika and Thomas conclude that the contemporary presidency continues to operate much like it did half a century ago.

“Postpresidential Influence in the Postmodern Era,” written by Thomas Schaller and Thomas Williams, focuses on the influence exerted by former presidents on the American public.95

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96 Pika and Thomas, 30.
political system. The authors examine the postpresidency, with a special focus on postmodern ex-presidents.\textsuperscript{98} In the article, Schaller and Williams contend that “opportunities to exercise postpresidential power are greater than ever and may be expanding.”\textsuperscript{99} This expansion in the ability of former presidents to influence the political system is directly related to the postmodern era. While Schaller and Williams do not directly define the postmodern presidency, they conclude that the contemporary political environment, or the postmodern period, is strongly related to postpresidential influence.

The increasing demands of campaigning and fundraising, the number of foreign policy novices winning the presidency and globalization of American diplomacy, the need for sizeable and sophisticated presidential staffs, and the ability to use electronic and published media as an “ex-bully pulpit”—these developments provide postmodern ex-presidents expansive and expanding opportunities to exercise influence in American politics.\textsuperscript{100}

In effect, the political conditions of the postmodern period serve as the perfect backdrop for postpresidential influence on the American political system.

Despite being an integral part of the article, Schaller and Williams fail to adequately define the postmodern presidency, applying the term postmodern to the presidency as though a commonly used definition exists. Possessing more influence and power than their predecessors, postmodern ex-presidents are said to hold increasing power in both domestic and international affairs. However, beyond labeling the postmodern ex-presidents as Nixon through Clinton, Schaller and Williams do little to further the conceptualization of the postmodern presidency as a legitimate and important concept in the field of presidential

\textsuperscript{97} Pika and Thomas, 37.
\textsuperscript{98} “Though there is some dispute about who is the first postmodern president, we prefer Rose’s (1991) distinction of Carter as the first postmodern president, making the two former presidents alive at Carter’s inauguration—Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford—the first postmodern ex-presidents.”
\textsuperscript{100} Schaller and Williams, 196.
studies. While they cite Richard Rose in a footnote, referring to the onset of the postmodern era, the authors do not find it necessary to explain the origins of the postmodern presidency. As a result, in the same mold as the majority of scholarship since 1988 that refers to a postmodern presidency, the concept is taken as a given and, in turn, used to provide a setting for more explicit work related to the American presidency.

Conclusion

In the fifteen years since Rose and Barilleaux first introduced the idea of the postmodern presidency, the concept has appeared sporadically in the political science journal literature. The concept has failed to become incorporated into the discipline. Overall, references to the postmodern presidency are scarce and when the term is used, further discussion of its delineation, framework, and timeframe is generally absent. At no point is the postmodern presidency the primary focus of an article or the author’s research. Instead, the term is used more lightly as a setting for more detailed research focusing on the presidency. Moreover, the concept of the postmodern presidency is virtually always referred to in passing, treated as though the definition or conceptualization is common knowledge. Examination of an array of general political science as well as presidency-specific journal literature suggests that the postmodern presidency is virtually non-existent. As a result, the idea of a postmodern presidency serves, at best, as a mere footnote in contemporary journal literature dealing with the presidency.
Chapter 5
The Postmodern Presidency in Undergraduate Courses

After examining specialized presidency journals along with the more general political science journal literature, it becomes apparent that the idea of the postmodern presidency has not gained significant attention. Since Rose and Barilleaux first introduced the term in the late 1980s, it has rarely been used. In order to further explore the influence of the postmodern concept, an examination of undergraduate presidency syllabi as well as presidency textbooks was conducted as a means of gaining a better understanding of the usage as well as the prevalence of the term. By exploring the use of the postmodern presidency in undergraduate teaching in conjunction with presidential scholarship, I sought a more thorough understanding of the concept’s viability. Moreover, by examining course syllabi and textbooks, it can be determined whether past scholarship on the postmodern presidency has influenced teaching and, more importantly, to what extent the concept has been incorporated into the teaching of the presidency.

