The Politics of Presidential Legacies

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Introduction

Richard Neustadt began his seminal work on presidential power by noting that "within the United States we like to "rate" a president" (1990, 1). With the introduction of 24 hour news channels coupled with the ubiquity of opinion polls this observation is even truer today. But while presidents are rated on a daily basis by pollsters and pundits, these measures are often imprecise, contradictory, and can fluctuate dramatically throughout the course of an administration. Hence, these popular ratings alone are short-lived and can not be generalized to discuss a president's enduring influence. In contrast, the idea of a presidential legacy, defined as the impact of a president's actions beyond their own administration, can be a valuable way to assess and comment upon the performance of not only the current officeholder, but the office itself. However, for legacies to remain useful to political scientists, one must ensure that the study of presidential legacies is not imprecise, contradictory, or limited in temporal scope.

Unfortunately, there is no widespread agreement about what a presidential legacy is. Even a casual observer of politics knows that a president can often be remembered for both personal scandal and as well as a robust policy agenda. For example, Richard Nixon's legacy famously includes the duality of both high crimes and misdemeanors, as well as some laudable accomplishments such as shuttle diplomacy with China and the reorganization of the bureaucracy. Aside from these observable actions, presidential legacies are also often based on perceived personality traits, which many presidential scholars have also used in an attempt to categorize presidents (Barber 1977; Skowronek 1997). Defined another way, a president's legacy is not a measure of how he carried out his term of office, or why he did particular things in a certain way, but rather what impact

those actions had on later leaders. Though perhaps insightful alone, the combination of these varied approaches often lead scholars to contradictory conclusions as to what *exactly* a President's legacy is.

The multiple approaches cited above indicate that there is a critical element missing from research on presidential legacies: a systematic approach to the topic. This is not to imply that there are no descriptive statements of what presidents do while in office. In fact, such empirical tidbits are abundant. But rather, there is no schematically built, theoretically driven account of the effects of those presidential actions over time. Specifically, the presidential subfield literature does not offer a theoretically driven account of the consequences of presidential action using a neo-institutionalist framework. Some even think an emphasis on consequences rather than processes is a very real limitation to institutional inquiry (Edwards and Wayne 2003, 16); instead offering up legal, psychological, and power based theories for the study of effects of presidential action (ibid 14, 16-17, Edwards 1980).

The lack of a unified theoretical approach to presidential legacies is highly undesirable for those writing, researching, or studying about the presidency. First, in a purely definitional sense, the ubiquity with which the term "legacy" is used to refer to contrary aspects of the presidency renders the term all but meaningless. As such, each new work addressing presidential legacy is forced to give its own definition, which in turn compounds the problem of disunity. Beyond problems of definition, many of the currently fragmented and disparate approaches to presidential legacies limit research possibilities. For example, if a theory of presidential legacy is developed purely on the personal qualifications and characteristics of the officeholder, then legacies can not be

discussed across administrations. Without basic generalizability, researchers are left studying at maximum an N of one, which is an ongoing difficulty within presidential literature (King 1988). Furthermore, a focus on personality often ignores institutional and policy affects.

Despite several methodological and theoretical calls to arms for better approaches to studying the presidency (e.g. Hart 2002; Howell 2003; King 1988; King 1993; Moe 1993; Sinclair 1993), the subfield remains deeply entrenched in its old ways. This sad state of affairs stands in contrast to the relatively robust recent scholarship concerning other political institutions (e.g. Congress, the Judiciary, and even bureaucracy). Furthermore, the symptoms of this theoretical and methodological affliction are no more acutely realized than in the conceptualization and study of the idea of presidential legacy. Much of the popularly accepted writing on presidential legacy comes not from political scientists, but from historians and journalists. While not without their own insightful virtues, historians and journalists do not have an expert understanding of the institutions constituting the American political system. As such, current conceptions of presidential legacy are not informed by the advances made by political scientists. This grim prognosis is the direct result of substantial theoretical and methodological shortcomings; or at the very least, disagreement within the subfield as to a common scholarly path.

