THE PRESIDENT AS PRISONER
A Structural Critique of the Carter and Reagan Years

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—CHAPTER ONE—

The Rise and Decline of Presidency Fetishism

The day of enlightened administration has come.
— Franklin D. Roosevelt

In 1941 Henry Luce proclaimed the dawning of the "American Century." With political science in mind, he might have heralded the "Presidential Century."

Franklin Roosevelt's tenure stimulated a veritable love affair between political science and studies of the presidency. The "Roosevelt revolution" not only overturned entrenched notions of the relationship between government, economy and society. It also refocused the vision of American government scholars. His handling of the dual crises of depression and world war permanently elevated the office to heights unimagined in the nineteenth century, save for periods of temporary urgency. With the coming of the Roosevelt administration, political scientists spent considerable time gazing up at the heights, often in semi-awe. The era of presidential government had arrived.[1]

Like any historic change, however, the rise of the presidency was not without its antecedents. While FDR routinely is credited with creating the modern office of the presidency and solidifying its activist character, Theodore Roosevelt is thought to be the first chief executive who legitimately can be termed "modern" in outlook.[2] His view of the office was filled with Progressive Era notions of the president as the guarantor of reform and innovation. There is, in fact, a direct link between Theodore Roosevelt's enlarged conception of the office and the expansion of the modern positive state, whose interventions to rationalize the economy preceded similar New Deal efforts by several decades.[3] Roosevelt explains his energized view of the presidency in his autobiography. The section where he enunciates his "stewardship" theory is worth quoting at length:

> The most important factor in getting the right spirit in my Administration, next to the insistence upon courage, honesty, and a genuine democracy of desire to serve the plain people, was my insistence upon the theory that the executive power was limited only by specific restrictions and prohibitions appearing in the Constitution or imposed by the Congress under its Constitutional powers. My view was that every executive officer. . .was a steward of the people bound actively and affirmatively to do all he could for the people, and not to content himself with the negative merit of keeping his talents undamaged in a napkin. I declined to adopt the view that what was imperatively necessary for the Nation could not be done by the President unless he could find some specific authorization to do it. My belief was that it was not only his right but his duty to do anything that the needs of the Nation demanded unless such action was forbidden by the Constitution or by the laws. Under this interpretation of executive power I did and caused to be done many things not previously done by the President and the heads of the departments. I did not usurp power, but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power.[4]

Roosevelt's expansive theory of the president's powers gave the chief executive wide latitude to pursue his idea of the public good, unless prohibited by specific legal barriers. On this reading of the presidency, the White House could become the "bully pulpit" Roosevelt relished. "I believed in invoking the National power with absolute freedom for every National need," he asserted, while maintaining high regard for the Constitution as a tool for social progress, "not as a straightjacket cunningly fashioned to strangle growth."[5]

Roosevelt contrasted his theory of the presidency—what he termed the "Jackson-Lincoln" school—with the more circumscribed vision of the "Buchanan-Taft" school. The latter outlook held the "narrowly legalistic view that the President is the servant of Congress rather than of the people, and can do nothing, no matter how necessary it be to act, unless the Constitution explicity commands the action."[6] Roosevelt's successor upheld this second, more confined notion of the presidency. William Howard Taft saw great danger of "executive domination" in Roosevelt's stewardship theory. In addition to encouraging presidents to hold inflated opinions of their own worth—he chided Roosevelt for equating himself in any way with Lincoln—Taft believed that making the president responsible for the general welfare of the nation stretched the power of the chief executive well beyond reasonable limits, establishing him as a "Universal Providence" whose judgments are beyond reproach. Roosevelt's view of "ascribing an undefined residuum of power to the President is an unsafe doctrine," Taft reasoned, one that "might lead under emergencies to results of an arbitrary character, doing irremediable injustice to private right."[7] A far safer notion of executive power would limit the scope of presidential discretion, as Taft here asserts:

> The true view of the Executive functions is, as I conceive it, that the President can exercise no power which cannot be fairly and reasonably traced to some specific grant of power or justly implied and included within such express grant as proper and necessary to its exercise. Such specific grant must be either in the Federal Constitution or in an act of Congress passed in pursuance thereof. There is no undefined residuum of power which he can exercise because it seems to him to be in the public interest. . . . The grants of Executive power are necessarily in general terms in order not to embarrass the Executive within the field of action plainly marked for him, but his jurisdiction must be justified and vindicated by affirmative constitutional or statutory provision, or it does not exist.[8]

It was FDR's presidency that ensured the triumph of the earlier Roosevelt's conception of the office in the expectations of postwar America. Coming to power in the wake of three passive Taft-like chief executives, Franklin Roosevelt stood for virtually everything the more restricted model opposed. He had an abounding faith in the stewardship approach, believing in presidential leadership as the best hope for the material and spiritual revival of the country. On the eve of the election of 1932 he offered this well-known assessment of the historic role of the presidency:

> The Presidency is not merely an administrative office. That's the least of it. It is more than an engineering job, efficient or inefficient. It is preeminently a place of moral leadership. All our great Presidents were leaders of thought at times when certain historic ideas in the life of the nation had to be clarified.[9]

Henceforth, the presidency would be both enormously expanded in its scope of operation—the government would take on a host

of functions previously either beyond its purview altogether or not formally institutionalized—and greatly enhanced as a source of affirmation for society's basic principles. The president would provide the enlightened administration espoused by FDR, the chief executive who, in the words of one observer, "first made the office 'real' in the daily lives of Americans."[10]

The broad vision of Theodore Roosevelt, as etched into American political life by FDR, and the narrower view of Taft, both have since served to delimit the range of thinking about the presidency. Political scientists typically locate the office, analytically and normatively, somewhere between the poles articulated by these two presidents. The former position endorses an active chief executive who expands the reach of the office for the sake of achieving widely shared programmatic goals. This *expansivist* view is presidency-weighted, regarding the maximization of presidential power as virtually the sine qua non of American politics. The latter perspective seeks to rein in presidential power, viewing a relatively restrained chief executive as more closely attuned to the intentions of the framers of the Constitution and less prone to abuses of authority. Greater balance between the branches of government, particularly the executive and legislative, forms the basis of this *restrictivist* position.[11] Versions of these approaches have survived in the wake of FDR, right on through the presidency of Ronald Reagan. This chapter surveys some major works within these two schools of thought, beginning with the expansivists—those analysts who sought to consecrate in theory, what the presidency had become in practice.

Expansivist theories of the presidency

Scholarly doubts about the ascendancy and virtue of presidential initiative in postwar American politics were few and far between. By the early 1960s the expansivist view of the office as an engine for the pursuit of the liberal agenda seemed firmly entrenched in political science. One can get a sense of the spirit and substance of the expansivist outlook from the work of James MacGregor Burns. In *Presidential Government*, Burns develops a model of the modern presidency rooted in the ideas of Alexander Hamilton. The Hamiltonian model "implied a federal government revolving around the Presidency, and depending on energy, resourcefulness, inventiveness, and a ruthless pragmatism in the executive office. . . ."[12] He hopes such a model might serve as an antidote to the "delay and devitalization" of government he discerned in an earlier work analyzing the "deadlock" built in to the constitutional machinery of American democracy.[13]

For Burns, Lydon Johnson represented the glory of presidential government. Writing at the outset of Johnson's Great Society program, Burns confidently claims the presidency to be "at the peak of its prestige." Johnson's tenure marks the "triumph of presidential government," a kind of government geared to the achievement of new qualitative goals of liberalism which FDR, another Hamiltonian chief executive, had failed to achieve. These goals include "a concerted and sustained and expensive effort to impart values like those of Johnson to the barren lives of millions of Americans, middle class as well as deprived," accompanied by the diversion of "the kind of resources into cultural, recreational, and educational acitvities that we have in the past poured into economic recovery, or even into national defense."[14] Burns wrote, of course, before the massive pouring of resources into the effort of imparting "values like those of Johnson" to the "barren" lives of millions of Vietnamese.

At times, Burns' affection for presidential assertions of power goes even farther—perhaps too far. It reaches nearly absurd proportions in his reflections on an earlier progressive president, Theodore Roosevelt. He laments:

> For a man with Theodore Roosevelt's need for personal fulfillment it was a sort of tragedy that he had no war—not even a Whiskey Rebellion. Not only would war have given him immense psychological gratification, it would also have brought his means and ends into better relation.[15]

This regret is offered for the needs-gratification of a president who unflinchingly championed the use of America's Big Stick to achieve its supposed destiny as the global policeman. It takes little imagination to think of the means Roosevelt would have employed to secure his ends, given his record of allowing U.S. military interventions short of war to defend the "civilized world's" standards of law and order. His racist, patronizing attitude toward the "damned dagoes" of Columbia, or the "Chinese halfbreds," "Malay bandits," "savages, barbarians, a wild and ignorant people" of the Philippines provides a hint on this score.[16]

Despite his exalted view of presidential government, Burns admits Americans generally are ambivalent toward an energized, expansivist administration like that of the Hamiltonian Johnson (or Roosevelt), ambivalence rooted in the fear that "a current or future strong man in the White House might threaten American democracy." However, such fear has been misplaced, Burns reasons, for as it turns out, "presidential goverment, far from being a threat to American democracy, has become the major single institution sustaining it—a bulwark of individual liberty, an agency of popular representation, and a magnet for political talent and leadership."[17] When tempered by an abiding concern for Jeffersonian purposes, a key for Burns, this situation can endure to the benefit of the office and the public.

Burns saw an entire "epoch" of presidential government on the horizon. His endorsement of the expansivist view proved to be especially ironic, though, since Johnson's presidency marks the beginning of the decline—if not the end—of expansivist theories in postwar political science. To appreciate the precipitousness of this decline it is useful to examine some of the major theorists whose tracks Burns followed. Harold Laski, Clinton Rossiter and Richard Neustadt will be the focus of my attention. They certainly do not exhaust the supply of expansivist writers, nor do they include all the variations on the expansivist theme.[18] But they do represent classic defenses of this major approach to the presidency.