Undergraduate Presidency Syllabi

Utilizing rankings of political science Ph.D. programs provided by *U.S. News and World Report* (1998), syllabi from undergraduate presidency courses taught in sixty political science departments were examined as a means of determining the prevalence of the concept of the postmodern presidency.\(^\text{101}\) By examining the syllabi of selected undergraduate presidency courses for mentions of the postmodern presidency, a general acceptance or lack

\(^{101}\) For a full list of the fifty-nine programs provided by *U.S. News and World Report*, see Appendix II.
thereof may be identified. In doing so, questions about the usefulness of the concept may also be explored. Are any of the dimensions of the postmodern presidency being taught in presidency courses? If so, in what form is the concept being used? Is it presented as a presidential epoch, to identify the presidency of Bill Clinton, or to explain a social or cultural period overlying the modern presidency? Given that different versions of the postmodern presidency concept have been incorporated into presidential studies sporadically over the past two decades, it is necessary to determine whether presidency scholars are using the term in their classrooms or if the very idea of the postmodern presidency is without an audience.

Overall, of the sixty departments examined, fifty-four offered courses on the U.S. presidency. Of those, I was unable to locate twelve syllabi. As a result, a total of forty-two syllabi from undergraduate presidency courses were examined for evidence of the postmodern presidency. In addition, references to the modern presidency were noted as a means of comparison. Examining the syllabi revealed that only five contained a reference to the postmodern presidency. By comparison, twenty-three syllabi contained some mention of the modern presidency. In effect, only 11% of the syllabi referenced the postmodern presidency, while 55% referenced the modern era of the presidency. Although such data should be treated with care since most undergraduate presidency courses were not included, these numbers aid in making a substantive conclusion: the postmodern presidency is not a prevalent concept in these presidency courses, and it has not been incorporated into undergraduate teaching. Meanwhile, the idea of the modern presidency remains a staple in undergraduate presidency courses.

Despite the low number of syllabi that refer to the postmodern presidency, it is also

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102 For a detailed list of the syllabi examined and the results, see Appendix III.
important to examine the general use and direction of the concept in these particular undergraduate courses. The syllabus for “The Presidency and the Executive Branch,” taught by Professor Irwin Morris at the University of Maryland, briefly mentions the postmodern presidency in the general course outline. Although there is no specific reading linked to the concept, under the heading “development of the presidency” Morris lists the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern presidencies as three stages in the evolution of the office. While no other details can be ascertained given the limited nature of syllabus design, at the very least, Morris’s recognition of the concept of a postmodern presidency is evidence that the concept is being applied to the presidency in this particular course. Moreover, Morris’s use of the concept in terms of era construction follows the work of scholars such as Rose and Barilleaux, who linked ideas of a postmodern presidency to a specific presidential epoch.

At Syracuse University, in “The Modern Presidency,” taught by Professor Margaret Thompson Flusche, the postmodern presidency is given attention during a chronological treatment of the presidency. Listed in the syllabus as “The Meaning(s) of ‘Watergate’: Toward a Post-Modern Presidency,” Thompson Flusche sets aside one class period to discuss the postmodern presidency. Attaching the onset of the postmodern presidency to Watergate, Thompson Flusche takes a page from Rose, who also partially linked the origins of the postmodern presidency to Watergate. Once again, while it is not possible to draw any further conclusions, the instructor’s attention to the postmodern presidency as part of the development of the institution and its connection to Watergate provides students some sense of the general direction and background of the concept.

In addition to using Steven Schier’s edited work, *The Postmodern Presidency*, Professor Peri Arnold pays attention to the idea of Bill Clinton as a postmodern president in
his course on “Presidential Leadership” at the University of Notre Dame. Devoting three class periods to the topic, Arnold uses many of the essays in Schier’s edited volume to study Clinton as a possible postmodern president. Since Arnold is one of the contributing authors of *The Postmodern Presidency*, it is not surprising that he would devote attention to the topic. Overall, it is impossible to gauge exactly how the postmodern presidency is treated, but the syllabus does show that the postmodern presidency in this case is taught with the second understanding of the postmodern presidency in mind, centering on the presidency of Bill Clinton and individual postmodern characteristics, rather than focusing on the postmodern presidency as a specific presidential era. As a whole, Arnold devotes extended attention to the idea of a postmodern presidency, as the concept is a notable part of the overall course outline.

In her course, “The American Presidency,” Professor Marie Gottschalk utilizes the work of Richard Rose to supplement a section of her course, which she labels “The ‘Myth’ of the Modern President. Political vs. Secular Time.” Recommending that students read chapters four and five of Rose’s 1991 book, entitled “Widening the View from the Oval Office” and “Resources and Constraints of Government,” Gottschalk evidently uses the readings to present an alternative to the theory of the modern presidency. Beyond referring to Rose’s book, Gottschalk does not use the concept of the postmodern presidency in her syllabus. Furthermore, given that Rose’s book is listed as “recommended” rather than “required” reading, one might infer that the idea of the postmodern presidency is not a primary concern of the course. Overall, the concept of the postmodern presidency is given very limited attention if any, making it difficult to draw conclusions as to the concept’s usage and acceptance. Similar to many other references to the postmodern presidency, while the concept is acknowledged, it serves more as a footnote rather than as a substantive aspect of the overall
study of the presidency.