The goal is to produce a functional and systematic conception of presidential legacy that can be used broadly in many forms of research while maintaining validity. A good definition of presidential legacy should be able to clearly indicate both what is, and what is not, captured by the term on the basis of reasoned criterion. The first broad criterion for inclusion within a presidential legacy is that an issue must be endogenous to

the political system. Next, while political the issue must specifically concern an *outcome* of presidential *action*. Given these and other criterion we find institutional and policy changes to be the best candidates for forming a coherent conception of presidential legacy. Institutional and policy legacies stand in contrast to popular and historical legacies in that the former more predictably and reliably constrain the behavior of future president's. In this way, institutional and policy legacies form the core of a president's enduring influence.

This paper serves as an investigation into the term "legacy" with the ultimate goal of providing a new framework for future research. First we discuss how legacy has been talked about within popular and historical contexts. Next, we contrast these prior conceptions with examples and descriptions of how political scientists have treated the subject of presidential legacies and outline the problems with these older conceptions. In the following section we provide an alternative conception of legacy based on criterion selected to solve prior difficulties. Finally, we will show the superiority of our theoretical approach with respect to future research.

I. Popular Accounts of Legacy

Political scientists are not the only group of people writing about presidential legacy, indeed political scientists are likely far from the most prolific on the topic. Accounts of presidential legacy can largely be placed into one of three distinct categories: journalism, historicism, and political science. Both journalistic and historical approaches are oftentimes geared toward a popular audience. While non-academic, these popular treatments help create the meaning of presidential legacy. As such, both the journalistic

and historical approaches must be investigated before their influence on political science can be appreciated.

Journalism

Journalists' accounts of presidential legacies have been editorial page fodder for generations. More recently, magazine writers and television commentators have contributed to the multitude of proffered opinion on chief executives' legacies. For instance, a simple Lexis-Nexis search of "President Bush Legacy" turns up literally thousands of articles from all manner of news sources, ranging from magazines to newspapers that each offer up some sort of take on the sitting President's "legacy." With ideas ranging from the positive (e.g. Economist, Editorial 2006) to the prescriptive (e.g. Kristof 2006), and even into the damning (eg.. Kellner 2003; Lowry 2003); from the vast (e.g. Abramowitz 2007) to the particular (e.g. Rahn 2007), the volume of pieces written about the Bush legacy continues to increase while not necessarily increasing knowledge.

The vastness of this "literature" commenting on legacy is so large it is virtually impossible to quantify. The idea of a definable legacy is broadly captivating to interested citizens, but remains curiously ill-defined by the writers themselves (e.g. Blumenthal and Edsall 1988). For a scholar to copy the approach of a journalist, even a Pulitzer prize winning one, would be ill-advised. This genre focuses on the moment at hand (e.g. Woodward 2002, 2004, 2006), and tends to lose its luster as time passes (e.g. Woodward 1991, 1994).[1] These factoid heavy works can be thickly laden with quotes from highly placed sources, but they are not very useful tools for making causal arguments about the institutional presidency anymore than an article about a member of

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[1] Regarding the public perception of journalistic subjectivity, the 2002 and 2004 Woodward books were seen as positive to the Bush White House's war against terrorists. However, the 2006 book was seen as a reversal in judgment by the author.

congress would be a useful tool for making well reasoned arguments about the entire legislative branch. Likewise, writings of former staffers probably say more about the author's own legacy than it does about that of their former boss (e.g. Morris 1998, 2004; Suskind 2004[2]; Stephanopolous 2000).

History

The works of McCullough (1992, 2001), Morris (1999, 2001), and Goodwin (2006) offer readable insights into individual people who have held the office of the presidency. Their accessible work and the work of their peers, likely beckoned many political scientists to the presidential subfield in the first place. Again however, as with journalism, the historical approach most often uses an N of one. This single unit sample is not the institution, but the person in the White House, or even that person's inner circle (Heller 1980), or family (Goodwin 1994). Historians do have the benefit of a long time horizon, however, this strictly historical and personal approach suffers from a lack of institutional focus and a commensurate over emphasis on personality traits.