British political scientist and Labor Party leader Harold Laski was one of the first analysts to posit the unique character of the presidency. His 1940 book *The American Presidency* shuns any simple comparisons between the chief executive and institutions of European parliamentary systems.[19] Believing the essence of the presidency to be its organic development within an American environment and historic traditions, Laski contends that there is no foreign institution against which it can be compared "because, basically, there is no comparable foreign institution." The presidency is novel: "The president of the United States is both more and less than a king; he is, also, both more and less than a prime minister."[20] The special nature of the office places an enormous burden on its occupant. Citizens expect direct thought and action from the president on the key issues of the

day, since the officeholder symbolizes the entire nation. But while embodying the hopes and dreams of the people as the head of state, the president stands alone as head of the government, shouldering the responsibility for the success or failure of government policies. "In England, we blame an anonymous entity 'the Government' if thing go wrong, or a mistake is made," Laski points out, whereas "in the United States it is the president who is blamed."[21] Hence, Laski sees an unusual degree of risk for presidents who would be bold and innovative.

More than this risk, though, Laski everywhere sees limits to the expansion of presidential influence. He has these constraints in mind when he states that "the day of a successful election is the day on which the president ceases to be a free man." Setting aside for now the question of the freedom of a person *before* being elected, among the many contstraints on the officeholder is the deep-seated American aversion toward strong governmental leadership. Laski notes Americans' traditional fear of centralized authority, manifest in the scheme of federalism and checks and balances established by the framers of the Constitution. The institutionalized fragmentation of power and authority has long been noted as one of the defining features of democracy in the U.S. Laski takes a dim view of such impediments to coherent leadership. In particular, he finds Congress an annoying barrier to presidential action. The oppositional role of the U.S. legislature (unlike the unified parliamentary government in Britain), combined with its sectional orientation and its will to assert its own power, makes for factionalized politics. Summing up the relationship between the two branches of government, Laski is unambiguous about his opinion of Congress. "Its own instinctive and inherent tendency is, under all circumstances, to be anti-presidential," he says, adding that it constantly seeks ways to differ from the president, for in so differing it is "affirming its own essence" and "exalting its own prestige."[22]

Along with the divisive role of Congress, Laski cites the power of big business as especially troublesome for presidents. He contends that the "interstitial connections between business and politics in the United States" color every facet of the context of political life. Congress is affected, directing its energy to the maintenance of "those conditions of confidence which business men approve." Parties are equally deferential to the business

ethos: "[S]ince the Civil War the dividing line between them has never been real.... The truth is, I think, that these major parties have been essentially the agents of the property interests of the United States...."[23] And, of course, the president must "pay continuous attention to the attitude of business itself." Laski writes: "The president who arouses the suspicion that he is not a 'sound' man from the angle of business philosophy is bound to run into heavy weather."[24] Forms of "heavy weather" can vary, but he clearly has in mind some kind of investment strike on the part of capital, with the attendant "rapid repercussion upon unemployment and the standard of life." The general idea here simply is that any government program for innovative social reform must prove acceptable to big business, or risk confronting business efforts to undermine the conditions of economic health upon which such reforms must rest.

Aligned against the risk of presidential initiative, the historic distrust of centralized power, and the effective veto power of the business community is what Laski sees as the modern imperative of the positive state, directed by strong presidential leadership. Citing the presidencies of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Wilson and FDR, Laski argues that strong executive leadership has occurred in the U.S during periods of crisis. Indeed, it is a measure of the beauty of the American political system that "so far, it is clear, the hour has brought forth the man." His point is that the time has come for the *sustained* exercise of presidential initiative. "America has now entered the epoch where the requirements of the positive state can no longer be denied," he writes. Political, economic and social forces have made a strong president a necessary and enduring part of the nation's future. And there is no question that he thinks of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal as the kind of president and program such conditions demand.

For Laski, the first 100 days of FDR's term stand as the greatest example of presidential leadership ever, including wartime. Roosevelt was a positive president with a gift for knowing how to "prick men into thought" and into enthusiastic support for his programs. But because the tradition of negative government is so entrenched in the U.S., once the most immediate dangers of depression had passed, congressional and other opponents of the New Deal were able to constrain the Roosevelt administration

in numerous ways, especially during his second term. Laski wants America to overcome this cyclical, boom-bust quality of assertions of executive power through the establishment of strong, unified, presidentially-led government. For as he contends, "a government does not prove its adequacy because it can transcend its own principles in an emergency; its adequacy is born of its ability to prevent the outbreak of emergency."[25] Central to this goal is a "radical realignment of parties" in America. Absent the formation of a truly progressive party, the "forces of privilege" will continue to dominate the scope of political choices. But with disciplined parties a strong president will find the institutional support, especially in Congress, for executive leadership. No longer would parties simply "enthrone the conservative forces in permanent power."

Such a shift ultimately depends on popular support among the people, however, and it is here that Laski looks for the real staying power of a president's claim to enhanced authority. Again with FDR as the model, he asserts the need for presidents to draw upon the vigor of movements for social and economic change to ensure a constituency for reform. Roosevelt's passion for change aroused the "dynamic of democracy," a dynamic with "an energy...more powerful and more pervasive than the dynamic of any other form of state."[26] Laski claims that unleashing such a powerful democratic force is the answer to the problem of generating the presidential leadership necessary for the nation in the difficult times ahead. It can spark the interest and moral concern of an ordinarily uninterested populous. The concerns of the common person, and the object of broad executive initiative for future generations, will center on the expansion of the positive state. Expanded presidential power will be the vehicle for its realization. A weak presidency will not suffice. As Laski explains:

> A weak president, in a word, is a gift to the forces of reaction in the United States. It enables them to manipulate and maneuver between every difference that is provoked by the absence of a strong hand at the helm. It arrests the power to transcend the negativism which the scheme of American government so easily erects into a principle of action. A weak presidency prevents that transcendence of the limitations of 1787 which the compulsions of our generation demand.[27]

It is, finally, in this potential transcendence that we can locate the essence of Laski's case for the expansion of the presidency. Only a president with broader power can confront the problems plaguing the nation. Only a president can rise above the pervasive obstacles to progressive reform. Laski is mindful of the possible dangers of increasing the power of the chief executive. The temptation to abuse is great. Yet he sees power as an opportunity as well, an opportunity that must be granted if the country is to achieve its highest aspirations. "[G]reat power alone makes great leadership possible" he concludes; "it provides the unique chance of restoring America to its people."[28] This argument for the transcendent ability of the office (elsewhere referred to as the ability to "suspend the normal assumptions of the American system") seems thin, though, upon closer examination. Two weaknesses are particularly damaging to his argument.

First, Laski offers no critical assessment of the dynamics of U.S. foreign policy and how they impinge upon a president's power. He is correct to point out that in matters of international affairs the president has a "decisive hand." He informs us that "in no other part of American political life has the separation of powers counted for so little as in the definition of this part."[29] True enough. But he proceeds to accept without a note of dissent the proposition that the U.S. had developed, even before the Spanish-American War, a "consciousness of a world-destiny" which the presidency reflects and pursues. Apparently this American outlook is unproblematic—no need for presidential transcendence here. It is puzzling, though, why someone who grounds his analysis of the domestic side of the office in some kind of moral framework would accept without qualification the premise of American empire. Moreover, even if he is simply expressing an implicit hope for American resolve and aid in the face of growing tension in Europe over the expansion of Nazi Germany (and it is not clear that he is), he should not ignore altogether the connection between U.S. foreign policy and the domestic economy, particularly the interests of big business. If these interests constrain the president in the domestic sphere, as he suggests, it bears notice how they do so in the foreign sphere.

This raises a second, more significant, weakness of Laski's analysis. While it may be true that a strengthened president working within an invigorated party system might provide the unified leadership the framers tried so hard to foil, it is less clear how such unity could elude the reach of big business, whose powerful position he contends has given it "an economic and psychological authority unexampled....in any country in the world." Laski repeatedly refers to the maintenance of business confidence as imperative for the realization of reform. Yet he also wants activist presidents—emboldened by the ongoing equivalent of crisis conditions and rooted in popular support—to overcome the interests of privilege and the propertied classes in order to extend the positive state. He makes no attempt to resolve this tension. Hence his prescription for the presidency rests on too sanguine a view of the possibilities of reform.

Systemic reforms can have a tremendous impact on people's lives. The New Deal experience has taught us that. But the limits of reformism stop well short of the transcendence of the basic structure of the political economy, which is another New Deal lesson. After all, it was FDR—Laski's model of liberal reformism—who offered perhaps the most lucid summary of the status quo bounds of such a philosophy. "The most serious threat to our institutions comes from those who refuse to face the need for change," he declared while campaigning for reelection in 1936. "Liberalism becomes the protection for the far-sighted conservative.... 'Reform if you would preserve.' I am that kind of conservative because I am that kind of liberal."[30] The consequences of these limits affect both presidents and programs they would pursue. They are explored in the rich literature of the "corporate liberal" perspective on 20th century history.[31] Laski anticipates no such obstacles to political change; he overstates the efficacy of a popular president infected with the reforming spirit.

Whatever the shortcomings of Laski's work, he at least thought it important to grapple with the issue of how the political economy constrains the scope of presidential initiative. Clinton Rossiter's 1956 book *The American Presidency* gained a far wider audience and much more praise while providing less analytic content. It is perhaps a testament to how little the expansivist, usually liberal, New Deal presidency actually challenged the basic interests of American business that by the 1950s a leading conservative, like Rossiter, could champion its power as well. Rossiter applauds

the accretion of presidential power since the founding of the nation, while describing in near-worshipful tones the contributions of individual chief executives to that increase. His sketches of the most influential presidents (e.g. Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, FDR) at times approach hagiography. Of this tendency, we are forewarned: "I would be less than candid were I not to make clear at the outset my own feeling of veneration, if not exactly reverence, for the authority and dignity of the Presidency."[32] Rossiter's influential text thus has a civics book quality about it, which may, in part, account for its popularity.[33]

Rossiter describes the president as a man wearing many "hats." The hat imagery aptly summarizes the thrust of the book, for his purpose is to explain the many roles a president must, by necessity, play upon assuming office. This emphasis on the president's roles proved so popular an approach that it could be written that it constituted "the most prevalent and academically respectable way of viewing the presidency. . . . [I]t may be dubbed the received view of the office."[34] Rossiter cataloges presidential roles, or functions (he uses the terms interchangeably), in order to draw attention to "the staggering burden he bears for all of us." In all, ten major roles are discussed. The first five roles comprise the "strictly constitutional" functions of the office, and include chief of state, chief executive, commander-in-chief, chief diplomat, and chief legislator. Many provocative themes can be found here. For instance, being the head of both state and government—fusing "the dignity of a king and the power of a prime minister"—carries with it complex issues of accountability of power. Likewise, the historically controversial commander-in-chief position poses fundamental problems not only with Congress, and its competing authority to declare war, but also with the people, who in the nuclear age must face a president swollen to "nothing short of a 'constitutional dictator' " in wartime. Yet as pressing as these issues are, Rossiter makes no attempt to scratch below their surface. He is enumerating, not analyzing.