In the overview of her course syllabus, “The American Presidency,” Professor Jeanne Clarke writes, “the course is further focused on the presidential election of 2000. That problematic election provides us with a good perspective in which to view the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘post-modern’ presidency.” Concentrating more heavily on the idea of the postmodern presidency than any other course in the sample, Clarke not only uses the concept as a backdrop for discussing the 2000 presidential election, but also recognizes the postmodern presidency as a period in the evolution of the presidency. In doing so, she follows Rose’s lead, dating the period of the postmodern presidency from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush.

In addition, an study guide for the final exam attached to the syllabus includes several points center on the establishment and existence of a postmodern presidential era. Specifically, as part of a question dealing with the president’s role in the economy, Clarke asks that students be able to “explain the post-modern president’s influence over the nation’s economy, especially its fiscal and monetary policies.” Moreover, she devotes an entire essay topic to the idea of the postmodern presidency, asking, “what is the ‘post-modern’ presidency?” As part of this broader question, Clarke also asks, “how does the post-modern presidency differ from previous presidential regimes? How is it similar? What is the role of the media, especially television and the White House reporters/Press Secretary relationship, in perpetuating the post-modern presidency?” The construct of the postmodern presidential era is discussed extensively in Clarke’s course. At various points, it is not only a point of reference, but also serves as the primary subject of study. Overall, Clarke’s use of the postmodern presidency, while rare when compared to the entire sample, provides some substantive
evidence that the idea of a postmodern presidency continues to be discussed and applied in undergraduate presidency classrooms, particularly as part of the era/evolution construct.

In general, the syllabi examined suggest that the idea of the postmodern presidency is largely ignored in undergraduate presidency courses. The notion of the postmodern presidency first introduced by Rose and Barilleaux and subsequently used by scholars such as Schier, Miroff, Parry-Giles, and Parry-Giles has had little effect on how the presidency is taught, at least in the courses offered in the Ph.D.-granting departments considered here. While the “modern” era construct continues to be used to describe the ongoing development of the presidency, the idea of the postmodern presidency is generally without an audience. Overall, following a pattern similar to presidency scholarship, the results of the syllabi exploration reveal that work on the postmodern presidency has neither been accepted nor advanced in undergraduate presidency courses.

Presidency Textbooks

As a means of supplementing the examination of presidency syllabi, an examination of presidency textbooks for the use of the postmodern presidency was also conducted. By looking specifically at presidency textbooks as an educational tool, further data can be collected about the prevalence and acceptance of the term. In examining seven textbooks, any sign of the postmodern presidency was taken into account, looking specifically for its overall presence, direction, and depth of discussion. The limited number of textbooks examined is largely due to the overall low number of presidency textbooks in circulation. As a result, examining these seven textbooks provides a sample with which to explore the use of the

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103 A list of the seven textbooks examined can be found in the References.
concept of the postmodern presidency. Like the examination of undergraduate syllabi, an examination of presidency textbooks provides a more thorough understanding of if and how the postmodern presidency is being used in presidential studies.

After examining the textbooks for any sign of the postmodern presidency, it was found that three of the seven contained some reference to the concept. By contrast, six of the seven textbooks discussed the modern presidency. Overall, when compared to the journal literature and the undergraduate syllabi, the idea of the postmodern presidency is much more prominent in presidency textbooks, appearing in over forty percent of the textbooks sampled. While the concept is not given overwhelming attention in any instance, it is nonetheless treated as a legitimate aspect of presidential studies. For the most part, it is the work of Rose that is incorporated into presidency textbooks to describe the postmodern presidency. For this reason, the concept is primarily used in its original form, treated as a possible new era in the development of the presidency. Rose’s framework for the emergence of a postmodern presidency has been incorporated into presidency textbooks and subsequently used as an aid in the teaching of the American presidency.