Ranking presidents in terms of some undefined "goodness" of their legacy has become a pastime for historians, and is probably the most unfiltered version of a broad historical approach to presidential legacy[3]. Arthur Schlesinger began the practice of asking historians to rank former chief executives, and the practice continues unabated to this day. In 2004 a survey of over 400 historians conducted by George Mason University, found that the vast majority rate the current President Bush as a failure. This result made waves, even before Bush's first term was over. But what do such subjective

[2]The Suskind book was written with the cooperation of former Bush Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill.
[3]Though other fields have joined in this ranking exercise too. For example, one 2004 survey goes so far as to break down rankings between the fields of economics, history, law, and political science (Taranto and Leo 2004). Washington, Lincoln, and FDR were the top three in that one by the way.

measures mean regarding a president's legacy? The study's own author seems a bit taken aback by the meaning, if any, of this poll (McElvaine 2004). Not all professional historians, of course, put stock in such simplistic public opinion measures. After all, the field's work in psycho-biography and archival research lead the way for political scientists wishing to delve into such methodology. Additionally, historical works rich in detail and specific in scope provide the firm empirical foundation on which political science presidential scholarship depends (e.g. Maev 1977; Watson, Devine, and Wolz 2005).

II. Legacy in Political Science

Political scientists can offer audiences interested in the study of presidential legacy substantial empirical validity concerning issues over time. In other words, political scientists could leave behind single N studies to historians and journalists, and offer institutionally centered studies of multiple presidencies. Rather than writing independent volumes dealing with "Bush's legacy" or "Clinton's legacy" the field could produce work on what legacy means and how it can be studied across multiple administrations. With a systematic theory of legacy, the subfield can uniquely inform its readership using the core competency of the discipline: the rigorous analysis of behavior and institutions applied to a complex political problem.

However, the shortcoming of the subfield's literature on presidential legacy, thus far, is that it bears too much in common with the historical and journalistic accounts given above. It is our claim that political scientists have lost their way concerning the study of presidential legacy. The current writing on the topic suffers from a scattered approach and a poor working definition. Oftentimes the writing is not as much about

legacy as it is about applying a certain view of the presidency to a particular person in office. Consequently, the conclusions offered by researchers have been riddled with dubious endorsements of various presidential management techniques as well as broader policy strategies. These endorsements sometimes are based on what amounts to an informed hunch.

The first type of work addressing legacy is the one which uses a single president to make comment upon how later presidents have done the job; while employing a single theoretical frame. Typically, the former president is offered to readers as a.) An example of how things worked better in the past and b.) How the current occupant of the White House has attempted to reinvent the wheel by ignoring the lessons of history (Dickinson 1996; Henderson 1988). An example of this is Henderson's *Managing the Presidency*, which provides Eisenhower's formal staff structure as an alternative to how later presidents ran their White Houses (1988). It was written in the late 1980's, so naturally a fondness for the military influenced NSC staff of Ike is seen as a welcome reprieve from the failures of the Reagan years[4]. The more recent work by Dickinson similarly uses the case study of FDR's executive branch management style to comment upon the Iran-Contra Affair[5].

The second type of writing on legacy also uses a single president, but is more descriptive than prescriptive. For example, Waddan's volume on Clinton begins with an attempt to define "Clintonism" and then moves on to substantive chapters on electoral politics, economics, health care, welfare, and cultural issues (2002). Waddan's work is

[4] Reagan's Iran-Contra Affair is the subject of its own chapter; as an example what happens when organization breaks down (Henderson 1988, 147-171).
[5] The Iran-Contra Affair is the subject of the first chapter of Dickinson's book on FDR (Dickinson 1996, 19-42).

laudable for its sweeping scope and inclusion of multiple accepted theories within the field on a variety of topics. However, this descriptive type of legacy work only differs from a historical biography insofar as it addresses either the political environment or policy issues of the day more than it does the president himself. Not all solo authored works on a single president's legacy are so broad. In contrast, Steven A. Shull treats only the Reagan (and Bush) civil rights legacy (Shull 1993).