Together these five roles give the president formidable political muscle. Citing Harry Truman, Rossiter says the responsibilities "form an aggregate of power that would have made Caesar or Genghis Khan or Napoleon bite his nails with envy."[35] But these do not exhaust a president's arsenal. To the original five Rossiter

adds five additional functions he believes round out a realistic assessment of the president's job: chief of party, voice of the people, protector of the peace, manager of prosperity and world leader.[36] These roles have arisen from historic exigency, not constitutional design. The manager of prosperity role stems from the need for overall economic stability to prevent depression, the role of world leader from our post World War II stature, and so on. Nevertheless, he accords them equal status with the constitutionally-grounded functions.

Having briefly touched upon the ten presidential roles he then steps back to see what they add up to. He finds a "seamless unity," "something more than the arithmetical total of all its functions," a single office that is the presidency itself. He is almost giddy with this finding: "I feel something like a professor of nutritional science who has just ticked off the ingredients of a wonderful stew."[37] Sometimes the ingredients do not mix well with one another, however, causing presidents to use their leadership to find the proper balance between them. Rossiter shifts metaphors to make this point:

> If the Presidency is a chamber orchestra of ten pieces, all played by the leader, he must learn for himself by hard practice how to blend them together, remembering always that perfect harmony is unattainable. . . .[38]

Such a blending of musical instruments, or stew, adds a tremendous administrative responsibility to the already "monstrous" burden resting on the president's shoulders. That burden is made more manageable by the vast executive bureaucracy which has flourished in the twentieth century. But it is not removed. The office remains a "one-man job." Truman's famous sign on his desk—"The buck stops here"—captures the essence of the presidency for Rossiter.

Despite great power and responsibility the president is not a free agent. Rossiter follows his account of the president's roles with a discussion of the limits that balance these powers, serving as safeguards that "keep the President's feet in paths of constitutional righteousness." He highlights seven major centers of power restraining the chief executive. Congress, the Supreme Court, the federal bureaucracy and political parties offer a check on the level of national government, while individual states, free

enterprise and public opinion present other potential barriers. Most of the seven provide partial restraint, or serve only as an irritant. The Supreme Court, for example, usually ends up "rationalizing most pretensions" of presidents, amounting to "one of the least reliable restraints" on executive behavior. Free enterprise—broadly defined to include, among others, corporations, small businesses, consumer groups and, somewhat oddly, unions—similarly plays a modest part in checking the president. To be sure, a president must seek the support of this "fabulous galaxy" of free enterprise organizations. But beyond that Rossiter does not explain the nature of the relationship involved, except to criticize the performance of labor free enterprisers, John L. Lewis ("the last of the robber barons") and Philip Murray.

The two centers of countervailing power that actually play a significant ongoing role are Congress and public opinion. Congress is a "fiercely independent" institution that vigorously wields its many weapons to check and confine presidential initiative. Yet while Congress is the most reliable constraining force, public opinion constitutes, "over the long run," the "most effective check upon the President." Granting the chief executive's power to shape public sentiment, Rossiter thinks there is a point beyond which the public will not be led. That point marks what he several times calls the "grand and durable pattern of private liberty and public morality." By this he intends to draw attention to the importance of ends and means that are "within the common range of expectations," namely ends and means which "at least do not outrage the accepted dictates of constitutionalism, democracy, personal liberty, and Christian morality."[39] While Rossiter is vague on what these terms entail—they essentially represent his version of an American consensus on liberalism—he does single out those who contend that Roosevelt should have nationalized the banking system in 1933 as holding a view that would have fallen outside an acceptable range of liberty and morality.

Even allowing for the efficacy of an aroused public voicing its opinions through countervailing centers of power, however, Rossiter finds the ultimate limit on the chief executive to be internally generated, not externally imposed. Personal beliefs, conscience, and a sense of history together form the human constitution that ensures a president will act in accord with

established norms. These self-limitations, in conjunction with the more formal barriers, thus keep the American presidency moving "with the grain of liberty and morality." The imagery we are left with after this exposition of the interplay of presidential power and its limits is vintage Rossiter:

> [T]he President is not a Gulliver immobilized by ten thousand tiny cords, nor even a Prometheus chained to a rock of frustration. He is, rather, a kind of magnificent lion who can roam widely and do great deeds so long as he does not try to break loose from his broad reservation.[40]

Rossiter's ensuing account of the history of the presidency amounts to a celebration of those who have roamed widely and done very great deeds. With George Washington in mind as the person who would be chosen as the first U.S. president, the authors of the Constitution made a series of key decisions enabling a strong executive to emerge from the proceedings in Philadelphia. Since then, Rossiter perceives a steady (though not unbroken) upward trajectory for the status of the chief executive, propelled by exigent forces of history that have left the office "a hundred times magnifed." By themselves, these historical factors would not necessarily have strengthened the office if the challenges they ushered in were not met by leaders willing and able to exercise authority with resolve. Fortunately for the nation we have been blessed with exceptional presidents when the times called for them. Here he echoes Laski's "the-hour-has-brought-forth-the-man" thesis. He counts eight presidents who merit the adjective "great," and six other "notable" ones, who together helped build the "office of freedom." His brief portraits of these men offer tribute to their legendary achievements, achievements that Rossiter stands in awe of as he glorifies them:

> Each is an authentic folk hero, each a symbol of some virtue or dream especially dear to Americans. Together they make up almost half of the company of American giants, for who except Christopher Columbus, Benjamin Franklin, Daniel Boone, Robert E. Lee, and Thomas A. Edison in real life, Deerslayer and Ragged Dick in fiction, and Paul Bunyon and the Lonesome Cowboy in myth can challenge them for immortality? Washington the spotless patriot, Jefferson the democrat, Jackson the man of the frontier, Lincoln the emancipator and preserver of the Union, Theodore

> Roosevelt the All-American Boy, Wilson the peacemaker—these men are symbols of huge interest and value to the American people.[41]

Myths and symbols certainly play an important role in any society. No one would argue with that. But Rossiter nearly leaves the realm of earthy existence in lavishing praise on these luminaries. Myths seem to be an end in themselves when he writes, "The final greatness of the Presidency lies in the truth that it is not just an office of incredible power but a breeding ground of indestructable myth." Are there any drawbacks to the preservation of a mythical aura surrounding our most elevated political figure? Apparently not. Even the presidents that historians and political scientists routinely cite as the worst—Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, Ulysses S. Grant and Warren Harding—receive, as consolation of sorts, kind words: "a man of rich experience," "a gentle man," and so on.[42] This hero worship confirms a "cardinal fact" of historical scholarship: "American history is written, if not always made, by men of moderate views, broad interests, and merciful judgments."[43] A critical temper, it appears, would be almost unpatriotic.

The merciful judgments continue for the three figures Rossiter examines at some length in a section on the modern presidency—FDR, Truman and Dwight Eisenhower.[44] All three contributed to presidential modernization, which entailed the incorporation of five key changes (on top of the ones listed earlier) over the quarter-century since Roosevelt first took the oath of office. The first change is the further erosion of congressional power vis-a-vis the executive branch. New Deal economic management, in particular, solidified expectations that the president would play a crucial role in the legislative process, virtually becoming a "third House of Congress." This blossoming responsibility was aided by the concomitant development of radio and television, the second dimension of the modern office. The "miracles of electronics" opened up the channels of communication that put the president in touch with the people in a more intimate and sustained way. Henceforth, the president would mold public opinion as never before.

A third change is the increased use of the president as "Protector of the Peace," one of the ten original roles that define

the office. The citizenry now demands the president be a "one-man riot squad" able to go anywhere and do anything necessary to maintain domestic tranquility. Although numerous applications come to mind, the one Rossiter is most clearly pleased with—and one that underscores his conservative bias—is the president's power to intervene, with bloody force if need be, to resovle labor disputes.[45] He applauds the executive's willingness, both pre- and post-Taft Hartley Act, to quell strikes, the gravest threat to liberty and morality from Rossiter's perspective. Rounding out the modern alterations are presidential efforts on behalf of civil rights and civil liberties, and the conversion of the office into a bureaucratic structure of the Executive Office of the President. The former development establishes the president more firmly as "a friend of liberty;" the chief executive has no choice but "to serve as the conscience and strong arm of American democracy." The bureaucratic evolution institutionalizes the office, surrounding the presidency with the personnel to carry out its burgeoning duties.

What are we left with, then, after Rossiter's discussion of the roles of the presidency and the men who filled them? His own final reflection is one of conservative (in the sense of conserving the status quo) contentment, expressing his "deep note of satisfaction" with the office and predicting "a long and exciting future for the American Presidency." His expansivist optimism rests on his belief that "all the great political and social forces that brought the Presidency to its present state of power and glory will continue to work in the future," ensuring that "we will turn to the President....for help in solving the problems that fall thickly upon us."[46] The strong, active chief executive, reminiscent of the great ones who have come before, is a certainty: "There is a Presidency in our future, and it is the Presidency of Jackson and Lincoln rather than of Monroe and Buchanan, of Roosevelt and Truman rather than of Harding and Coolidge."[47] Persistent and vigorous presidential leadership thus serves as both description and prescription for Rossiter, who opposes any effort to weaken the institutional centrality of the office. The stakes are simply too high:

> [A]ny major reduction now in the powers of the President would leave us naked to our enemies, to the invisible forces of boom and

> bust at home and to the visible forces of unrest and aggression abroad. In a country over which industrialism has swept in great waves, in a world where active diplomacy is the minimum price of survival, it is not alone power but a vacuum of power that men must fear.[48]

The presidency Rossiter endorses with a shamelssly uncritical eye represents "a choice instrument of constitutional democracy." It is ascribed totemic qualities. To tamper with this "peculiar treasure" in any fundamental way is to court disaster. "Leave Your Presidency Alone"—this is Rossiter's fundamental counsel.

