



The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House

Bob Woodward

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The Agenda is a day-by-day, often minute-by-minute account of Bill Clinton's White House. Drawing on hundreds of interviews, confidential internal memos, diaries, and meeting notes, Woodward shows how Clinton and his advisers grappled with questions of lasting importance -- the federal deficit, health care, welfare reform, taxes, jobs. One of the most intimate portraits of a sitting president ever published, this edition includes an afterword on Clinton's efforts to save his presidency.

The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House Details

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From Reader Review **The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House** for online ebook

Patricia says

Interesting and enlightening. Review to come.

Rusty Henrichsen says

A look at the poorly organized Clinton White House in the early days of his administration. Since Woodward is part of the establishment media which some folks accuse of only publishing wonderful things and whitewashing the problems of the Democrats, one would expect this to be a cheerleading book. Well, it's not! Woodward describes Clinton as wanting to engage in endless debates and being slow to make a decision - this was quite frustrating to many of his aides with Washington experience. He is also pictured as having fits of temper - yelling, screaming, accusing, etc. Sometimes action was only taken after Hillary stepped in and made assignments and threw out some of the most ridiculous arguments. Maybe it's a good thing that we got a "two-fer".

I guess it really describes Clinton's early education of how Washington works (or doesn't).

Takaharu Saito says

This book describes how the budget and tax package in 1993 went through the houses. The negotiations defeated Clinton's idea of expenditure expansion and Gore's of environmental regulations. The book made it easy to understand the power relationship of the president and the houses.

Erik Graff says

I didn't vote for Clinton, but still expected more from his administration than it delivered--national health care and a conservationist energy policy at best, an honorable international profile at least. This insider representation of the Clinton White House did not improve my opinion of the President, but it did heighten my impression of the Vice-President, Al Gore, betrayed by his boss and ineffectual as he was.

Jeff says

This in my estimation is the best of the Bob Woodward "Inside the White House" books. *The Agenda* strikes me as very even-handed, usually Woodward books are used by one set of subjects (those who talked to Woodward and as a result come off looking good) to settle scores against others (those who snubbed Woodward), that seems not to have happened here. I also have to admit that it pleases me greatly that the people within the Clinton White House that I had a soft-spot for (Leon Panetta, George Stephanopoulos, and

a few others) come out largely unscathed and the most contemptible of the bunch (David Gergen comes readily to mind) are shown to be fatuous dolts.

Jonah says

dug this book out of the stacks to learn something about these clintonite characters coming to washington...and for that its great - Hillary, Leon, theyre all here. this book is also instruction as to how not to organize a presidential transition and enter the first year of your first term.

but...once you get through about a quarter of it, you get the idea! the rest is just the same budget battles fought again and again. also, what happen to foreign policy? like a disaster called "Somalia"?

a good character sketch of Bill Clinton - useful for comparison against his successors.

Caroline says

Only Bob Woodward can make a year's worth of economic planning seem like a thriller.

Brett says

This book details Bill Clinton's efforts to get a budget passed in 1993, his first year in office. The book was written in 1994, so it's interesting to read a contemporaneous account of a historical period. I enjoyed reading it and seeing how the process worked and how both Congressman and Senators make deals and sacrifice this for that and prioritize what they're willing to fight for. It was frustrating to read how watered down legislation can get, just so something gets passed. It was interesting to read how Al Gore wanted an energy tax that would help curb carbon emissions but that was sacrificed as part of the negotiations. And here we are, 16 years later, still worrying about carbon emissions and whether we should do something about them. Although at one point in the book it's mentioned that Clinton wouldn't be able to balance the budget, even if he had a second term in office. Yet at the end of eight years he actually left office with a budget surplus!

Brandan says

The Agenda is a look back on the first year of President Clinton's life in the White House as reported by Bob Woodward. Despite Woodward's role as a reporter and editor on The Washington Post since 1971, the style of writing he uses is that of a professional novelist. This is what adds on to the interest of The Agenda. With a "compulsive, Grisham-like" feel to the novel, Woodward manages to make signing a bill sound interesting (New York Times review of The Agenda).