A third treatment of presidential legacy still focuses on a single president but uses multiple theoretical perspectives, presented by multiple authors. Notably, these are not multiple theoretical perspectives about presidential legacy per se, but rather about the constituent parts which might be said to compose a particular individual's legacy. One example of such an approach is the series of books helmed by Campbell and Rockman. These books, which have seen five different iterations, are not lacking in theory (1991, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2008). But, can one have too much theory? Put more precisely, the present complaint is that they contain too much disparate theory to comment on legacy meaningfully. Their second edited volume on Clinton's legacy (2000), is not so much a theoretically sound attempt to address legacy, as it an opportunity for a number of preeminent scholars to apply their favorite theoretical frames to various aspects of Clinton's presidency itself[6]. While the theme is the chance of long term change brought about by Clinton, it struggles from its first page with what exactly *that idea means* (Campbell and Rockman 2000, ix), and from there the work begins its task.

[6] This particular volume edited by Campbell and Rockman has, among others, Byron Shafer discussing partisan legacy, George Edward's on the rhetorical presidency, Barbara Sinclair on legislative leadership, David M. Obrien discussing the courts, Mark A. Peterson on organized interest, and Graham K. Wilson commenting on Clinton from the perspective of a comparative political scientist (2002). For a complete listing see Table 1.

Of course, presidential legacy is a popular topic to write on, and Campbell and Rockman are not alone in editing this sort of work[7]. Another example, also dealing with immediate past president Bill Clinton, is the work helmed by Steven E. Schier (2000). As with the Campbell and Rockman book (2000), this volume starts off by noting that unlike other work it will not deal with what happened, but rather with what impact the presidency could have on future politics and policy (Campbell and Rockman 2000 ix; Schier 2000 16). Like its counterpart published in the final year of Clinton's term in office, it employs a diverse group of top scholars to use their theoretical frame of choice to address different subjects relating to the Clinton presidency (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 About Here]

The explanation of an idea is only going to be as good as its commonly understood definition. The authors of past work on legacy have recognized this fact and have spilled much ink describing how they view the concept. One work expressed a difference between it and other legacy works, most of which "primarily recapitulate what happened" (Schier 2000, 15). In a very reasonable statement, the author said the plan of his book would be to "assess the impact of Bill Clinton's presidency on the future of American politics and public policy (ibid)." Others have talked about legacy in terms of both positive and negative lasting impacts, which later officials "inherit" as constraints on future action (Campbell and Rockman 2008). To be fair, there is an inherent difficulty for scholars in focusing in on an idea that has been first described by very different scholarly approaches. Neustadt portrayed the presidency of the mid-twentieth century coherently, while writing that the president did not change the system in any marked way

[7] Nor were they the first. Prior to their editing the Chatham House series on presidential legacy, it was overseen by Charles O. Jones (1988).

on his own accord (Neustadt 1990). In contrast, and also with a refined precision, Skowronek famously described the president as a constitutionally generated agent of political change (Skowronek 1997).

Some multi-author edited collections which address only a single president do in fact share a single theoretical viewpoint, and even provide a clear expression of what they take legacy to mean. For example, Adler and Genovese edited a work addressing Clinton and constitutional law that framed his presidency in terms of Madisonian and Hamiltonian perspectives (2002). However, the work did not deal with the modern presidency thesis at all and talked past an important subfield controversy (Bailey 2004). Even when recognizing the merits of a work such as this one, one which was built upon the writing of some of the subfield's most capable researchers; a presidency scholar can not help but be frustrated that it does not engage the most talked about theoretical conundrum of the last two decades.

III. Problems with the Old Approach

Our criticism of current legacy writing is not so much that it is inaccurate as it fails to shape a cogent research on agenda on the topic. The popular approach to studying presidential legacy within political science has conflated multiple broad ideas together into a theoretical morass. Past work regarding presidential legacy has used the previously mentioned treatments of historicism and journalism, but the mixing has not stopped there. This line of writing has also been blended together with the parallel idea of 'popular sentiment.' As if that were not enough, more traditional political science subject areas such as institutionalism have also been included, creating quite the mélange.

