

# PRESIDENCY RESEARCH



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Vol. VII, No. 2

Spring, 1985

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NEWS AND NOTES

PRG Panels at the 1985 APSA Meeting

Panel 1: Informal Channels of Communication in the Presidency and Congress.

Papers by Paul Light (Gangs in Government), Susan Hammond (Caucuses in Congress), and Mark Petracca (Executive Advisory Commissions)  
Thursday, August 29, at 1:30

Panel 2: Presidency Texts in the 1980s.

Roundtable chaired by Thomas Cronin, with Stephen Wayne, Benjamin Page, and Michael Nelson  
Friday, August 30, at 3:30

Panel 3: The Presidential Appointments Process.

Chaired by Calvin MacKenzie, with papers by Christopher Deering and James Pfiffner  
Saturday, August 31, at 10:45

The annual business meeting of the APSA's Organized Section on Presidency Research (formerly the Presidency Research Group) will be held in conjunction with APSA Annual Meeting at the New Orleans Hilton Hotel on Thursday, August 29, 1985, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Article suggestions for the Fall issue are welcome, along with items for "News and Notes" and "Recent Publications on the Presidency." The deadline for final submissions is November 1, 1985.

PRESIDENTIAL POWER:

A 25th Anniversary Retrospective

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WHAT DID I THINK I WAS DOING?

Richard E. Neustadt  
Harvard University

The editor of Presidency Research has asked me a hard question, namely, why did I write Presidential Power? What led (or pushed) me to it? The book was first published 25 years ago by John Wiley and Sons, but I began work on it five years before that. To reconstruct a 30-year-old set of motivations is a daunting task, if not plain dumb -- memory is so tricky, retrospective so readily deceptive. But the question is a fair one, even if the answer could be foolish. So let me discipline my memory and respond as best as I can.

In 1953, at noon of January 20 to be exact, I was "turfed" out of the White House where I'd worked for three years -- after four at the then-Budget Bureau starting when I first got out of uniform. I had loved the seven years, especially the last three, but there was no help for it: Harry Truman was yielding office to Dwight Eisenhower.

The question of what-to-do preoccupied me for some time -- the more so since I had a wife and children to support -- and having only one professional credential, an untested Ph.D., I chose academia. But academia very nearly didn't choose me. White House experience was not then considered advantageous by the universities, if anything the contrary. After a transitional year at Cornell, I went to Columbia as a buck assistant professor with no assurance of a ladder, although no absolute bar either. "Come and take your chances," Schuyler Wallace's letter read.

By then I had in draft or on the verge of publication three interrelated articles that I had adapted from my doctoral dissertation and brought up

to date. (Having done course work and "generals" before the war, I had written the dissertation without leaving Washington in 1948-1949.) The articles dealt with the administrative history of legislative programs and coordination in the presidential orbit and also with the legislative history of Truman's Fair Deal program, which itself had occasioned much of that administrative development. These were matters in which I personally had played a part.

When published in 1954-55, the articles persuaded my colleagues that I was not merely taking refuge in their midst; a ladder appeared accordingly. Meanwhile, after a lapse of twelve years, I was frantically reading in the political science literature to prepare-while-doing for the introductory course that I had been assigned to teach on American government. During 1955 I read as hard as I taught. By 1956 I had roughed out the major themes of Presidential Power and that summer got them written down, albeit crudely, in an APSA paper that later was published by the Duke Law Journal under the title, "The Presidency at Mid-Century." Thereafter it took three years of research and writing -- 18 months of it on a paid leave, thanks to Columbia -- to do the book. Meanwhile, my colleagues had voted me tenure on the strength of that fourth piece and the three before, coupled with their judgment that I was plainly "in motion." This heartened me enormously. But it cannot be said to have started me off on the book. The frantic year of reading had done that.

For the reading had disclosed to me (among other things) two giant gaps, as they then seemed, between the literature on the presidency and my experience of it in the Truman Administration -- or for that matter in Eisenhower's, as best I could observe it.

One of these gaps was descriptive. Edward S. Corwin seemed the natural and necessary starting point for study of the presidency -- a judgment I

have not revised -- but the two presidents I then admired most, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, were precisely those he most feared. And part of what I admired in them was their relative capacity, much of the time, to make the most their politics allowed of two things I would learn to call (but had no names for then) "professional reputation" and "public prestige" -- two things "my" president had regularly mangled.

These things seemed to me to be central in the exercise of presidential power, indeed as much a part of it as the foundation-stones of institutional authority laid down by the Constitution, statutes, court opinions, precedents, and cumulative tradition. Those indeed were foundations. Logically, all else derived from them, took shape from them, depended in important senses on them. Yet the "all else," not his formal powers or their limits, seemed to me the stumbling blocks for Truman, up to and including his defeat by the Court in Youngstown Sheet and Tube et al v. Sawyer. So I found something missing in Corwin, and not in his work only. Even Pendleton Herring's elegant, short book on Presidential Leadership, which surely dealt with much of what I missed in Corwin, confined itself to FDR's salad days, his early years, not to the hard times of his second term when the conservative coalition, which would later keep my man on such short rations, first arose.

My sense of a descriptive gap was reinforced by a great deal of writing, much of it contemporary journalism, that followed Woodrow Wilson's line in Constitutional Government: "The president is at liberty, both in law and conscience, to be as big a man as he can.... Let him once win the admiration and confidence of the country, and no other single force can withstand him, no combination of forces will easily overpower him." In the early Eisenhower years there was a lot of this, combined with knee-jerk

criticism of Ike for not living up to the Wilsonian standard. That combination drove me to my Duke Law piece, which is the real beginning of Presidential Power. Many of the jerking knees belonged to Democratic friends who thought me much too kind to Ike. I couldn't help it. (In a way, perhaps, albeit inadvertently, I was excusing Truman.)

Further reinforcement for my sense of a descriptive gap in the literature on the presidency came from a different quarter, from Wilfred Binkley's President and Congress and from my senior colleague at Columbia, Laurence Chamberlain, whose careful work on the sources of initiative in legislation was completed just before the rise of White House bills. The image of a pendulum of power swinging back and forth across the decades between Congress and the presidency warred with what I had experienced and indeed had helped to construct: an institutionalization of executive initiative. This development was more useful to congressional chairmen, possibly, than to presidents, and it told relatively little about origins (or outcomes), but it blurred the criteria and symbols of initiative that Binkley, Chamberlain, and others were accustomed to use. Puzzling this out caused me to distinguish "clerk" from "leader," but that came later.

I also discovered a prescriptive gap in the literature; this bothered me more than the other. It amounted to an almost total silence on what presidents could do from day to day to better their chance of having adequate capacity when some patent need arose to exercise effective influence on something that was outside their immediate control. When steel contracts expired on December 31, 1951, and Truman faced the choice of tolerating a strike with a war still on, or invoking an 80-day Taft-Hartley injunction or a three-month review by the Wage Stabilization Board (assuming consent of the parties), what could have improved prospects that at the end of either postponement he'd be able to accomplish what he sought