Though Rossiter's stature in the field of presidency scholarship has endured, the evolution of discourse on the presidency veered away from his approach with the publication in 1960 of *Presidential Power,* perhaps the most influential book ever written on the topic and certainly the most forceful statement of the expansivist position. Written by Rossiter's friend and colleague Richard Neustadt, the book represents a self-conscious attempt to break with the hitherto dominant way of conceptualizing the office. Rather than adopting a traditional constitutional orientation to the presidency, viewing it as an amalgam of formal roles to be carried out within a matrix of competing institutions, Neustadt sought to see it as a more unified whole with one major purpose—to wield power.[49] He writes:

> My theme is personal power and its politics: what it is, how to get it, how to keep it, how to lose it. My interest is in what a President can do to make his own will felt within his own Administration. . . .[50]

He has written what amounts to a prescription for presidential power (his first working title for the book was "Primer for Presidents") broadly defined as "personal influence on government action." Drawing on case studies of the Truman and Eisenhower years, he proceeds by examining examples of presidential weakness and contrasting them with the type of executive behavior he believes could have resulted in more effective policy outcomes. The latter are reinforced by examples of successful presidential action in roughly similar circumstances, with FDR often serving as the model efficacious actor.

For Neustadt, the essence of presidential power is the power to persuade. The extent of this power depends upon the ability to influence the behavior of people in government, with such influence becoming the measure of presidential leadership. However, Neustadt sees a problem with a president's power to persuade; it is not simply an automatic ability acquired once in office. Formal constitutional "powers" do not guarantee power in the day-to-day affairs of the president. For a chief executive to turn formal power and status into an operative political tool for achieving desired results, more must be done than issuing commands from on high. Presidents must engage in earthly give-and-take of the persuasive endeavor, in effect bargaining with various constituencies which include executive officialdom, Congress, party officials, citizens at large and citizens abroad.

The connection between persuasion and bargaining is central to Neustadt's thesis. He locates the imperatives of this nexus in the Constitution, which created a government of separate institutions sharing powers. This relationship of reciprocal need among separate institutional actors defines the parameters within which the president must persuade. Of course, the authority inherent in the job enhances a president's persuasiveness. An enormous amount of respect and esteem come with the territory. Yet as Neustadt stresses, a president also depends upon those who must be persuaded; their authority and power are necessary for effective presidential leadership. Thus, in Neustadt's view, the operation of government hinges on "relationships of mutual dependence." As he summarizes:

> Persuasion is a two-way street. . . .
>
> The power to persuade is the power to bargain. Status and authority yield bargaining advantages. But in a government of "separated institutions sharing powers," they yield them to all sides.[51]

Given an environment of pressures and counter pressures, of interaction among influential people with differing vantage points, how does a president wield influence and garner support for programs? How does a president persuade? One method, least desirable from Neustadt's perspective, is through command. As shown in the case of Truman's dismissal of MacArthur, his seizure of the steel mills, and Eisenhower's dispatch of troops to Little

Rock, a president can on occasion command certain actions that result in quick compliance. From a presidential perspective, these three cases involved orders which were self-executing. Yet despite the fact that commands can work, Neustadt says they do so only under certain circumstances. Conditions under which the necessary factors combine to produce compliance are relatively rare. Moreover, cases of command typically occur as a last-ditch effort after all other options have failed or been discarded, in sum constituting political failure rather than success. Results may be produced, but the quality of the result is strategically poor, often inconclusive and usually costly to future programmatic aims. Neustadt concludes that anything accomplished via the persuasion mechanism of command necessarily will prove to be transitory.

As a means of effective persuasion, Neustadt prefers the aforementioned technique of bargaining. The need for bargaining in the formulation of government policy stems from the underlying motive of persuasion: self-interest.[52] Because policy actors have differing outlooks and loyalties, a president seeking to persuade must convince them "to believe that what he wants of them is what their own appraisal of their own responsibilities requires them to do in their interest, not his." People with divergent interests must come together and hammer out policies that not only embrace their desire objectives, but also appear in a form consonant with their individual situations. Truman's handling of the Marshall Plan is used to illustrate the meshing of policy form and content, the need for bipartisan policy agreement and the success such accommodation can produce. And this also serves as an example of how a president can best protect the chances of achieving favorable policy results. Such protection, Neustadt postulates, can be obtained only through the choices a president makes. Power to persuade is thus intertwined with choices, for "a President's own choices are the only means in his own hands of guarding his own prospects for effective influence." Yet to understand how a president can guard personal power in bargaining relationships through specific choices, one must first touch upon the two other key power sources: professional reputation and public prestige.

For Neustadt, a president's professional reputation (reputation within the Washington community) is a central factor in the

exertion of influence because the power to persuade depends upon what other people who share governing power have come to expect of the chief executive. A president's reputation is always evolving. Accordingly, attention must be paid to presenting an overall image of "tenacity" and "skill." Mistakes are inevitable, but the impression of recurring inconsistency and poor judgment must be avoided at all costs. Of course, a positive reputation in Washington does not guarantee effective persuasion. But it can make life at the top much smoother. Neustadt emphasizes that the responsibility for reputation is almost entirely a president's own affair. Since words and actions can damage one's professional image, the responsibility is fraught with risks. The point, though, is that a president's reputation is not immutable. It can change, as Eisenhower changed his in 1959 with the emergence of a purposeful "New Eisenhower" following more than a year of equivocation over budgetary matters. It is this potential to alter a reputation through executive decisions which lies at the heart of a president's opportunity as a reputation-builder.

Public prestige offers another measurement by which the Washington community gauges a president's performance. Personal power depends on the president's standing outside Washington as well as within. Neustadt terms a president's popularity among the citizenry "a jumble of imprecise impressions held by relatively inattentive men." Yet this disparate collection of subjective judgments directly influences the responsiveness of policy actors to the president's programmatic aims. A president's prestige as an element of influence, Neustadt contends, is comparble to that of his professional reputation—neither one may decide the outcome of a particular situation, but both may have an impact on the possibilities in those situations and thus are pivotal to power prospects.

To protect public prestige a president must not merely be concerned with people's perceptions of the presidential personality; the image of the office itself, and what it ought to be, must be protected. He emphasizes this connection between popular prestige and people's notions of the role of the presidency because he believes the private lives of citizens—their personal dreams and anxieties—greatly color their expectations of the president. Popular discontent weakens one's public image. Therefore, to protect public prestige a president must be attuned to their hopes

and the objective conditions of their real world existence, such as "paychecks, grocery bills, children's schooling, sons at war" and other concerns of Main Street America. Unable to control all these elements of people's lives, the president must become a teacher of the public through words and, more importantly, actions, in effect convincing people to "accept the hard conditions in their lives, or anyway [to] not blame him."

Given that tactical choices provide the most essential means of guarding a president's three power sources—bargaining relationships, professional reputation and public prestige—Neustadt turns to an analysis of how the chief executive can gain the greatest benefit from these choices. His advice hinges on the simple proposition that a president makes the most of available choices by first comprehending the power stakes involved and acknowledging their implications. A president must perceive the possibilities of power and influence: "Before power can be served, it must be seen."[53] Here Neustadt definitely means for the president to undertake these activities personally. These are not tasks for advisers: "Nobody and nothing helps a President to see save as he helps himself." As the examples of Eisenhower's budget-day fiasco in 1957 and Truman's Korean War strategy shift in 1950 display, when a president neglects personal power stakes the policy results can seriously erode executive influence. Presidents should be wary of relying exclusively on the advice of experts and advisers, even when the issues are far removed from their experience. Only the president is an expert in the field of personal power. By developing "a consciousness of power stakes" a president will protect self-interest, clarify vision and improve the capacity to make choices, thus standing ready to decisively plan the course of government action.

Having discussed the philosophy behind, and importance of presidential choice-making, Neustadt asks how a president actually operationalizes his suggestions. A fundamental ingredient of self-help for the chief executive is information. By information, Neustadt does not simply mean the policy briefings and other routine data produced by advisers. Presidents need all this, but also need more. They need to stay abreast of "the odds and ends of tangible detail that pieced together in his mind illuminate the underside of issues put before him." Being generally informed is not enough for the power-seeking president. Knowledge of

the nitty gritty substance of policy formulation is the key. This implies the president should shy away from delegating all the dirty work of information gathering to advisers who report back only a clean, capsulized version of reality. Presidents need the dirt too. They ought to be their "own director of [their] own central intelligence." As Neustadt explains:

> Presidents are always being told that they should leave details to others. It is dubious advice. Exposure to details of operation and of policy provides the frame of reference for details of information. To be effective as his own director of intelligence, a President need be his own executive assistant. He need be both, that is to say, if he would help himself.[54]

Time constraints, of course, incessantly impinge upon a president's ability to secure such a broad view of government operations. But Neustadt believes it is possible for a president to deal with time pressure and still attend to personal power stakes. He grounds this belief in the figure of Franklin Roosevelt and his competing advisers, self-created deadlines and other administrative devices. Roosevelt's use of power and extraordinary administrative success, according to Neustadt, depended upon the development of his "interior resources," comprised of his acute sense of power, his abounding self-confidence and his sense of direction.

Neustadt concludes his study of presidential power by stressing the increasing need of the chief executive to bring to the office the qualities of government experience and an intense drive for personal power. Although he thinks that expertise and ambition, to be effective components of power, must be kept in perspective by the proper temperament, he still reduces presidential efficacy to the extremely personal pursuit of power. The power-seeker must be able to accept the inevitable frustration of the job. Save for that qualification, the chief executive's "unremitting search for personal power" remains the engine of enlightened administration. When it comes to American presidents who have searched unremittingly for power, the exemplary case for Neustadt (as it is for Laski and Rossiter) is FDR, the president whose call for enlightened administration frames this chapter at the outset. Of FDR, Neustadt writes:

> No President in this century has had a sharper sense of personal power, a sense of what it is and where it comes from; none has had more hunger for it, few have had more use for it, and only on or two could match his faith in his own competence to use it. Perception and desire and self-confidence, combined, produced their own reward. No modern President has been more nearly master in the White House.[55]

Elsewhere he commends FDR's qualities, his insatiable appetite for power, as the cornerstone of presidential greatness, citing the fact that he "wanted mastery," "wanted power for its own sake," brought a "taste for power," to the job, and so on.

