By the very nature of his campaign, Barack Obama was going to have a hard time managing expectations when he got to the White House. But in the 2008 primary and general elections, his job was to get there. Which proved to be the easy part. Quite apart from the financial crisis and the recession he inherited from his predecessor, Obama has proven to be curiously disengaged and even tone deaf in office, delegating leadership of his agenda to Democrats in Congress, while his staff have often proven inept in communicating his messages to a wider public outside Washington. The candidate who was so compelling, writes Robin Sears, needs to get his mojo back by reconnecting with how he got to where he is.

Barack Obama’s campaign for the presidency was a brilliant fusion of unique ingredients. Among them was the astonishing feat of persuading tens of millions of Americans to suspend their disbelief.

Seduced by his presence, his soaring oratory and his vision, a new coalition of voters set aside concerns about his inexperience, his reputation for a certain cool querulousness, and his almost bizarre mélange of political values.

Americans said, in historic numbers, “Well, maybe he can!” Sadly, less than halfway into his first term, many of them seem now to be concluding, “Well, maybe not…”

If successful political leadership is about expectations management, the President and his advisers had signally failed long before he even won the Democratic nomination. They would respond that only by reaching for the stars could they have overcome the “inevitability” of Hillary Clinton’s nomination.

It was that stellar vision, in some of the most stunning demonstrations of the power of sweaty outdoor political oratory — even in a digital age — that enabled them to slowly grind the Clinton candidacy into submission, and then to win a greater general election victory than any since Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson. More Americans came out to see Obama in the flesh — more than 150,000 in one long weekend alone — than ever in American history.

A venerable political cliché — “those who got you there may not be whom you need to make you a success” — has come to haunt the administration. Though Obama showed creativity and courage in reaching out to Rahm Emanuel, Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates and other former opponents in building his leadership team, the core White House team remains those who were with him on the campaign trail.

The leaders of his economic team, Larry Summers at the White House Economic Council and Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner, who advised him when he was a candidate, have come in for particular attack as risk-averse conventional policy advisers and exceptionally weak communicators. At a time when the economic crisis demanded greater creativity and an exceptional ability to build confidence and support, Geithner and Summers have succeeded in uniting Wall Street, the unions, and the business press as political opponents.

The likely departure of Chief of Staff Rahm Emmanuel for a run at the Chicago mayoralty, and Defence Secretary Bob Gates into retirement, will launch a shakeup of the insiders that could be highly beneficial for a post-midterm Obama administration.

The administration’s supporters fairly observe that managing the worst financial and economic crisis in three generations was bound to weaken support for any president. But
Obama over-promised and under-performed. The stimulus package was supposed to have delivered a growing economy in time for these mid-term elections. This was to have been “the summer of recovery,” a slogan Republicans are now using to make sport of the Obama record in heavy television advertising. There was no sunny recovery this year, and the electoral damage to the Democrats will be severe.

Whether you agree with those who say “too much and too wasteful” or those who say “too little, too late” about stimulus spending matters not. By promising that his economic leadership would work where the Bush administration had failed, Obama set a threshold he will fail to meet. His September efforts to combine tax cuts and more infrastructure spending are welcome signs he understands that he needs to be seen to do more. Opinion was instantly divided, however, on whether these moves made sense or had any prospect of getting Congressional support.

There have been curious failures of grace and tone from the White House almost every month. On race, Obama has made more serious gaffes than one would have expected from a Southern Democrat of an earlier generation, first siding with the vainglorious Cornell West in a battle with local police, then permitting the attack on a dedicated black civil servant, Shirley Sherrod, by a cabinet member. Both incidents resulted in damage to Obama’s message of a postracial, inclusive presidency.

The Obama family’s choice of Hawaii, Martha’s Vineyard and the Spanish Riviera — often as guests of the super-rich — as their holiday destinations has similarly clanged badly with supporters of a president leading a nation through its most wrenching recession, as Obama himself says often, “in our lifetimes.” Choosing the interior designer who was responsible for some of the most offensive multi-million dollar bank presidents’ offices to re-do the Oval Office provoked a ferocious attack by one of the New York Times most liberal columnists, Maureen Dowd.

This tone-deaf political management extends to his response to crisis, sadly, as well. Misunderstanding one of the basic precepts of crisis management, the Obama administration seems to show up late and say little. The Christmas bomber and the Gulf Oil spill were only the most damaging of a series of missed opportunities for Obama to assume the father-of-the-nation mantle that was so useful to presidents from George Washington to Ronald Reagan. Worried voters want a sympathetic father figure in the Oval Office at times of crisis, not Dr. Cool.