The academic projects of history and political science are very different endeavors. When approaching the evaluation of a presidential administration, it is simply not enough for a political scientist to recount contextualized facts. Even the most historically based writing within the field, American Political Development, surpasses pure historical analysis in that it is rooted topically in the study of American political institutions (e.g. Landy and Milkis 2004; Skowronek 1997). The APD approach is valuable one, as expressed regarding the presidency with the work of Milkis and Nelson for instance (2003). Indeed, it would be a major oversight within the subfield to not address the development of institutions over time. Questions regarding stasis and change such as why the president's cabinet has taken its current shape, and how the "personal presidency" developed, can be answered by APD. However, the beauty in APD is its core idea of melding together the historical with the institutional (Polsky 2000). One need not attack APD, nor feel compelled to defend it, as its approach is not at odds with a systematic theoretical account of presidential legacy.

It is also notable that legacy has been meshed together with notions of popular sentiment regarding personal characteristics of a president. Presidential popularity, when discussing legacy, can mean both today's ratings as well as a reflection on historical approval numbers. Of course, today's presidential opinion polls and television appearances make the transformation into something else with the passage of time as today's journalism often becomes tomorrow's historicism. With this idea in mind, the topic of predicting what Bush's image will be in the future has become a popular topic. Specifically, President Bush's low public approval ratings may be judged by later generations to be either a symbol of his forward-thinking stoicism, as in Truman; or

alternatively, a reminder of his administration's abject failure, as in Nixon. Over the years, the current public opinion numbers regarding a president will become one measure of the richer concept of his presidential image. This lasting image is, however, merely one aspect of a chief executive's legacy and certainly not the totality of it.

Each president may also possess more than a single image within his or her legacy. In fact, different groups of scholars are likely to assign a different image to the same person. Nixon has been called a populist, a conspirator, a news manager, a victim, a madman, a statesman, and a liberal (Greenberg 2003). Each of these images is more favored by one particular group of thinkers than another (ibid). With the today's legacy writing it is tasked to the reader to discern which image of the chief executive the author is employing, if indeed only one. Furthermore, it might be that the writer is taking it as the project to lay out and defend a new such image and equate that with legacy (e.g. Han and Krov 2003; Rozell and Pederson 1997).

Existing legacy writing is not completely without its institutional aspects, but it is too often presented without a definition of what the concept is taken to mean. It is a fair assertion that most readers are interested in an *instance* of legacy rather than in the concept *per se*, but that is not a sufficient reason to go about the recounting of a legacy without a proper definition of what the term means.

[Insert Table 2 About Here]

Legacy has been explained via a variety of differing concepts (see Table 2). If scholars can not agree on what the term means than there can be no common thread to discussions. Scholarly and lay readers alike deserve fair warning as to what the research

is about. To do otherwise, is to have members of the subfield talking past each other about the idea.

The conceptual problems presented above are better illustrated with a comparison. Perhaps no presidents possess more iconic historical images than FDR and Richard Nixon. FDR is taken to have been the champion of the working poor and the individual who created the administrative presidency as it is known today. By way of contrast, Nixon is the prototypical Vaudevillian bad guy. Nixon has been portrayed in mainstream movies and books as shadowy, menacing, and frankly deranged. Its not that either of these accounts is wrong, but that political scientists tend to focus on the institutional with one president and the personal with another. As researchers, our approaches are clouded by conceiving of FDR as a hero and Nixon as a crook.

Naturally, exceptions abound to this typecasting of scholarship, however a common footing with which to discuss a president's legacy would neither erase the memory of FDR nor polish the human spectacle that was Richard Nixon. Rather, it would serve to offer a common measuring stick to place the two next to each other in an empirically accurate fashion.

IV. An Alternative Conception of Legacy

Past writing concerning presidential legacies has not been inaccurate so much as incomplete. Under a more political science oriented conception, presidential legacy is not the same as historical factoids or a popularly conceived image. Nor can it be fairly explained as dealing with a single aspect of the presidency, such as staffing or mid-term congressional races. As such, to create a systematic approach to legacy research one

must first construct a useful definition of legacy itself. To achieve these ends, and keeping in mind the specific weaknesses of prior approaches, we suggest the following criterion for selecting a definition of legacy:

1. The inclusion only of factors endogenous to the political system.
2. A focus only on matters under presidential purview and power.
3. The inclusion of only those actions that constrain future behavior.