Just what a president is supposed to do with all this personal power once the thirst for it has been quenched is not clear from Neustadt's discussion. He does equate the determined quest for power with the attainment of "viable" public policy, primarily because the president's political vantage point is so broad he should naturally pursue balanced, feasible policy directions. But the terms "viable," "balanced," and "feasible" seem hopelessly vague. Indeed, the language he employs to clarify such terms sounds reminiscent of Rossiter's ambiguous words, particularly when Neustadt (twice) tells us the president should be certain administration policy moves with "the grain of history," an especially obscure phrase. Disappointment awaits anyone hoping to discover an *analysis* of the *ends* of presidential power.[56] Neustadt has collapsed questions of ends into the quest for "viability." Presidential power is thought of in purely instrumental terms. What is doable is what should be done.

In sum, Neustadt wants his readers to follow him in placing their faith in the president as the political system's "Great Initiator." The job of the "President-as-expert" is to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable factors which the nation's problems entail, a task the chief executive is suited to perform if an awareness of power stakes and viable policy is maintained. While a president's expertise through experience and consciousness of personal power provide no panacea for the country's ills, they offer our best hope for "effective" policy. If there is any danger in all of this it "does not lie in our dependence on *a* man; it lies in our capacity to make ourselves depend upon a man who is inexpert." "Inexpert" performers in the White House are what Neustadt fears most. American democracy is addicted to expertise

at the top, expertise available only from a small group of "experienced politicians of extraordinary temperament." Such proficiency ensures the status quo will not be disturbed, for

> [Presidential] expertise assures a contribution to the system and it naturally commits him to proceed within the system. The system after all, is what he knows. The danger lies in men who do not know it.[57]

Neustadt ends his original edition of *Presidential Power* with these thoughts on the need for expertise at the commanding heights of the political system. Subsequent editions have added three chapters of "Later Reflections," covering the presidency from John Kennedy through Jimmy Carter, but leaving the original study intact. In no significant way do they enhance or shed new light on his original thesis. Only in his comments on the demise of Carter's presidency—with its roots (for Neustadt) in the "hazards of transition" to office which gave rise to the resignation of his Budget Director Bert Lance—does he suggest that presidents might be done in by something larger than particular incidents or personal weaknesses. He argues that Carter was a victim of expectations, in particular the expectations of Washingtonians. People expected too much of him, and continue to expect more than *any* president can deliver. But if this note of caution in his work has the ring of special pleading on behalf of politicians he personally supports, it is because the trajectory of his thesis has not prepared us for such a revision. Indeed, *Presidential Power* contributed significantly to the kinds of expectations Neustadt begins to view as in some way undermining the presidency itself. He is caught in a bind he helped create and of which he is only dimly aware.

> In a relative but real sense one can say of a President what Eisenhower's first Secretary of Defense once said of General Motors: what is good for the country is good for the President, and vice versa.[58]

This thought—especially the "vice versa"—perfectly captures the spirit of Neustadt's classic text. It is the expansivist clarion call.

The restrictivist reply

Neustadt's eleventh-hour second thoughts about the wisdom of the expansivist outlook give a hint that something went awry

along the way to the enchanted land of presidential government. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, defectors from this perspective were legion. It is common for political scientists to credit the twin debacles of Vietnam and Watergate with providing the impetus for the intellectual retreat. Erwin Hargrove's comments on the "crisis of the contemporary presidency" are representative of the changed climate in the aftermath of these two events:

> If this chapter were being written in 1960 by a political scientist of liberal persuasion it would surely eulogize presidential power. But today [1974] the words do not come.... Our optimistic assumptions about the happy fusion of power and purpose have been exploded. It is not only that power has been abused but also that we trusted too much in it.[59]

Reflecting on the terms of Johnson and Nixon, Hargrove warns, "we must not be beguiled again by men of power."

Others more explicitly sought to refute the expansivist notion of presidential government as an enduring chapter in American political history. "The 1970s marked the end of the presidential era in American politics," writes Lester Salamon in an essay directly addressed to the kind of position Burns endorsed so enthusiastically. He continues,

> [T]he illusory quality of presidential government ceased being a cause for concern and became instead something to be applauded. The reason: for a brief period, the illusion of presidential government came close to being translated into reality, and the results turned out to be far different, and far more frightening, than its champions had expected.[60]

Clearly the times warranted some measure of rethinking on the part of presidency scholars. In the face of presidential excess and abuse of power, the idea that the reach of the office should be restricted gained credence.

It would be shortsighted, however, to consider the restrictivist orientation as simply a reaction to the strife of the 60s and 70s. In fact, its intellectual origins can be found decades earlier in the work of Edward S. Corwin. Written in 1940, with numerous later editions, *The President: Office and Powers* expressed Corwin's concern that the office has become dangerously personalized, its powers enlarged to the point of resembling, on occasion, a

"primitive monarchy." Corwin contends that the deliberately loose grant of "executive power" in Article II of the Constitution has been stretched by the combined impact of the handful of truly great presidents who have occupied the office, especially those of the twentieth century. He thus finds that, "Taken by and large, the history of the presidency is a history of aggrandizement."[61] The fruits of aggrandizement are passed on from strong chief executives to less dynamic ones through the "accumulated tradition of the office," hence "precedents established by a forceful or politically successful personality in the office are available to less gifted successors, and permanently so because of the difficulty with which the Constitution is amended."[62] For this reason, the potential threat posed by such presidents as FDR is not likely to diminish over time.

Corwin brings a legalistic approach to the study of the office. He focuses much attention on Supreme Court cases which contributed to the evolution of the president's constitutionally granted powers from 1787 onward. We get, for example, a discussion of the president in the role of "organ of foreign relations." Here we see the founding fathers issuing "an invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy," the struggle taking place between the chief executive and Congress. While such power is formally divided, the president's portion has waxed inexorably for a host of reasons, leaving the office with "the lion's share" of responsibility for shaping the substance of foreign policy. The disparity in power is even more pronounced during wartime as the president assumes the commander-in-chief role. Then the executive benefits from the accretion of inherent powers lodged in the leadership position of a sovereign state.

As a result of this growth in presidential prestige, people come to view the chief executive as the architect of the nation's every circumstance, "looking upon the Chief Executive as the author of peace, prosperity, and good crops, or, in the alternative, of war, depression, and famine." Even in light of the institutionalization of much of the administrative dimension of the job, "the office remains highly personal." For Corwin, personalization signals the dominance of a conception of the office as an autonomous center of activity, with the citizenry *embodied* in the executive. The casualty of this supremacy is legislative power and the notion

of the people being *re-presented* in Congress. Ironically, the legislature has collaborated in its own evisceration, delegating vast amounts of power and responsibility to the president in the name of meeting the demands placed on the modern state by the public. Presidential aggrandizement therefore encourages the marasmus of the most cherished constitutional principle for Corwin, and for all restrictivists—the separation of powers.

Corwin insists upon the need to stabilize the relationship between these two branches of government. The presidency has encroached too deeply into American political life, a problem made no less troubling by the knowledge that it has come, by and large, with the blessing of popular opinion. While not certain the encroachment poses a threat to personal liberty, he remains wary of its advance. It is this sense of unease that restrictivists share. Corwin's writing thus led the way for what later became a parade of scholars seeking to restrain, in some measure, the political dominance of executive authority. What follows is an exploration of three represenattive members of this bandwagon—Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Thomas Cronin and Theodore Lowi.

The first thing to note about Schlesinger is how fitting it is to picture him climbing aboard a bandwagon in writing his renowned book *The Imperial Presidency.* He was not always given to cautious appraisals of the scope of presidential power, serving as the "official historian" of the Kennedy administration, to use Noam Chomsky's apt phrase connoting his criticism of Schlesinger's generally effusive praise for Kennedy's presidency and his uncritical attitude toward the administration's foreign policy initiatives, especially in Vietnam.[63] For his part, Schlesinger admits a degree of complicity in the furtherance of expansivist notions of the office. Lamenting the "rise of the presidential mystique," he faults political scientists and historians, including himself, for giving "historical sanction" to an "uncritical cult of the activst presidency" in postwar scholarship.[64] We should think of him, then, as a sort of born-again restrictivist.

Schlesinger's shift away from the expansivist school was prompted by his revulsion against what he saw as the deformation of the Constitution caused by the growth of presidential power, especially in foreign policy. The specific deformation—the underlying theme of the entire book—is the extent to which

postwar presidents have besieged the separation of powers. While many factors contributed to the historic destabilization of the institutional balance of power between the president and Congress, they seemed to coalesce in a White House fueled by President Nixon's "compulsive internal drives." Vietnam and Watergate drew attention to the glaring decay of presidential accountability which, under the intense pressure of worldwide crisis, created the imperial presidency. Schlesinger's only explicit definition of the "imperial presidency" comes in an epilogue to a mid-1974 edition, where he says that it "may be briefly defined as the condition resulting when the balance between presidential power and presidential accountability is destroyed."[65] It is absolutely crucial to note that what concerns him throughout is the draining of countervailing centers of power (most notably congressional powers) out of the political system. The problem is an *institutional* one. The *presidency* has run amok. Hence the title of the book tells the story: the office has become imperial, not the nation's foreign policy or the political economy it supports.

Schlesinger's work traces the history of changes in the balance of power between the president and Congress, with the modern period marked by an outright presidential "appropriation" of powers granted the Congress in the Constitution. This appropriation is particularly striking in foreign affairs, the aspect of political life that provided the "decisive impetus" to the imperial presidency. However difficult it might be to ascertain the intent of the framers, Schlesinger points out that they surely intended to divide control over the war powers. Yet it is this division that has come under attack since the early days of the republic.

The increase in the occurance of "presidential war" has not been a steady one. It can be seen more accurately as a cycle of action and reaction: the president engages in some type of military activity which leaves the office with the upper hand in foreign policy matters, and then Congress tries to recoup some of the power taken by the president. The key is that the power lost by Congress is never completely recovered. And each new presidential recoil against congressional reassertions of power elevates the office in the conduct of international relations. The result is an upward trend by fits and starts. Thus we have the nineteenth century examples (there are dozens more) of presidential war in the case of the bloody annexation of Texas, the

destruction of San Juan del Norte (Greytown), Nicaragua, and the Civil War. Each of these assertions of presidential war-making power came at the expense of a serious congressional role in these matters.