Political management involves driving the legislative train as well as the communications agenda. Here too, the White House has missed one home run opportunity after another. The various stimulus bills at the launch of his presidency appeared to be driven by Barney Frank and Nancy Pelosi — not the Democratic Party’s more compelling faces to independent voters — as much as by the White House. Obama featured little and his somewhat hapless economic advisers got mauled on the Hill, on cable TV, and by their own caucuses.

The recruitment of former federal reserve chairman Paul Volcker to salvage the financial reform package highlighted that the White House knew Geithner and Summers could not carry the ball for them. Their continuation in their roles only heightened the contrast between them and the dour central banker’s overwhelming credibility and confidence-building capability.

In campaign terms, it was important for Obama to plant his flag firmly in favour of bipartisan outreach. He was coming to power following the most deliberately divisive American administration in half a century. He needed to offer to independent voters, in particular, the promise that he would try to be more inclusive. But he should never have believed his own campaign rhetoric, let alone followed it so literally, even after having sand kicked in his eyes the fourth or fifth time by the robotic right-wing Republican leader, John Boehner, and his acolytes.

It merely served to make him look naive and unprepared for the big leagues to the media, offensive to his own caucus and supporters, and like a passive punching bag to the hardest of hard-edge Republicans and their extensive network of propagandists masquerading as fair and balanced journalists. And it meant he wasted valuable time chasing political mirages until well into this year; time he could ill afford to squander.

It was the bungling of the tactical management of the health reform package that was the source of the deepest angst among Obama’s supporters. Allowing the centrepiece of this presidency to drift from committee to committee on the Hill, to be kicked to pieces as the GOP/Tea Party’s first political football in the summer of 2009, and then to have it make it across the finish line with only the smelliest of smelly back room deals, was a hanging offense for his political team. The President squandered a precious political year and far too much political capital getting a victory that should have come earlier and cleaner with a tougher, more hands-on approach.

It was the loss of the rock-solid Edward Kennedy rotten borough of Massachusetts in January of last year
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House only became aware that the race was doomed days before the end. Senior Democratic political heavies muttered over the Christmas holidays that such a fiasco would never have happened in a Karl Rove-led political team. Such a disaster would have meant heads on stakes on the White House lawn the following morning. No one was fired for losing the Democrats’ Senate majority.

“Unfair!,” shout the loyalists to media friends. “Look at the record, not the cable TV noise!” This is a sad failure of liberal and progressive governments in all democracies. Delivering the goods is essential in a successful government; controlling the narrative that describes your success is equally so. Celebrating a legislative victory only when your own team’s blood and body parts are scattered around you is not usually recommended.

Ten years from now historians will record that the Obama administration managed to deliver the most comprehensive reform of health care, the keystone of the American welfare state; a victory that eluded legislative geniuses such as FDR and Lyndon Johnson. They will hail his careful and confident hand on the tiller of the ship of state as he successfully navigated the most challenging economic storms in half a century only days into his presidency. They may even hail his cleanup of the financial services swamp, perhaps delaying and certainly smoothing the cleanup of the next financial crash. He will get credit for having restored America’s prestige internationally, and for finding a graceful exit from Iraq.

Two years from now, President Obama may have drowned the sneers that greeted his Nobel Prize with his epochal Cairo speech may have been followed by leaders from the Arab world united in endorsing the Palestinian peace deal that has eluded every president before him.

The shoots of a green economy and a massive rebuilding of public infrastructure may be delivering, once again, the kind of American national self-confidence lost in the turmoil of the sixties. Big-city public schools may be once again delivering to black and Hispanic American families the kind of career advantage they delivered for generations of immigrant Americans for a hundred years before.

Today’s nasty, race- and class-divided politics, driven by the most vicious phony journalists and their allies in parts of the social conservative movements and the Republican and Tea Parties, may be only bitter but happily distant memories. The Know Nothings of the twenty-first century may have been put down just as firmly by cooler heads on left and right in the Democratic and Republican parties as...
were the Father Charles E. Coughlins and George Wallaces of another era.

Roger Ailes and Rupert Murdoch’s corrosion of American democracy may have been arrested by a new inclusive politics seeking shared bargains about national goals. The world would be a much more wobbly enterprise if today’s political conmen and the nightmares they peddle were to prevail. Those who doubt that a stable and confident America is the “one indispensable nation” — in Madeleine Albright’s phrase — would quickly panic in a world without that deep keel.

Progressive Americans, their friends internationally, and friends of a strong and prosperous United States everywhere can only hope that all these dreams are delivered. But in November of this year, voters will thrash Democrats from coast to coast, angry at 10 percent unemployment and a president who seems not to feel their pain. Those dreams of a fairer, greener, healthier, more prosperous future seem very far away for the nearly 20 million Americans unemployed today.