On the basis of this criterion, we define legacy the following way: the impact presidents have on political institutions and public policy. Institutions include such formal items as the executive branch and judicial staffing, as well as political concepts such as party power. Public policy focuses on issues such as federal work programs that a president may provide the impetus or key support for. Of all the varying aspects of a presidency that could be examined as part of a legacy, only institutional and policy impacts are endogenous to the political system, represent matters of presidential purview and power, as well as constrain the actions of future presidents. Hence, one must look to institutional and policy legacies for a systematic approach to presidential legacies.

With such a holistic and clearly defined starting point, legacy is something that can be looked at systematically. Though it *can* be looked at with multiple theoretical viewpoints, it need not necessarily be. Legacy can be explored, and judged, as a unified concept. This will necessarily require research efforts that address multiple aspects of legacy at the same time. Furthermore, legacy is not monolithic, it has nuance. It's multiple constituent parts are best examined not as they stand individually, but as they exist in interrelationship to each other.

Also, legacy studies should move both longitudinally and laterally. Longitudinal movement means research should address change over time. It is not enough to know

that FDR signed Social Security into law. At least an equally important point to those looking at legacy is that is has remained public policy for so many decades. There is also a lateral aspect to legacy work; it would be myopic to not move past narrowly cast duration studies. Research also has to address multi-institutional change occurring concurrently with various policy changes at a single point in time. In other words, the coin of the realm in legacy assessment is the duration of a policy or institutional change. However, another measure of legacy is the nature of the change that was made, and in what institutional and policy environment in which it occurred.

A breakdown of the idea of legacy begins with a simple dichotomy: institutional legacy and policy legacy.

Institutional Legacy

Institutions broadly defined are the "rules of the game", formal or otherwise, that constrain actions (North 1990, 3). Formal rules are those codified either into law or bureaucratic policy. For example, a president may veto legislation passed by Congress, which will stand unless overruled by a supermajority of Congress. This formal rule is derived directly from the Constitution and plays a significant role in shaping the President's relation with Congress (Cameron 2000). More informal constraints come from interactions that are not governed by formal rulemaking. For example, the President's relation to the press is a critical aspect of the presidency and one that shapes his ability to garnish public support. Though there are few written rules spelling out a president's obligation to the media, the actions of prior presidents set the stage for future ones. Arguably, once FDR began using fireside chats during the 1930s, future presidents

were expected to bring their policies to the public. Hence, when looking at institutions one must examine both formal and informal constraints on presidential power.

Formally, the powers and responsibilities of the president as presented Article II of the Constitution are vague and few in number. However, since the passage of the Constitution, the presidency has gained in prestige and power, but it has done so in an uneven manner. For instance, presidents did not regularly use their veto power until the administration of Andrew Jackson. Years later, Abraham Lincoln's unprecedented wartime measures forever established the presidency as the epicenter of national crisis management. Despite the erratic expansions of the executive's preeminence, it was not until the early twentieth century that the presidency was established as the focal point of national politics. The presidency changed into a more formal institution when after the 1937 Brownlow Committee report the modern Executive Office of the President and the White House Office were formed.

There is a consensus among scholars that the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt marked either the institutionalization of the presidency (Burk 2000) or at least saw the execution of the changes that would comprise the institutionalization of the office in later administrations (Ragsdale and Theis 1997). This institutionalization was characterized by three traits: a more complex staffing hierarchy, a standardized decision-making process, and a well-bounded identity that differentiated the presidency from other actors (Burke 2000). The core feature of the institutionalized presidency is the staff, which has shifted the majority of the analytical scholarship on the presidency from the man in office (e.g. Barber 1977; Neustadt 1990) to the characteristics of the surrounding bureaucracy (e.g. Pfiffner 1996; Burke 2000). Today, studies on the institutionalized presidency correctly

emphasize the importance of the staff to the leadership of the president himself (Burke 2001; Dickinson 2005).