The case of the leveling of San Juan del Norte in 1854 is instructive for what it says about both U.S. foreign policy (especially given the Reagan administration's eight-year war against the Nicaraguan government) and about Schlesinger's approach to his thesis. The U.S. naval bombardment of the town came as an act of revenge after an incident in which an American official was insulted. Not wanting to back down to pressure from Congress and Britain, President Franklin Pierce eventually defended this wanton destruction by defining the inhabitants of the town as, after all, only a "camp of savages" living in a "pretended community." The incident speaks volumes about the U.S. attitude toward Latin America, and toward the rest of the world we define as the Other when it suits our global ambitions. It is an antecedent of the kind of foreign policy the nation would carry into the twentieth century as well. But for the purposes of Schlesinger's analysis the incident serves only as another case where Congress was denied a role in authorizing military conflict. The issue for him is an institutional one concerning process.

Institutional jockeying continued after the Civil War, when Congress "makes a comeback," asserting its power in the areas of treaty-making and requests for executive information. But the congressional star fell once again with the Spanish-American War and the proliferation of executive agreements under William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. Also, Congress generally took a back seat during the strong tenures of Roosevelt and Wilson, provoking "the inevitable reaction" of congressional resurgence between the time of the Versailles Treaty and Pearl Harbor. With the coming of the Second World War, though, the institutional ebb and flow begins to diminish, in part because of unfavorable reaction to congressional neutrality legislation which had tied Franklin Roosevelt's hands in the critical years leading up to the war. In trying to act as a check on the executive, Congress instead had acted as a "straightjacket" on the nation's foreign policy, leaving "the verdict of history" to be one of congressional failure. "No one for a long time after would trust Congress with basic foreign policy," Schlesinger writes. "Congress did not even trust itself."[66]

Against this backdrop, the build up of presidential power in foreign affairs became nearly irresistible. The bombing of Pearl Harbor facilitated a major shift in FDR's conception of presidential power. Prior to the war, he sought congressional collaboration for most of his New Deal and foreign policy initiatives. But after Congress declared war, he used his commander-in-chief powers to expand the unilateral use of executive authority. As it had so often in the past, Schlesinger asserts, "war nourished the presidency." Schlesinger's concern is with the unilateral aspect of the president's power, since its growth was accompanied by a corresponding decline in legislative power. But as with his earlier articulation of this procedural position, he forecloses many fundamental issues. For instance, his preoccupation with purely tactical questions leads him to obscure the importance of policies such as the decision to intern Japanese-Americans during the war (Schlesinger chooses to refer to their "removal," a curiously sanitized word choice). Here a "shameful" policy decision received the approval of Congress and the Supreme Court, leaving in doubt the salience of his thesis on the centrality of the separation of powers issue. Is the emergency power of the president the basic question at stake when a segment of the population is put in prison camps, or is there also a crucial question about the nature of U.S. foreign policy and the ideology that underlies it at home? Schlesinger confines his criticism to the first issue.

Indeed, Schlesinger consciously tries to sidestep questions about the values and interests behind policy decisions of the government. Thus in a section on postwar America he admits that in order to secure congressional passage of aid for Greece and Turkey, Truman used the tactic of trying to "scare the hell out of the country" with appeals to anticommunism and international peril. But some 30 pages later, assessing the national climate in the wake of the Korean War and the crisis atmosphere of threats to "national security," the fact that the Soviet threat was to a great extent simply a promotional strategy aimed at the American public is no longer of importance. Of the cold war, he writes:

> It is not necesary here to argue whether crisis was real or imagined and the foreign policy decent or imperialistic. Surely all those adjectives applied at one time or another. . . . But whatever the

> motives and merits of American foreign policy in these years, our present analysis requires us only to assess the impact of that policy on American political institutions.[67]

The resulting elevation of "national security" to a "supreme value" certainly merits attention, as does the concomitant expansion of executive prerogative to combat alleged threats. But since Schlesinger can offer no evidence that Congress—the branch losing power in the face of an inexorable executive power grab—could have responded to a *different* set of imperatives or would have offered a *different*, less contrived account of Soviet foreign policy aims in particular and the world situation in general, his unwillingness to question "the motives and merits of American foreign policy" during this formative cold war period weakens his argument considerably. He ignores the deeper level of analysis for the sake of an exclusively institutional focus.

Schlesinger continues to confine his inquiry to procedural questions in his analysis of Nixon's presidency, especially his handling of Vietnam and Watergate. Fed by Kennedy's "brilliance" during the missile crisis, and Johnson's use of executive power to order troops into the Dominican Republic and again to manufacture the circumstances surrounding the Tonkin Gulf resolution, the presidency becomes "rampant," "revolutionary," and an outright threat to democracy under the sway of Nixon's "agitated psyche." "By the 1970s the title Commander-in-Chief had acquired almost a sacramental aura," according to Schlesinger, "translating its holder from worldly matters into an ineffable realm of higher duty."[68] Nixon basked in the aura to defend his unilateral assertions of power in Vietnam and Cambodia, using the phrase commander-in-chief "as if it were an incantation." But Schlesinger is not without his own enchanted language, with "separation of powers" casting its spell of constitutional closure on the issues involved. For it is, we must keep in mind, the "legal need to go to Congress before leading the nation into war" that Nixon's presidency so brazenly ignores. The *presidential* nature of Nixon's "presidential war" offends Schlesinger most profoundly, not the war itself or the dynamics that engendered it. As Schlesinger frames the problem:

> The Nixon theory of presidential war...had effectively liquidated the constitutional command that the power to authorize war belonged to the Congress. Nixon had thereby erased the most solemn written check on presidential war.[69]

Though clearly rooted in foreign policy, Nixon's assault on the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches eventually found domestic equivalents. His efforts to control appropriations through impoundment and his enlargement of claims of executive privilege stand as two examples of Nixon's desire to "make Congress as impotent in domestic affairs as it had come to be in foreign affairs." Reinforced by a host of other historic forces tending to transfer political power to the executive, Nixon's personal compulsions drove him to seek ever-greater control of national priorities. He sought, Schlesinger asserts, nothing short of a revolution in American politics, its essence being "power to the presidency." What this would have entailed was the establishment of a "plebiscitary presidency"—since Nixon personified the majority of the citizenry, his own beliefs about the best interests of the nation justified any course of action he deemed necessary, accountability coming only at election time. This type of personal rule renders any opposition inherently undemocratic. And its logic legitimizes the types of illegal activities the administration undertook in the Watergate affair.

Fortunately for the nation, Watergate eventually put a halt to the advance of Nixon's revolutionary agenda. The other institutions that are supposed to play a vital role in the polity—the judiciary, the press, Congress, and executive agencies—"all drew new confidence as institutions from the exercise of power they had forgotten they possessed." With constitutional vigor restored, the nation is still left to grapple with the question of the relationship between democracy and foreign policy. For Schlesinger this question boils down to an old argument over "the location of the war-making power." The problem turns on the precise distribution of power between the two branches that are supposed to share this authority, with the distribution meant to ensure that no one person exercises such monumental power.

In searching for a solution Schlesinger provides a glimpse of a critique that moves beyond the bounds of his procedural orientation. The answer, he finds, "lay not in machinery but in policy." Perhaps we need to rethink the "messianic globalism"

traditionally associated with our foreign policy. Perhaps it is time for a "redefinition of American interests abroad" to diminish America's "will to unlimited global intervention." "If such things took place," he speculates, "then the imperial heat would be off, and Congress would have the opportunity. . . .to reassert its role in the constitutional scheme."[70]

The feebleness of Schlesinger's commitment to such major foreign policy revisions quickly becomes evident, though. To begin with, his principle objection to American pursuit of empire is that it tends to "deform and disable the Constitution," centralizing power where he prefers to see power shared. Moreover we learn that it was the *Nixon* administration that fumbled the opportunity to do the basic rethinking and redefinition necessary to change U.S. international objectives, as if the major practitioner of the imperial presidency would be predisposed to challenge the foundations of imperial logic and interest. Finally he argues that to regain democratic control over foreign policy, the "ultimate answer lay in the restoration of the constitutional comity so badly breached by the imperial Presidency and so nearly destroyed by the revolutionary Presidency."[71] The rebirth of comity calls for such measures as the revival of the State Department, the reassertion of Congress as at least a junior partner in the formulation of policy, and a loosening of the "secrecy sytem" that gives the executive branch such a tight hold on information. While these moves might help the president understand that "foreign policy was not his personal property," Schlesinger gives us no grounds for reasonably expecting that if it became shared property—with Congress or the State Department or anybody else—decisions would be based on anything other than status quo assumptions about national security and the national interest which have proven so compatible with the imperial presidency. His call for a rethinking of "messianic globalism" thus seems purely rhetorical, divorced as it is from any sustained, penetrating analysis of the historic, systemic roots of such motives.

Looking to the future of the presidency, Schlesinger foresees not only the need for constitutional comity, but also the need to foster a less deferential public attitude toward the chief executive. "[W]hat the country needs today is a little serious disrespect for the office of the Presidency," he contends, calling

for "a decline in reverence" to reverse the decline in presidential accountability. Seen in this light, Nixon's dark tenure had a very bright side to it—"Watergate was potentially the best thing to have happened to the Presidency in a long time." If the right lessons are learned, then the Nixon years will be viewed as "a culmination" of American society's "compulsion toward presidential power." The chief lesson is the need to strike a balance between an energetic chief executive and a constitutional one. If such a balance can be restored, he feels people will come to speak not of "the shame of Watergate," but "the glory of Watergate." The glory, of course, lies in the conclusion that the nation's democratic institutions work. Bad guys eventually get caught.

Schlesinger's misgivings about the relative growth of presidential power and his advocacy of greater accountability and constitutional balance are standard fare for the restrictivist school of thought. His special place in the literature comes from the urgency of his message. The pharase "imperial presidency" became something of a rallying cry for those concerned that the nation's institutional integrity was at stake in the swirl of events of the early 1970s. It was one of his subthemes, though—the necessity of diminishing public reverence for presidential authority—that received fuller development in the writing of Thomas Cronin, particularly his *The State of the Presidency.* Published in 1975, Cronin's book posed a major challenge to orthodox scholarship on the presidency.[72] He charged the academy with presenting a standard, hopelessly idealized version of the office, which fostered exaggerated public expectations about presidential efficacy. His contribution to the restrictivist cause was to make a case for lowering substantially those expectations.