In *The Changing American Presidency: New Perspectives on Presidential Power*, the postmodern presidency is addressed in the briefest sense. Used only once, the postmodern presidency is defined as “Richard Rose’s idea that the United States is no longer capable of leading the world on its own, but now is but one of the world leaders. The idea is that the presidency, in this age, is constrained by various resource limitations.” Other than recognizing Rose’s use of the term to describe an era of the presidency, the concept does not elicit further explanation. While the idea of the modern presidency is used extensively in this
particular textbook, the concept of the postmodern presidency is given limited attention, with no commentary as to the concept’s numerous definitions over the past two decades. In effect, while the concept is acknowledged, it garners minimal attention, serving in this case as a footnote rather than a legitimate aspect of presidential development.

In his textbook entitled *The Presidency*, Richard Pious gives the idea of the postmodern presidency extended attention, focusing on the concept as a possible new era in the development of the presidency. Citing Rose’s work on the subject, Pious asserts that the postmodern presidency centers around the idea that international affairs now affect the success or failure of a president in ways similar to domestic affairs. “The modern president led by gaining public support for his policies: the postmodern president faces an international as well as a domestic audience, and each may want different things.”  

After providing a definition of the postmodern presidency based largely on the work of Richard Rose, Pious offers a critique of the postmodern presidency theory. In contrast to Rose’s views, Pious asserts that “if there is a postmodern presidency, it may not fit the description of a weakened president presiding over a weakened United States.” Although Pious is careful not to completely reject the idea of a burgeoning postmodern presidential era, his comments can be characterized as apprehensive. In fact, Pious advances an alternative viewpoint, stating that “in international crises, the real ‘postmodern’ presidency may yet prove to be an enlarged rather than diminished version of the modern presidency.” Reacting more favorably to the thinking of Barilleaux, while unwilling to make a final judgement on the existence of a

106 Pious, 76.
107 Pious, 76.
postmodern presidency, Pious presents the topic in a relatively detached form, leaving it up to
the reader to weigh the ideas that might signal an emerging postmodern presidential epoch.

Under the heading, “The Postmodern Presidency and the End of the Modern
Presidency?” Jeffrey Cohen and David Nice discuss the concept in their textbook The
Presidency. Also using the work of Rose and Barilleaux as the grounding for their discussion
of the concept, Cohen and Nice write: “two trends seem most important if a postmodern
presidency is a likelihood.”108 According to Cohen and Nice, the two major factors related to
the emergence of a postmodern presidency are the end of the Cold War and the end of the era
of big government. In essence, the end of the Cold War has eliminated s major source of
presidential power and authority, while the end of big government has the potential to alter
the president’s role in policy making and domestic agenda setting. As a result, while
searching for new avenues of leadership and power, contemporary presidents may be faced
with an emerging new presidential framework. Overall, Cohen and Nice are hesitant to make
any solid generalizations as to the reality of a new postmodern presidential era, as is evident
in their heading, which questions the very existence of a postmodern presidency. However,
they do treat the idea of a postmodern presidency as a legitimate question, asking “if
international politics no longer provide a dependable justification for the modern presidency
and if big, new domestic programs are no longer possible, what is the need for a modern-style
presidency?”109 Although the authors do not provide a definitive answer, they do contend that
“the changing international and domestic environment may have altered the presidency and its
role in the political system.”110 Overall, drawing on ideas from Rose and Barilleaux, Cohen

109 Cohen and Nice, 62.
110 Cohen and Nice, 62.
and Nice treat the postmodern presidency as more than a footnote in the overall study of the presidency, providing evidence that the presidency “may” have entered a postmodern era.

Conclusion

As a whole, the postmodern presidency construct is more prevalent in presidency textbooks than in any of the other arenas explored in this study. While the majority of those textbooks that include a discussion of the postmodern presidency do not go into great length or recognize it as an established part of presidential scholarship, at the very least the concept is recognized and questioned. Overall, much of the writing pertaining to the concept centers on the work of Rose and Barilleaux and the idea of the postmodern presidency as an era in the development of the presidency. As a result, unlike presidential scholarship in journals and undergraduate syllabi, the ideas of Rose and Barilleaux continue to be discussed in presidency textbooks. Nevertheless, despite being acknowledged, the idea of the postmodern presidency receives limited attention within presidency textbooks. In no instance is the postmodern presidency regarded as a “major” factor in the development of the presidency. Once again, it serves more as a footnote rather than as an influential aspect in the teaching of the U.S. presidency.

