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# The Modern Theory of Presidential Power: Alexander Hamilton and the Corwin Thesis, by R. Loss

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techniques of journalism to tell an interesting and important story. But his study does not have the systematic framework, grasp, reach, and willingness to generalize that are appropriate to the subject and to the author's stated purpose. The task of gleaning from the study any general insights, principles, hypotheses, or theoretical speculation is left entirely to the reader.

The work of journalists and scholars of journalism is important to building a body of expertise and knowledge in the burgeoning and interdisciplinary field of political communication. It is important that the news media be recognized and studied as political institutions, and it is essential that political scientists be major players in that recognition and study. The field should not be left largely to journalism and communication studies because the perspectives and kit of tools—theories and methods—of political science are important to build understanding of political communication as process and the news media as institutions integral to politics.

HERBERT WALTZER

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**The Modern Theory of Presidential Power: Alexander Hamilton and the Corwin Thesis.** By Richard Loss. New York: Greenwood, 1990. 192p. \$39.95.

How far have presidents and presidency scholars strayed from the wisdom of the founders regarding executive power? Quite far, argues Richard Loss, who calls for a return to the Hamiltonian-Washingtonian conception of presidential power.

Loss begins by arguing with Edward S. Corwin's thesis that "the modern theory of presidential power" is essentially a Hamiltonian notion. Loss argues that Hamilton did not advocate a presidency-centered view of the U.S. system. Instead, Hamilton calls for a republicanism based "on natural law, Christianity, honesty, justice, liberality, moderation and virtue" (p. 153). Hamilton's *real* message is one of "moderation," not the aggrandizement of presidential power. Presidents and scholars have misrepresented Hamilton's views and identify him with the strong-presidency model. Hamilton's views—and Washington's—reflect

a more limited and republican (in both its classical and modern forms) approach to presidential power.

To argue this position Loss draws a distinction between the *Federalist Papers*, which were written as political propaganda and "of necessity lack complete candor" (p. 24) and thus do not reflect Hamilton's true beliefs and Hamilton's *Pacificus Letters*, which were "a corrective of the *Federalist's* concession to the fears of the state ratifying conventions" (p. 25). The *real* Hamilton is found in *Pacificus*. Loss's assertion is plausible but not convincingly presented.

If Hamilton and Washington are the good guys of this tale, the bad guys are clearly the "revisionist" presidents and scholars who misunderstand Hamilton's message and promote the aggrandizement of presidential power. Chief among the presidential culprits are Lincoln, "a revolutionary figure" who "abandoned Hamilton's crucial limitations that presidential power must be compatible with other parts of the Constitution and with the principles of free government" (p. 90); Theodore Roosevelt, who "implicitly denied Hamilton's moderate doctrine of restraints of power" (p. 93) and developed a "post-Hamiltonian" (p. 95) stewardship theory of presidential power; Woodrow Wilson, whose "theory of presidential power . . . squints at tyranny" (p. 103); and Franklin Roosevelt, who "went to a non-Hamiltonian extreme in threatening Congress" (p. 107). Surprisingly absent from this presidential hall of shame is a recent activist conservative, Richard Nixon.

Presidential scholars also populate the presidential rogues gallery, led by Edward S. Corwin, who incorrectly linked Hamilton to the presidency-centered model of U.S. government, Clinton Rossiter, who glorified presidential power, and Richard Neustadt, who "teaches a decayed, academic Hobbesianism" (p. 147).

Loss attempts to redeem Alexander Hamilton and rescue his historical reputation from successors who have misunderstood and misrepresented his view of presidential power. He challenges the accepted wisdom regarding Hamilton and asks us to reconsider our views of presidential power in favor of a more limited vision of power controlled by virtue and Hamiltonian moderation.

This thin volume is useful, if often too brief

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## Book Reviews: American Politics

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and unsatisfying. Presidency scholars would be well served by reflecting on Loss's challenge to conventional wisdom.

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**America's Misunderstood Welfare State: Persistent Myths, Enduring Realities.** By Theodore R. Marmor, Jerry L. Mashaw, and Philip L. Harvey. New York: Basic Books, 1990. 268p. \$22.95.

At least in the academy, liberals are preparing to retake the offensive in social policy debates. Smart responses to the conservative critique of the U.S. welfare state and well-crafted plans to make antipoverty policy simultaneously more generous and more attentive to the work ethic are proliferating. This book provides a useful, clearly written, and welcome précis of this new and improved liberalism. Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey want to show that conservatives are wrong about many of the most important features of the U.S. welfare state—its impact on work, savings, and investment and public support for social reform. Along the way, they also seek to rebut social democratic and neo-Marxist criticisms that U.S. social policy is incoherent and internally contradictory.

According to the authors, U.S. social policy works: it is affordable and efficient. Contrary to accepted wisdom on the right, social insurance and public assistance programs reduce economic insecurity without imposing large deadweight losses on the economy or arbitrarily restricting individual liberties. Only the medical care system is out of control; but the problem here is too little—not too much—government.

The authors also think the U.S. welfare state is consistent and coherent. We have, they argue, an "opportunity-insurance state" (p. 22). By design, it is not residual or redistributive. And this is the welfare state that U.S. citizens want. The growth of social welfare is the result neither of a self-expanding welfare state bureaucracy nor rent-seeking special interests who selectively benefit from public provision. Nor is it an artifact of democratic voting procedures. Public opinion polls show,

they argue, that contemporary social policy reflects a genuine societal consensus on mutual assistance within a framework of individual responsibility and limited government. If anything, organized opposition by conservative political interests and ideologues artificially denies citizens many of the things they want from the state.

Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey are also hopeful about the future of reform. The continuing problems of economic insecurity—notably the poverty of children, access to affordable medical care, and social security financing—can be addressed incrementally, within the existing institutional framework. They propose more generous welfare benefits tied to work requirements and supplemented by job creation programs; a universal, national health insurance system; and modest reforms in social security taxes and benefits.

Much of this is compelling. The book works through the best available evidence on the impact of social policy carefully and effectively counters the most common conservative complaints. But there are some problems. First, the limits of existing protections are understated. In their brief for liberalism, Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey sidestep the fact that the U.S. government does less to promote the economic security of its citizens than most other Western democracies; that it meets the welfare standard established by its European counterparts only on the most elementary welfare state commitments; and that it extends a rather limited safety net, implemented in ways that often discourage the poor and economically dependent and leave adult workers and their dependents at risk of sudden job and income loss.

Second, the account of the possibilities and limits of further reform is insufficiently attentive to the complex relationship among institutions, policies, and political beliefs. The authors' brief against redistributive reform is purely pragmatic: public opinion will not support it. But attitudes about social policy are shaped by what is. As the comparative literature on Western welfare states makes clear, the United States separates social insurance and public assistance—and the "deserving" from the "undeserving" poor—to unusual degrees. These institutions, in turn, reinforce longstanding racial antagonisms. It is likely that these arrangements condition what citizens think about social policy and that other, more