Writing at a time of heightened public awareness of the dangers of executive usurpation of power, Cronin sets out to explain "the presidential puzzle." Noting a marked drop in public confidence in the credibility of presidents, he warns of widespread cynicism and confusion if the veil of illusions and misplaced hopes surrounding the president is not lifted. From the outset he makes his pitch for realism:

> To understand the presidency, we need to appreciate the limits of the presidency, the constraints on presidents, and the

> exaggerated expectations we visit on both. We overestimate powers of the office, and underestimate the economic, social and cultural factors that shape presidential performance.[73]

Healthy skepticism is in order if the office is to be brought back in to some kind of reasonable focus.

At the root of the puzzle, Cronin finds a series of paradoxes born of public expectations and demands which place presidents in no-win binds. These binds have grown especially confining in recent decades, as the public came to expect presidents routinely to live up to the Rooseveltian image of bold, innovative leadership, while simultaneously not overstepping the limits of acceptable constitutional behavior.

> The modern (post-Franklin Roosevelt) presidency is bounded and constrained by various expectations that are decidedly paradoxical. Presidents and presidential candidates must constantly balance themselves between conflicting demands.... [I]t could well be that our paradoxical expectations and the imperatives of the job make for schizophrenic presidential performances.[74]

Public expectations which are "exaggerated or hopelessly contradictory" create a climate conducive to presidents attempting to reach too far, thus leaving them subject to criticism when they inevitably come up short.

Cronin cites a dozen such presidential paradoxes, with the idea that "a more sophisticated and tolerant consideration" of the office might lift a portion of the disabling burden from presidents' shoulders. It is not necessary to delve into all of them; a sampling conveys the thrust of his argument. For instance, the public demands a president be "the decent and just but decisive and guileful leader." This sets up a contradictory dynamic within which a president is torn between toughness and tenderness: the role of the "kindhearted son of a bitch" is difficult to pull off. Likewise, "The common man who gives an uncommon performance" is another paradox. It calls for a folksy leader who can perform heroic deeds — the "uncommon common man." Apparently Truman successfully handled this conflicting demand. Carter surely could not. Finally, there is the traditional constitutional paradox that confers on the president the dilemma

of being both "national unifier and national divider." As head of state and head of government, the president must at least try to create the impression of rising above politics while leading a decidedly political administration (and also serving as party chief). Again, the president is left in a difficult position—perched above the fray yet standing up to his neck in it.

Together these and the other paradoxes constitute an imposing challenge to presidential leadership. Asked to be all things to all people, the president has both too much and too little power to get the job done. When public expectations are not met by our elected "pseudomessiah," we react politically with "the wrath of our vengence." "It is almost ritual destruction," Cronin explains. "[W]e venerate the presidency, but we destroy our presidents."[75] Cronin overstates the fury of public retribution here, given the remarkable and troubling unwillingness of the media and political pundits to bury the corpse of the nation's most resilient presidential Lazarus, Richard Nixon, whose books and presence seem never to fade from the public eye. Yet Cronin's main point remains useful: the political system is geared toward the coronation of a person of superhuman qualities every four years. He locates the responsibility for this distortion of reason in the minds of the people, who constantly search for a "savior-hero." "The paradoxes of the presidency do not lie in the White House," he asserts, "but in the emotings, feelings, and expectations of us all."

One prime consequence of inflated public expectations is what Cronin refers to as "the textbook presidency." The textbook presidency is an interpretation of the office replete with myths about the "benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient, and high moral" chief executive. A product of post-FDR political science, this "romantic—benevolent father, Big Daddy" version was extolled in college textbooks of the 1950s and 60s. Cronin examines more than 30 such books to glean the common ingredients of this mythic scholarly model. He finds surprisingly little variation on the president-as-great-man theme.

> What resulted very often was a storybook view that whatever was good for our president must be the right thing. We were told the president is the embodiment of all that is good in America: courage, honesty, integrity, and compassion. We began to hail the power-maximizing president.[76]

Standard texts portray the president as the engine of national progress, leading the people as their teacher and preacher, and advocating a wide government presence to ensure prosperity and social justice. The vision presented is that "if Americans could only identify and elect the right person, their loftiest aspirations would be fulfilled." Rossiter and Neustadt both are grouped among the purveyors of the textbook conventions.[77] Summarizing this academic concoction, Cronin highlights two dimensions which together describe the textbook ideal type president. The "Omnipotent-competent dimension" holds that the president is *the* strategic catalyst for national progress, and that only the president can fashion public policy to meet the crises plaguing the republic. On the "moralistic-benevolent dimension" the president is viewed as the true personal and moral leader of the people, and if the right person is found for the job, all will be well.

In hindsight the textbook perspective seems woefully inadequate, even somewhat silly. And one would think that it would have foundered on the shoals of the Vietnam and Watergate debacles. But Cronin thinks this orientation is alive and well, if perhaps less assured. After a period of disillusionment within the public, "the prevailing view once again took hold that only the president can get things done, only the president can lead legislatively, only the president can negotiate effectively with other nations, and only the president can make the country governable."[78] Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter tried a more austere presidency, Cronin thinks, but the voters repudiated their attempts. Public expectations just will not let the larger-than-life image of the president die, for

> Americans still long for dynamic, reassuring, and strong leadership. Watergate notwithstanding, we still celebrate the gutsy, aggressive presidents—even if many of them did violate the legal and constitutional niceties of our separation-of-powers ideal.[79]

Cronin attributes the persistence of the textbook model to a number of mutually-reinforcing factors.[60] These include the American sense of mission which grew out of our experience in World War II, resulting in the prevalent image of the president as "leader of the free world"—an image enhanced to an enormous degree by the solidification of nuclear weapons as an element in the calculation of U.S. foreign policy. A second factor is the

enduring human tendency to believe in the ability of "great" people to guide a nation through difficult times. An important psychological role is played by the president as a "national symbol of reassurance," leading Americans to place certain chief executives "on a pedestal rather than under a microscope." The personal values of presidency scholars come into play as a third force. Predominantly beholden to liberal ideology, many authors trumpet the activist presidents, particularly FDR. Likewise, the modes of analysis employed by authors are another influence. Authors typically use some combination of the public record, biographies, prior texts, executive department staff memoirs and memos, interviews with Washington officials, and newspaper and magazine articles—sources which are likely to encourage a more positive picture of the president. Political insiders, when not steadfastly trying to protect their president, often will discuss mistakes and dirty laundry only if such information is off the record. And finally, television has magnified the president dramatically. It places in the president's hands tremendous powers "over reality, perception, and over the whole way in which issues are presented and discussed in America." Thus the textbook presidency has become a "prime-time presidency" as well, a fact that the Reagan presidency has verified many times over.

These sustaining aspects of textbook orthodoxy (and there are others) have consequences about which Cronin has serious reservations. One cost of such an exaggerated version of the office is the extent to which it cheapens the quality of citizen participation, or stifles it altogether. Many people come to regard the president as "the national chaplain," therefore above reproach. This inhibits the development of an active, involved citizenry, since the president should be able to handle whatever troubles arise. The flip side of such an attitude, of course, is that it sets up people for cynicism and despair when a president fails to measure up to our lofty expectations. And such reactions can weaken the legitimacy of political institutions. The textbook imagery also affects presidents, who may actually believe the mythology of presidential invincibility. Expecting reverence from the people, a president's perspective on the world can become distorted. And White House aides often reinforce this danger by shielding their boss from outside influences. Both the Johnson and Nixon administrations have been critiqued on the grounds that they eventually lost contact with reality.[81]

But of all the costs of the textbook phenomenon, Cronin is most troubled by the publicity imperative it engenders—"looking presidential" as he calls it. What follows from the need to look presidential is a public relations "script," which emphasizes style over substance, or "selling the appearance of leadership." The priorities of public relations often lead presidents "to 'act,' to fake and to mislead as they try to live up to the illusory notion that the right person in one job single-handedly can solve the nation's problems."[82] Moreover, when manipulation of images is elevated to a high art form, "telling the truth becomes dangerous," and hence a casualty.

Cronin concludes that the most fundamental question raised by the illusions surrounding public perceptions of the president—reinforced as they are by uncritical scholarship—is how the nation's political leadership and its citizenry can be brought back into a healthier relationship more closely approximating democratic ideals. Sounding a bit like Schlesinger, he stresses the need for a strong but accountable president, with an informed, vigilant public an essential ingredient in any meaningful notion of accountability. As he asserts, "The presidency must not be allowed to become the only, or even the primary, instrument for the realization of government of, by, and for the people."[83] Social change occurs as often from the active commitment of "militant mobilizers" and "political prophets" as it does from "visionary presidents." The contributions of "extragovernmental pressures" such as movements for civil rights, women's rights, and consumer and environmental protection are valued for their consciousness-raising and their challenge to vested interests—interests to which presidents often are beholden. For in order to get elected, aspiring presidents must play by the rules of the game, a game they get locked in to.

One would like Cronin to explore the linkages between presidents and these dominant interests, as well as the problems faced by mass movements which hope to alter fundamentally some aspect of the status quo. Such an examination would situate the president and the public within a political, economic, and social context that clarifies the structural dimensions of life and explores the ways they inhibit change. But he offers only these sketchy impressions, almost as afterthoughts. His final point reiterates that he is in no way denying the importance of dynamic

presidential leadership. On the contrary, presidential leadership remains at a premium:

> We shall, of course, need a strengthened and effective presidency. We shall, of course, need brilliant, talented presidents. But we need to deflate the notion that presidents can provide all or even the major amount of our national leadership.[84]

Hence, Cronin urges people to take the political initiative, looking less to Washington for solutions to problems. He proposes that a balance be struck between presidential leadership and citizen activity, lowering our expectations of the former and raising our faith in the latter.