Given that the idea of the postmodern presidency has been virtually nonexistent in presidential scholarship over the last fifteen years, the fact that the concept is used at all in presidency courses is significant, providing evidence that the concept continues to be discussed and applied to the presidency. The vast majority of references to the postmodern presidency in the undergraduate syllabi and textbooks examined cite the work of Rose, thus using the term to describe an era in the development of the presidency. In contrast, the second
interpretation of the postmodern presidency, which centers on individual postmodern traits and the presidency of Bill Clinton, is virtually nonexistent. By the same token, at no point is the postmodern presidency connected to a sense of the hyperreal, as seen in the work of Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles. With that said, justification can be found as to why this has been the case. The ideas of Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles are quite new and therefore may take time to be incorporated into the overall teaching of the presidency. Moreover, Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles are communications scholars. Writing about Bill Clinton and the postmodern presidency from outside the discipline may have an effect on why their work is not used in political science textbooks and syllabi. In the end, while not extensive by any means, the idea of the postmodern presidency is much more prevalent in undergraduate teaching, used more often in presidency syllabi and textbooks than in presidency scholarship.
First introduced to describe a new era in the evolution of the presidency, analysis of the postmodern presidency has been anything but consistent. Over the last fifteen years, the concept has been used to signal the onset of a new presidential era, illustrating both the decline of the institution as well as its rebirth, as well as to describe the individual characteristics of Bill Clinton and the “hyperreal” environment that surrounds the contemporary presidency. Overall, it seems as though almost every time the term postmodern is connected to the study of presidency, it describes something new and different. The postmodern presidency refers to a number of different ideas, resulting in the creation of an ambiguous concept, as one definition can sometimes be the antonym of another. As a result, the concept of the postmodern presidency is virtually non-existent in presidential scholarship and when it is used, it is treated as little more than a sidenote. As a whole, in the fifteen years since the term was first introduced, a common definition has never been established. Despite this, the term continues to be used, as is evident in the two recent works that connect it to the Clinton presidency.

The initial analyses dealing with a postmodern presidency, which used the term chronologically to explain the onset of a new presidential era, have been virtually ignored over the past fifteen years. While Rose’s work continues to be referenced in various articles and classrooms, it is rarely seen as significant reasoning to describe a new presidential era. For the most part, Rose’s notion of a postmodern presidency is primarily mentioned in passing, gaining acknowledgment but failing to receive any type of extended attention.
Barilleaux’s work on the postmodern presidency appears even less frequently in presidential scholarship and teaching. The reason for this can be attributed to numerous things, but given that neither Rose’s nor Barilleaux’s work was held in high regard from the onset, it is easy to see how their ideas have become a sidenote in the study of the presidency. In each case, both Rose and Barilleaux described a postmodern presidency, but ultimately failed to define it. In a review essay in the *Western Political Quarterly*, Craig Rimmerman reflected on the work of Rose and Barilleaux dealing with the postmodern presidency.

Two recent books on the presidency suggest that recent changes in the office of the presidency and what it means to be president are so great that we have moved into a third major epoch in the development of the presidential power—the “postmodern” era. Both works attempt to outline the nature of these changes and persuade the reader that if we are to better understand the institution of the presidency, we must evaluate the institution with this newly recognized paradigm in mind, … [but] they fail to make a convincing case on behalf of the “postmodern” paradigm.\footnote{Rimmerman, Craig A. “The ‘Post-Modern’ Presidency. A New Presidential Epoch?: A Review Essay.” *The Western Political Quarterly* (Volume 44, Issue 1, March 1991), 222.}

In the end, Rimmerman rejects the ideas of both Rose and Barilleaux, stating that neither makes a convincing case for the emergence of a new presidential era. Given the track record of the concept, it is safe to say that the vast majority of presidential scholars have seen Rose’s and Barilleaux’s ideas concerning the postmodern presidency in the same light. In short, the work of the two has not been incorporated into presidential studies due mainly to the fact that their ideas, while considerably different, fail to persuasively define a new presidential era.

Making no reference to these earlier works, more recent analyses of the idea of a postmodern presidency have focused primarily on the presidency of Bill Clinton. Rather than concentrating on the grand notion of a new presidential epoch, this work applies a more philosophical notion of postmodernism as a basis for understanding and evaluating Clinton’s
presidency. For authors such as Schier, Miroff, Arnold, Parry-Giles, and Parry-Giles, the postmodern presidency is captured by personal characteristics and the contemporary environment that surrounds the office of the presidency. In effect, these scholars compare the perceived image and elusiveness of Bill Clinton to the evident “reality” of his character and leadership. In other words, taking a page from literary postmodernists, more recent scholarship on the postmodern presidency has centered on the notion that the postmodern presidency is defined by the obscurity of Clinton’s character as well as by the constantly changing environment of contemporary politics. Very different from the original ideas of the postmodern presidency that centered on the changing evolution of the presidency as an institution, more recent work on the concept has leaned more toward describing the flexibility of Clinton’s personality and leadership.