The Agenda starts out with a governor wondering whether or not he has what it takes to be the President of the United States. His wife gives him encouragement, and decides to go for it. He is, of course, Bill Clinton. Despite the fact that we know what happens from there (even someone who lived under a rock could figure out what happens from there, the book is sub-titled "Inside the Clinton White House after all), Woodward

sets up Bill & Hillary Clinton like brand new characters that we are eager to meet and get to know. He also takes us on his journey to the White House as well. We even experience Clinton's journey to the White House. The stress of campaigning, the fear of rejection, the drama of the race, Woodward brings us there with every vivid detail intact to the point where you forget you know that Clinton makes it as the President. Again, Woodward's brilliant writing style makes Clinton a real character that you care about and want to achieve his goals. Standard news reporters tend to make the target sound like an unidentifiable ruler, no different than any other previous ruler. Luckily, this is avoided by Woodward. Clinton is a real man. He, of course, does make it into office, and we are treated to more of the real-life drama that Clinton faced. Whether it be economic issues (the federal deficit in particular), civil rights, taxes, you name it, Woodward brings us through it all. It's also not even Clinton eyes that Woodward provides vision through. All of Clinton's economic team, chief of staff, senior policy adviser, counselor, consultants, senate, house of representatives, and of course, his Vice President Al Gore are featured, as well as then First Lady Hillary Clinton. Every perception on every social and economic plan is present and we really learn just how much blood, sweat, and tears go into making our country the way it is. From notes to memos to bills to plans, Clinton and his entire staff faced it dead on, whether it be Clinton's economic plan, health care, or even NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement, which he signed to help create jobs in America). Perhaps the one downfall of the novel is that it covers just the first year of Clinton's reign. Readers become so involved in Clinton's life (Woodward gives us some social life backgrounds to the Clintons) that we are not ready to stop reading... We want more. Even non-political majors (I would consider myself in this category) fall under the novel's spell. Early in the novel, it is established that Clinton should move away from "elitist social issues... and return to the themes of 'economic populism'" (Woodward, 13). At the time of the novel, 1992 at this point, economics were more important for the country. Some of the elitist social issues mentioned were discussed in great lengths in our class throughout the year. Among these issues were abortion and gay rights. When it came to abortion, many different scenarios were brought up and we were to decide where we fell on the political spectrum on the issue. The general consensus was that abortions should be legal, but the more conservative students said that they should only be opened to those who are truly in need. In the world today, abortion is a big issue for those in Christian faith, who feel that anything in a woman's womb is alive and has the right to live. Another of these issues has been about gay rights. Especially when President Obama recently showed his approval of gay marriage, both Washington and our own classroom began buzzing over the issue. Gay rights issues were also brought up when Obama repealed the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, allowing open homosexuals to serve in the military. This issue caused quite a controversy everywhere. In our class, we went back to the political spectrum, where most people in our class did not see any issues with gay rights, including marriage and serving in the military. However, these issues were the ones Clinton felt unnecessary to dwell on. Clinton was mostly focused on the economy, a very major issue in the world today. Our country is in great debt, and we are struggling to get back on our feet. Throughout the year, we have had many conversations on the economy and how to handle it better. We've discussed where to stop spending and where we should spend.

One of the great things about Woodward is that he does not show any type of bias. He has written works on both Democratic and Republican presidents, and he has not opened up on his political preference. In the simplest of terms, he is a journalist who reports the facts in an entertaining and often exciting way. In some ways, this can be a positive. You get the straight facts and won't face any bias facts that you can disagree with. But in some ways, that is a negative. You miss out on getting facts from a different perspective, which can be fresh and interesting. However, on this case, I praise Woodward for his non-bias writing style simply because it is not necessary in this type of literary work. This is a book about fact. The Agenda is very well written, and it certainly contains every fact you need from this most interesting one year time period. It's sure to satisfy any reader at any time.

Kelli says

This book gave me appreciation for the intense effort of Bill Clinton to balance the budget. He was the first president since LBJ to balance the budget. Some bad language. I did, however, learn that Clinton has an intense anger management problem, often exploding on his staff. He also has a kaleidoscope way of seeing all aspects of an issue, firmly believing in both and all sides. This is confusing to me and makes me ask, 'where are his principles?' Bush II, in contrast, seems to be a man of principle but is an obvious simpleton. I guess a happy medium between compromise and principles is the answer. Any comments?

