

Moral Reasoning 74 – The Theory and Practice of Republican Government

Final Examination Question

"The concept for [the modern American presidency is] the 'unitary executive,' a term dug out of the grave of Alexander Hamilton's *Federalist* essay No. 71, advancing his argument for a single-headed executive branch whose energy would be needed for his constitutional mandate 'that the laws be faithfully executed.' It would also give the executive branch the means of defending the separation of powers against Congress, which Hamilton believed was the branch most likely to dominate the other two. No thought was given to the possibility that the executive might be the dominant branch...One of the principal goals drawn from the new state theory has been to denigrate the separation of powers and, indeed, government itself: *Anti-judiciary*, for lack of respect for original intent, for states' rights, and for 'legislating from the bench', with intrusion of rights issues. *Anti-Congress*, for its inability to do its job and for interference with national security issues, interference in war and resistance to 'supporting the troops'; and *anti-bureaucracy*, for interference in the market. What's left is the presidency and the highest echelon of the executive branch...The fight for the unitary executive has been won."

Theodore Lowi, "Bend Sinister: How the Constitution Saved the Republic and Lost Itself"
Political Science & Politics, vol. 42, no. 1 (2009)

"At every stage in the [historical] development of the executive office, a progressive proliferation of organized interests and independent authorities has redounded to greater reliance on the president for central management and coordination of the affairs of state...The political discretion and governing responsibility that have gradually accrued to the presidency as a matter of routine have bolstered those whose feeble political warrants might in earlier times have stymied their possibilities for independent action quite quickly...[T]he power of all presidents to get things done has expanded[.]"

Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make* (1993)

The presidency has durably changed since the United States Constitution was ratified, according to the two political scientists cited above. Using these brief selections and Federalists #70 and/or #71 as background material, **write a 3-4 page op-ed offering a "republican" assessment of these developments** (you can think of this assignment as a draft for a future *Crimson* editorial). This assessment may take the form of a defense or critique of existing arrangements, or something altogether novel -- the choice is up to you entirely. In offering your take on the development of the executive between 1789 and 2009, you should feel free to call upon any of the republican thinkers we have encountered in this course. There is no formal requirement that you do so; your obligation is simply to assess the modern presidency on republican terms.

Note 1: If you wish to better understand the development of the U.S. presidency historically, you might consult the Schlesinger reading available on the course home page. This is not required reading and will not grade you on whether or not you use it.

Note 2: An earlier version of this question referred only to Federalist #71, not to #70 as well. If you want to use only #71 in writing your paper, that is fine. If using *Federalist* #70 helps you understand the Hamiltonian perspective better, then use that, too. Neither of these essays need be cited.