It is important when discussing institutional legacies to separate inherited from changed structures. New presidents may have leeway when it comes to many aspects of staffing the White House, but they also inherit a great deal of both formal and informal practices. Many of these inherited institutional structures are thus taken to be constants, and thus they can not explain the variation amongst presidential legacies. Changes to inherited structures though have great impact on both the changer's presidency as well as those who come after. For example, Richard Nixon's creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 consolidated many smaller bureaucracies into an umbrella organization led by an executive-appointed official. Nixon's change was inherited by those presidents who came after regardless of their preferences to the contrary. Thus, Nixon's institutional change constrained future action in relation to environmental policy. Hence, it is important to keep in mind that institutions are path dependent, and are changed incrementally with consideration to preexisting structures.

Arguably the most important impact that a president can have upon the institutional structure of the executive branch is through the design of bureaucratic agencies. The need for bureaucratic agencies has historically risen in response to increasing governmental intervention into the economy and society, which necessarily demands specialized knowledge and the delegation of authority (Lewis 2003, 1). Some classic examples of bureaucratic expansion from American history include all agencies and regulatory systems created to meet the demands of the New Deal in the 1930s and the Great Society in the 1960s. After many years of expansion, bureaucratic agencies are

now a critical component to understanding the American policymaking process. As a part of the executive bureaucracy, a president can have great influence how and when a new agency is formed.

It is further important to note that bureaucracies are not designed for maximum efficiency in service of the public good, but rather are designed and structured to meet political goals (Lewis 2003; Moe 1989). Hence, from their very conception bureaucracies are not politically inert neutral enforcers of policy but rather they often have independent preferences formed when the agency was designed and staffed in a strategically partisan manner to encapsulate the preferences of the coalition that created it. In fact, bureaucratic agencies are often staffed explicitly through patronage appointments to reward political allies and aid the coalition in power (Moe 1984, 768). In this sense, presidents are able to shape agencies in ways that constrain future actors and help create favored forms of public policy.

Policy Legacy

Though arguably a president will have greater direct control over institutional features than he policy impact, this impact is potentially broader. While it is important to study how many staffing changes a president made, and what new departments were created on his watch, such research efforts would be incomplete without simultaneously looking at the policy effect of these changes. For example, the creation of the Works Project Administration by FDR in 1935 did indeed employ millions of people, but that is only a piece of the picture of Roosevelt's legacy as explained by this bureaucratic expansion. Beyond looking at employment numbers and legislative history, the projects completed by the WPA should be looked at as well. The legacy of Roosevelt as

explained by the WPA is not just about federal government expansion or completed bridges and dams, but rather the two taken in tandem. The pervading notion that FDR changed the role of Washington with this large New Deal project is best explained through using ideas of both staffing and tangible policy successes, and as the case may be, failures.

While sometimes much can be learned about policy through examining path dependencies, system stasis, societal sclerosis (Olson), and the pea soup of policy ideas, focusing in on presidential legacy intrinsically means focusing on what that individual and his administration changed in terms of institutions and public policy. Legacy is thus at its core about researching variables, not constants. These variables change over time because of both presidential action and factors environmental exogenous to the study. There are three primary ways a president's policy legacy can be looked at and then later evaluated: policy typology, policy impact, and policy stickiness. Importantly, there is existing literature within the policy studies subfield that can be used to the benefit of presidency researchers examining any of these areas.

The first area, policy typology, gets to the heart of the great Laswellian inquiry: who gets what, when and how? Policy types based upon the type of politics and the likelihood of coercion were developed by Lowi over thirty years ago (Lowi 1972). Since then there has been a rich body of work within policy studies that legacy writing can draw upon to clarify exactly what a president accomplished while in office (e.g. Bickers and Williams 2001; Anderson 2003; Peters 2004). Though political scientists' legacy work should be rooted in neo-institutionalism in order to understand the impact of the executive governing process, the final judgment on legacy can be thought of as a matter

of the allocation of scarce resources; be those resources dollars from the public treasury or the limited time of a regulatory agency such as OSHA.

Questions that could frame legacy research in this area include: what sorts of new policies were enacted? For instance, some of the most striking examples of lasting presidential legacy came out of democratic social redistributive policy during the mid-twentieth century. A robust example of a strong policy legacy is Truman's fight for universal old age insurance, which ended with Johnson signing the Medicare Act of 1965 at the Truman Presidential Library. If legacies are to be compared between two presidents, then the 1965 legislation could be compared to the original 1935 Social Security Act which provided the spirit, if not the enabling law, for Medicare.