Political pundits and Pinot Grigio-drinking voters sneer at the emotional, sometimes even tearful, storytelling appeal of a Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, Brian Mulroney or Tony Blair. Our political elites are far more comfortable with the radiant brainpower of a Pierre Trudeau, Dalton McGuinty, or Michael Ignatieff. The problem is that the best story wins, the best teller of stories wins, and the best stories contain tears and triumph, sometimes in maudlin quantity.

The curious gap in the Obama story to date is the one between his power on the stump and his pale pomposity in the studio, between his empathy and charisma in one setting and his chilly flat affect in the other. On a massive stage, in an even more massive stadium in Denver to a steaming audience of nearly 100,000, Obama delivered a speech that has already become a political classic. He did it night after night in a gruelling 20-month campaign. A spellbinding storyteller about his Kenyan father and his weapons-making grandma, and his Indonesia/Hawaii/Harlem/Chicago biography captured the nation and much of the world. In the Oval Office, in front of a TV camera, he turns wooden, inauthentic, even nervous.

FDR was a crippled, wheelchair-bound, private-on-the-verge-of-paranoid personality who trained himself to soar on stage and to seduce in front of the radio microphone. JFK dazzled at dinner parties and in dirty union halls while suffering teeth-grinding back pain and frequent bouts of severe political doubt. Obama’s presidency, following the bitter pill that the mid-term elections will deliver, will turn on his ability to demonstrate the same performance.

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It is easy to paint such a portrait in almost every developed democracy. It does seem that there is no arena in which it is not possible to sketch a picture of societal decline and decay: educational attainment, social inequality, levels of tolerance, substance abuse, and on and on. It is the case that no democracy is free of a good-old-days nostalgia that sometimes translates into an anti-immigrant sentiment, sometimes into an anti-tax movement, and sometimes into an attack on political and business elites.

Taxes were lower when the state provided only ports, roads, and schools. Parliament and civil servants were more accessible and accountable in a rural agricultural society. And unless you could tell a Ukrainian from an Ulsterman on the sidewalk, you might not have been as easily spooked about the foreigners stealing jobs as some are today in a city like Toronto, which has become a majority nonwhite metropolis in a single generation.

So the challenge for Obama and every democratic leader like him is this: the state is a monster in scale and sometimes in behaviour; the complexity and opacity of huge public bureaucracies will always alienate their citizens; immigrants of colour will
Estimates of campaign spending this year are, unbelievably, higher than the record-shattering levels set in 2008. In a nonpresidential year, at the end of a recession, some experts predict spending will be 50 to 100 percent higher than the $4 billion of two years ago. Since the Supreme Court struck down spending limits, an eruption of cash is flooding into so-called independent PACs and other political vehicles. Not surprisingly, given how angry the Obama administration has made both the financial and the energy sectors — the two largest donor groups — most of that money is pouring into GOP primary and general election accounts. One of Obama’s less heralded achievements in 2008 was that he raised and spent more money on his own campaign and to support Democrats nationally than did the GOP. This was a first since the early 1960s. It’s time he combined his speaking with an intense fundraising tour.

We are in new terrain for a presidency governing in a serious recession. Unlike his predecessors attempting to rally a nation drifting in the economic doldrums and the inevitable political blame-game that drift creates, Obama has two new adversaries: social media and cable news hysteria. FDR faced an overwhelmingly hostile press as he battled the Depression, but their ability to torque hostility hour by hour was trivial by comparison with the power of American talk radio, Fox News and its local TV allies, and the vicious conservative blogosphere. (It should surely be more embarrassing to Americans than seems to be the case that got Obama elected less than two years ago. How well he recaptures his ability to connect with the white, middle-class, independent voters who were seized by his vision the first time will define his presidency.

The stakes could not be higher. If he can regain his political mojo through the adroit execution of the mobilization, marketing, and management skills he demonstrated as a candidate, he will be re-elected in 2012 and probably remembered as one of the great presidents of the postwar era — no matter what happens to Democratic senators, congressmen, and governors in November. Richard Nixon, Reagan and Clinton all came back from serious midterm poundings, after all.

But if 2011 is a repeat of 2010 in the Obama White House, he will be one of the great one-term disappointments of all time.

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Will Obama's presidency be looked at as a failure because his big policies are being undone? How would a Clinton presidency differ from an Obama presidency? Has President Trump performed better than President Obama thus far? What are the failures and successes of the Obama presidency? Shane Toomey, Iâ€™m a Libertarian. Answered Sep 8, 2018 Â· Author has 384 answers and 227.3k answer views.Â Obama fixed the housing crisis aswell. Now it was going down on its own but he took it to record lows. Right now is one of the best times to buy a house in the US ever, we have super low interest rates.