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Charles O. Jones. *Passages to the Presidency: From Campaigning to Governing.* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998. xii + 224 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8157-4713-0; $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8157-4714-7.

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The Transition Game

Charles O. Jones is one of political science's most knowledgeable and astute observers of United States political institutions, especially the President and the Congress. In his current work, *Passages to the Presidency: From Campaigning to Governing*, he brings his formidable analytical talents to bear upon an often neglected topic: the transition period between the date a new president is elected to office and the date at which he is sworn in.

In this well-written and insightful book, Jones argues that how a newly elected president handles the transition "from campaigning to governing" can have a significant impact upon the success or failure of his presidency. More specifically, although a good transition does not ensure a successful presidency, a bad transition is likely to presage an unsuccessful presidency.

A good transition has a number of distinguishing characteristics. It begins early (even before the election) and it moves quickly. Appointments are made that are consonant with campaign themes, and emphasis is given to the quick identification and appointment of White House staff and to learning how the White House and Washington work. Lastly, relations with the press are carefully managed so that the president-elect can capitalize on the fact that the transition is the time when the press is most favorably disposed toward him.

Jones focuses his attention on four transitions–Nixon (1968), Carter (1976), Reagan (1980) and Clinton (1992). In each instance, a president elected for the first time replaced a president of the opposite party. Jones identifies the characteristics of successful transitions and analyzes these four transitions drawing primarily upon interviews that he conducted with people who had participated in one or more of these transitions and with a group of Washington reporters with extensive experience covering the presidency. He concludes that the Reagan transition was the best among the four, the Clinton transition the worst (not just among the four but probably ever), and that Carter's was slightly better than Clinton's and Nixon's almost as good as Reagan's. Although Clinton's transition failed by the standard criteria enunciated by his informants, Jones suggests that this transition may have been influenced by a movement toward campaigning as a permanent feature of governing. In this new model, the distinction between campaigning and governing that underlies the conventional model is less clear.

As this summary suggests, more attention is accorded to Clinton than to the other three presidents, and most of what Jones' informants have to say about Clinton is quite critical. This is in part because the interviews were conducted in 1995 and 1996, a time when Clinton's experience was freshest in everyone's minds and his presidency was being written off as a failure in light of the 1994 congressional elections. It also should be noted that the list of people with whom Jones spoke leans heavily toward the Washington establishment–a group that insists on referring to Washington as a "town" and has never viewed Bill Clinton as one of its favorite citizens.

Nonetheless, many of their criticisms ring true. Clinton knew little about how Washington worked and surrounded himself with amateurs who knew even less than he did. The president and his circle did not seem to recognize the need to move from a campaign mode (at which they excelled) to a governing mode. They seemed not to have even thought about let alone answered the question of what they wanted to accomplish with the office that they had worked so hard to win, and what needed to be done both organizationally and through appointments if their goals were to be attained. Most mystifying, a group that had so skillfully understood and handled the press during a one year campaign somehow managed to alienate them during the transition by ignoring their legitimate needs and concerns.

Singled out for particular scorn by several observers was Clinton's concern for diversity ("an administration that looks like America"). He is criticized for allowing this issue to become the dominant story of the transition, for allowing it to slow the pace of appointments, and for the several well-publicized fiascos that resulted from it. Although certainly this aspect of the transition could have been better handled, the critique is also a bit unfair. A commitment to diversity was certainly a part of the Clinton campaign and so his efforts in this respect were consonant with his campaign themes. Also, creating diversity where it hasn't existed before is always a difficult process, whether in government, universities, or newspaper offices. And this critique does come from Jones' informants, a group that seems to include not one person of color and relatively few women. The comment by several interviewees characterizing Clinton's quest for diversity as "bean counting" borders on the offensive.

It is also a bit disconcerting that the Reagan transition and by implication his presidency is singled out as a model for future presidents. Jones' informants praise Reagan for concentrating on a very narrow agenda, delegating nearly all responsibility to his staff, and absenting himself as much as possible from the transition process. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that there is an implicit preference for a minimal and disengaged president such as Reagan, rather than a president deeply involved in the politics and policy of his office, such as Clinton or Carter.

More to the point, Jones and his informants do not seem to offer a model for an effective transition by an activist president, especially one with little Washington experience. Indeed, the implicit message of the book is that given the complexity of the Washington community and a system for electing presidents which seems to have developed a bias in favor of Washington outsiders and masters of media campaign techniques, successful transitions and by implication successful presidencies will be increasingly rare. Alternatively, as Jones wisely suggests, we may need to change our understanding of what constitutes a successful transition and perhaps a successful presidency in light of the movement toward the incorporation of campaign techniques into the process of government.

Nonetheless, there is much in the conventional model that is still relevant and much in this book to recommend it to a wide variety of readers. Certainly, it is must reading for every presidential candidate and his or her closest advisors. They will find a discussion of steps that should be taken and errors that should be avoided in those few weeks right after an election that will enhance the new president's prospects no matter how he conceives of the office. And political scientists will find Passages to the Presidency indispensable as they seek to broaden their understanding of past presidencies and therefore of the American presidency.

This review was commissioned for H-Pol by Lex Renda <renlex@uwm.edu>

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