The work of Theodore Lowi, the last restrictivist thinker I will discuss, has an affinity to the ideas of both Schlesinger and Cronin. Like Cronin, he fears that public expectations of the president have surpassed by far any reasonable chance of being met. And like Schlesinger, he senses that the entire political system is out of balance, weighted too heavily toward the president. Indeed, he argues that the combination of these factors actually has changed the very nature of the American political system, nearly creating as a general condition what Schlesinger saw as only a dangerous possibility under Nixon—a plebiscitary republic, led by a plebiscitary president. "Already we have a virtual cult of personality revolving around the White House," he observes darkly in the preface of his 1985 text *The Personal President*. The book traces the rise of the personal presidency, assesses its impact on political life, and offers a way to overcome the "inherent pathologies" it has created. And it provides an indication of where the restrictivist perspective might be heading as its proponents look to analyze the office in the 1980s and beyond.

Lowi contends that the dramatic expansion in the powers of the presidency since the New Deal cemented a connection between big government, strong presidents and democracy. The connection is tantamount to a "redefinition of democratic theory with the presidency at its core." President-centered politics created an entirely new social contract whereby the president provides services to the people while the people, in return, identify directly with their leader. "This is the personal presidency," Lowi explains,

"an office of tremendous personal power drawn from the people—directly and through Congress and the Supreme Court—and based on the new democratic theory that the presidency with all powers is the necessary condition for governing a large, democratic nation."[85] But the personal presidency carries high costs, for its very nature breeds frustration. Unavoidable barriers prevent presidents from making good on all their promises to the electorate, yet to the extent that they fulfill any of them, expectations climb even higher. Presidents are left trying to fashion the appearance of success. The outcome is a no-win situation, much like what Cronin delineated. "The harder presidents try to please their mass constituency, the more alienated that constituency becomes," according to Lowi, and the situation arises regardless of who holds office.[86]

It was not always like this in American politics. Throughout what Lowi terms the "traditional system," from 1800 to 1933, Congress reigned as the dominant national institution. Patronage handed out by congressmen and committees was the glue that held everything together, as policies were framed to provide resources for distribution to clients. In this "patronage state" the president was of secondary importance. The patronage state went into decline by the late nineteenth century, though, as public pressure for government action mounted, first in the state capitals but eventually in Washington. It was moribund by the arrival of the New Deal. And since FDR's time "every president has been exceptional, as compared to presidents under the traditional system." Roosevelt did not give up the patronage state, however. Rather he added to it what Lowi calls the "regulatory state" and the "redistributive [welfare] state," whose new functions "finally brought the national government into a directly coercive relationship with the people." A new criterion for judging the success—even the legitimacy—of government was established as the ability to deliver services became a test of government effectiveness.[87] With the president supplanting Congress as the central institution of the ever-expanding federal government, a new sense emerged that "the president is the government."

Roosevelt's adept use of the available communication technologies of the time helped ossify this revolutionary attitude. Lowi sums up his legacy in the concept of the plebiscitary presidency, indicating that FDR achieved his goals through "direct

mass political methods." It was not novel for presidents to assume such great power. Schlesinger, for example, amply documents the accretion of power to the chief executive in wartime. What was new was the combination of national security and economic security as a dual rationale for a sustained government presence. In the absence of vibrant political parties—manifested by the spread of split-ticket voting, the rise of the independent voter, and the like—the presidency seeks to carve out its own personal, independent constituency which further weakens the party structure. The public, for its part, vigilantly watches the executive branch to see that agencies come through with the promised services. Lowi offers this observation on what he terms the resulting "Republic of Service Delivery":

> [S]ince the president has become the embodiment of government, it seems perfectly normal for millions upon millions of Americans to concentrate their hopes and fears directly and personally upon him. It is no wonder that the United States has developed such a tremendous stake in the "personal president" and his personal capacity to govern.[88]

The proliferation of presidential primaries has augmented the focus of the political system on the chief executive. With party leaders a marginal player at best, candidates individually compete to amass delegates who really have nothing in common with either the candidate or each other, save for their pledge of support. The base of support that comes out of this process bears little resemblance to a genuine coalition. Lowi compares it to a "flux," a word used in physics to describe independent, unrelated particles revolving around a temporary center of gravity. The plebiscitary president is not actually "made," however, until after the primaries, during the campaign when television exposure magnifies the politician's persona and shapes the presidential mystique. Celebrity status and isolation (the candidates increasingly want to appear to be "above" party, managed by their personal campaign organizations) coalesce to form the presidential personality, which Lowi sees as "a combination of Jesus Christ and the Statue of Liberty: Bring *me* your burdens. Bring *me* your hopes and fears. Bring *me* your search for salvation."[89]

Once such demigods reach the White House Lowi finds they all behave essentially the same way. This is not to say that

presidents all have the same psychological composition. Obviously their characters cannot be identical. But Lowi marvels at the surprising degree of continuity in their behavior despite character divergence. All presidents strive to keep the programmatic initiative, and further, to restrict it as much as possible to the White House proper, as opposed to the larger cabinet. Thus it is common to hear about "the president's program, the president's budget, the president's administrative initiative"—again, personalizing and centralizing the responsibility for government. Lowi posits that the resulting dynamic sets up job demands and public expectations which are "pathological, paranoid, and perverse." He adds:

> The president is the Wizard of Oz. Appearances become everything.... The more the president holds to the initiative and keeps it personal, the more he reinforces the mythology that there actually exists in the White House a "capacity to govern."[90]

It is precisely this capacity to govern that Lowi thinks has been drained from the political system by the onset of the plebiscitary presidency. The loss affects both domestic and foreign policy. Domestically, the presidency is based on the assumptions of liberalism. Liberal presidents want to expand the scope of government intervention. Increasingly, though, Lowi sees liberalism as an unrestrained set of values, a philosophy unable to establish priorities among competing claims for government programs and thus, unable to say no to any groups seeking support. Such indiscriminant expansion of government has influenced—captured, actually—the presidencies of avowed conservatives as well as liberals. Hence we have the example of Nixon, the hard-nosed Republican, presiding over the growth of a host of regulatory programs. Lowi places the even more conservative Reagan in the same category, calling his espoused desire to get the government off the backs of the people "completely phony." On this reading, all Reagan has done is shift the priorities of the government from social spending to defense expenditures, leaving "the liberal presidency" intact.

As for foreign policy, Lowi identifies several "syndromes" afflicting presidents regardless of their political stripe. The "star syndrome" compels the White House to resist most resolutely any sharing of foreign policy initiatives. Similarly, presidents

succumb to the "anti-diplomacy syndrome," relying heavily—and in crisis situations almost exclusively—on the Secretary of State, special assistants for national security or special envoys, at the expense of developing an independent professional foreign service trained in diplomacy. Most importantly, presidents face "the oversell syndrome" (lying in state). They simplify and dramatize appeals to international challenges they perceive, overselling every threat and always finding "a commie in the woodpile." The danger here is that if proclamations of threats mount, the president may end up locked into a position where, because "results" are expected, military escalation is the only course of action.

When weighing the costs and benefits of the plebiscitary presidency in foreign and domestic policy, Lowi turns up mainly costs. The expectations placed on the president virtually guarantee the cultivation of deceit. Moreover, since the presidency and the state are viewed as essentially synonymous, any opposition to the president's will can be construed as to some extent unpatriotic. To remedy the situation, Lowi concludes with an appeal to restore the balance between the president and other institutions—particularly Congress and parties. Restoring the balance would bring the presidency back down to earthly dimensions, an absolute necessity as far as Lowi is concerned. Interestingly, Lowi does not share Schlesinger's optimism that Watergate stimulated a fundamental move toward this end. Watergate did not cleanse the political system; it did not teach us lessons about the ultimate workability of the Constitution. On the contrary,

> [N]o substantial direct lesson can be learned from Watergate except not to engage in illegal activities or be caught doing so.... In every respect other than the extent of illegal activities, there is a Watergate of some kind everyday in the life of a president.[91]

Lowi faults Schlesinger for emphasizing the personal dimension of Watergate and the imperial presidency. He rejects the view of Nixon as "aberrant, illogical, or psychopathological." In fact he thinks Nixon was operating in a "consistent, logical, and normal" manner under the plebiscitary assumptions of the office. Those assumptions hold that the president is state personified, that the powers of the office should match its crushing responsibilities, that the president should not be bound

by normal legal restrictions when the state is at risk, and that opponents of the president are disloyal. Acting on these assumptions, Lowi writes, "then his [Nixon's] actions, including his crimes, are entirely consistent and rational, quite possibly motivated by the highest sense of public interest." Lowi is not being soft on Nixonism. But he is trying to foster appreciation of the fact that the modern plebiscitary presidency must routinely cope with enormous, unrealistic pressures from many quarters, including "the greatest source of everyday pressure on the presidency—not the Soviet Union, not world leadership, but the American people and their expectations."[92]

Dealing with these expectations requires reform and Lowi proposes such measures. First, though, he dismisses as inadequate the War Powers Resolution of 1973, the Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, and several older plans such as the proposal for one six-year term and a presidential cabinet. Real reform, as he sees it, requires the establishment of a responsible *multiparty* system. Enumerating nine myths about the existing two-party system, he contends that "nothing about the present American party system warrants the respect it receives."[93] Enacting changes which would facilitate a multiparty system (he thinks the most workable number would be three) would have a number of advantages, most notably reviving parties as meaningful institutions. His point, however, is not to lay out the details of a new set of party rules but simply to argue that the reinvigoration of parties would be a big step toward "building down" the presidency. Multiple parties, Lowi says, would reduce the need of parties to appear to be all things to all people. They would be expected to have a more limited, hence more realistic scope of coverage which would mean that "presidential candidates would no longer have to appear omnicompetent." Collective political responsibility could be fostered if the president came to be viewed on a more human scale. Restrictivist scholars share a common desire to take some of the burden off the president's shoulders by parceling a portion of it out to Congress, parties and other institutions. It is hoped that this would tame the tendency toward fixation on the president—whether currently conceived of as "imperial," "textbook" or "personal."

Lowi's prescription for change seems provocative for its commitment to creating the space for the institutional airing of

political alternatives ("Why, a couple of the parties might even be radical!" he exclaims at one point). He assumes, at least implicitly, that the policy alternatives currently available are in some way insufficient. But the value of his proposals depends upon a much closer examination of the *reasons* why presidents have so much difficulty getting things done. What structural forces inhibit the fulfillment of a president's objectives? How are those objectives decided upon? What *ends*, if any, are given policy priority and what does this tell us about the competing interest groups Lowi claims vie for government favor? It is to such questions—questions largely ignored by expansivist theorists and given only a surface treatment by restrictivists—that we now turn our attention.