Ben Sweezy says

This book is eerie for both the contemporary familiarity of its themes (healthcare, stimulus, "the economy, stupid") the foreignness of other themes (long term real interest rates that are not negative, an obsession with the discussion being almost solely about a precise \$\$\$ value of projected deficit reduction) and the omissions from the conversation (unemployment rate, number of jobs created, gdp growth, anything about the stock market).

This is no fault of woodwards--I imagine the difference in language/strategy was certainly accurate of the time. The stock market of 1993 touched many fewer American families than it did by 2000 or today. Long term interest rates are not today the bogeyman that they were in 1993...because they've managed to be (in real terms) so negligible. The fact that they've all but vanished from the insider vocabulary is a testament to how different today's macroeconomic (or at least monetary policy) picture is from 1993. And, perhaps shockingly, how much more stimulatory today's policy is.

The cast of characters is also largely familiar. So many former Clintonites remain in the public sphere that the reader of 2013 knows much more than Woodward of 1993 about some these characters--we know how Bill Clinton's presidency turns out, for one, but also the future careers of Hillary, Stephanopolous, the second lives of Gene Sperling, Larry Summers, Lew, Panetta, and others enrich the original story in retrospect. Oh, and Al Gore.

(One note/realization I had reading this was a series of misfortunes that befell Hillary Clinton during 1993 that have been forgotten in the mainstream retelling of her healthcare campaign. Multiple illnesses or deaths of family and friends certainly had an impact on her during this period. I'm not sure I've ever heard any discussion of these events when editorializing her attitude during this period.)

Karen Levine says

Classic Woodward.

Clinton's political history from mid-1991 when he decided to run for President through early 1994, by which time he had passed both a budget focused on deficit reduction and NATFA, both hard-won victories that were very controversial among Democrats. The inside scoop on who said/thought what, including Lloyd Bentsen, Hillary, James Carville, Gene Sterling, Robert Rubin, Alan Greenspan.

Benjy says

This book is incredibly relevant today as it depicts the equivalent time period we're in now in the Obama administration only with the last Democratic administration. It's fascinating to see the difference in the political environment between the two, but also the parallels. Both White Houses were dealing with a recession and the economy as their top areas of concern, but Congress was so divided then and Clinton so much less popular that he had a much harder time getting anything passed. At the time this book was seen as a big embarrassment for Clinton, and it definitely doesn't shy away from portraying his faults, most notably his hesitation in making big decisions. But reading it now, it seems like a tremendously supportive work that pushed back against Clinton's subsequent image in some liberal circles as a right-wing sellout. In the first chapters of this book you'll see the cabinet fighting tooth and nail just to get things passed like a \$16 billion stimulus plan (yes, you read that number right) and the Democrats in Congress were almost as conservative as the Republicans on economic issues. And this is before the GOP took over in 1994. Obama, with 59 much more progressive senators, complete Democratic dominance in the House, and a much larger mandate than Clinton thanks to his blowout election victory, is operating in an extremely different setting. Reading this, I can't help but be excited about the first Woodward book to come out on the Obama administration on pure entertainment grounds alone -- it's extremely well written and paced.

LINDA says

I found this book in a second hand store in summer of 2016. I thought it might give me some insight into operations in the White House, should Hillary Clinton be elected. I found the detailed narrative interesting and was struck by a couple things -- the intelligence and political thoughtfulness of Bill Clinton, the disorganization among his closest advisors and Cabinet and the boldness of Hillary. It is more than a little disheartening to learn how legislation gets mutated enroute to enactment. It was also interesting to see how unknown players can have a significant effect as parties vie for votes.

I do take some comfort from the certainty that Hillary surely must have learned alot about what NOT to do as she encamps in the White House and sets up her advisory system.

Paul says

This book is an excellent look at the inner workings of the Clinton team during its presidential run in 1992 and its first year in office in 1993. Focusing mostly on the economic debate going on within the administration and between the White House and Congress, it portrays a disorganized, frantic process which nonetheless culminates in legislative victory for Clinton. Though written in 1994, Woodward's thorough research (based mostly on interviews and White House documents made available to him at the time) and exceptional writing skills make this an excellent read even in 2009, as one can see certain parallels between what Clinton tried to accomplish then and what President Obama is working on now. If you're a political junkie or want to learn more about the Clinton Administration before the media focused on nothing but the scandals, this is a great place to start.