Given that the analyses dealing with Bill Clinton as a postmodern president are relatively new, it is difficult to judge their extended impact. While the ideas of authors such as Schier, Miroff, Arnold, Parry-Giles, and Parry-Giles are similar in some respects, there continues to be a lack of cohesiveness that binds the idea of a postmodern presidency together. However, viewed in conjunction with earlier work on the concept, more recent analyses of the postmodern presidency have done little to counteract the ambiguity that surrounds the concept. In essence, more recent scholarship on the idea of the postmodern presidency has demonstrated that while the concept continues to be used, a common conceptualization is still absent.

Overall, despite being used occasionally in presidency syllabi and mentioned briefly in presidency textbooks, the original ideas of the postmodern presidency can be classified as footnotes in the study of the presidency. There has been no scholarship over the past decade
that has focused on the postmodern presidency as a new era in the development of the presidency. Instead, over the last few years, the postmodern presidency has been used in different ways to describe the Clinton presidency and the contemporary environment that surrounds the institution. As a whole, fifteen years after the term was first introduced into presidential studies, the term continues to be mired in ambiguity. With every publication, a new definition and framework accompanies the concept. In effect, the concept of the postmodern presidency is redefined in every instance. The postmodern presidency as described by Rose is entirely different from the ideas set forth by Barilleaux, whose ideas are much different than those of Stark. Moreover, Schier’s and Miroff’s conceptions of the postmodern presidency have virtually nothing in common with previous work on the subject. Finally, the work of Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, while similar to the thinking of Miroff in some respects, is yet another example of the numerous definitions of the postmodern presidency. While the postmodern presidency as a concept continues to be used in presidential research, none of the analyses outlined in this work have been advanced beyond their own pages. In short, the idea of the postmodern presidency has meant something new to virtually every author that incorporates the term into his or her writing. As a result, no clear definition of the postmodern presidency can be ascertained, resulting in a continued sense of ambiguity that surrounds the concept.

In my view, the idea of the postmodern presidency as a distinct era in the evolution of the presidency contains little merit due to the array of competing ideas that have come to be associated with the term, particularly when one accounts for their overall inaccuracies. This alone aids in explaining its insignificance in the overall study of the presidency. While the modern construct continues to be used to describe the evolution and current state of the
presidency, a postmodern presidential epoch has evidently not developed, and it has therefore failed to become a significant aspect of presidential scholarship. Interestingly, despite the initial failures in using the concept postmodern to describe the presidency, the concept continues to appear in the study of the presidency. Now instead of Carter or Reagan, the postmodern presidency is epitomized by the presidency of Bill Clinton. Using the concept as a means of describing the elusiveness of Clinton’s character and the contemporary presidential environment, this line of postmodern presidency scholarship has its roots in the philosophical notion of postmodernism. As a result, at face value, more recent analyses of the postmodern presidency seem to hold more value than those of the past, describing aspects of Clinton’s constantly evolving character as well as the sporadic nature of the environment that encompasses the contemporary presidency. However, use of the term postmodern to describe aspects of the presidency has been and continues to be based on using a catchy title, rather than on the substantive value of the term. Always dependent on which version of the postmodern presidency is available, a different meaning is attached to the concept at every turn, resulting in a state of ambiguity that has not been shaken from the idea in over fifteen years of analysis.
Appendix 1

Political Science Journals Searched in J-STOR

   Midwest Journal of Political Science 1957-1972
3. American Political Science Review 1906-1999
   Far Eastern Survey 1935-1961
   Memorandum (Institute of Pacific Relations, American Council) 1932-1934
   International Affairs Review Supplement 1940-1943
   Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs 1926-1930
   Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs 1922-1926
    Background 1962-1966
    Background on World Politics 1957-1962
    Conflict Resolution 1957
16. Legislative Studies Quarterly 1976-1997
   MERIP Middle East Report 1986-1988
   MERIP Reports 1971-1985
    Western Political Quarterly 1948-1992
23. Proceedings of the American Political Science Association 1904-1913
   PS 1968-1987
26. World Politics 1948-1995
Appendix II


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112 Given that Claremont Graduate School is a graduate institution, syllabi from two of the undergraduate Claremont Colleges, Pitzer College and Claremont McKenna, were examined.