Indeed, the body of modern era public law that created the American welfare state has emerged as the gold standard by which the legacies of ensuing presidents are judged. Which types of policies were neglected and could be argued to be underused by an individual president? This would go a long way in tackling the legacies of more recent presidents who have been associated with its demise. Reagan, the proponent of limited government and reduced taxes, has popularly inherited the mantle of "old social program destroyer." The validity of that claim lies in looking at first his institutional changes, and second the policy changes he made, such as the injection of "workfare" into welfare benefit allocation in 1987. A different sort of legacy inquiry is the cause of the further disintegration of traditional welfare benefits under a democrat, albeit a "new one," Clinton. Once the institutional aspect is analyzed then a legacy inquiry should turn to the particular policies that were overturned or received lighter funding.

The establishment, if not the very creation of, new policy types and their subsequent elimination go a long way to establish what a legacy is. However, there are more subtle policy questions that should be asked in order to get past overly simplistic views of a legacy. For example, were there unique innovations by the administration in a given policy area? Federal employment service programs, such as the WPA, were echoed in Kennedy's Peace Corps and Clinton's Americorps. Though the Peace Corps is a smaller program in terms of raw headcount, that program has become more synonymous with the legacy of a "great president." Perhaps that has something to do with that nebulous idea of a president's lasting image. But putting that aside, one reason is the degree of innovation native to a service program designed to engage the United States with a Cold-War riddled world. Clinton's later program, though substantially new in its own right, built upon original legislation of both Johnson and George H.W. Bush[8]. Significant policy redesign, rather than the shade of it, can be one of the lasting marks of a president. Conversely, the lack of successful policy innovation can explain why a president's legacy did not end up as galvanized as he might have hoped before coming to power. Returning to the Reagan revolution example, he was never able to thwart well established Social Security and Medicare benefits. This massive conservative agenda item would also elude George W. Bush twenty years later, despite his highly touted social security privatization campaign of 2005 and 2006.

The policy proposals a president makes, whether they fail like privatized social security accounts or achieve at least partial success like Reagan's welfare reform agenda, are one key aspect of legacy, and in many respects the one which presidents are most

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[8] This information is prominent on the Americorp's own website introduction: http://www.americorps.org/about/ac/history.asp. Accessed February 2008.

remembered for popularly. However, there is another layer of analysis that digs deeper than the mere binary classification of the addition of a new policy or not: the relative success of that action. Again, as with typology, there is literature within the policy subfield that directly addresses this and can be tied into studies of the nation's chief executive.

That literature is the body of work evaluating policies' effects, also called policy impact analysis (e.g. Ludwig and Cook 2003). Research on a president's policy efforts is best served by not straying too far from the core idea of what the administration was able to accomplish and to what degree lasting change was achieved. Legacy, a potentially powerful idea to look at the presidency with, can indeed be neutered by becoming sidetracked with spurious research questions and questionable variable relationships. For instance, one component of the legacy of Bill Clinton was his failure to pass universal health care. This lack of accomplishment wounded his potency after his first few years in office, and still echoes in political discourse today. Questions regarding Clinton's public health legacy are succinctly answered by noting measurable phenomenon such as percent of Americans without insurance and health care costs per household.

Such analysis is pervasive to public policy literature and can contribute to understanding a legacy. Research should incorporate such data as this methodically, not in an *ad hoc*, fashion. To illustrate, policy impact numbers would complement discussion on institutional staffing decisions and funding numbers. Comprehensive topical policy analysis (e.g. Beland 2005; McFarlane and Meier 2001) is off point. Zeroing in on legacy need not include every bit of nuance to the often labyrinthine federal policy

process. The criteria of studying legacy, the impact a president has over time, are best met by looking at the impact rather than the process.

Next, the duration which a policy change lasts, thus transitioning from a change to the new status quo. Some presidential policy positions are so fleeting as to border on the cynically comical. Modern legends swirling around presidential about-faces, including Roosevelt's court packing attempt, Truman's failure to seize the steel industry (*Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co.* v. *Sawyer*, 1952), George H.W. Bush's "no new taxes" pledge, and George W. Bush's *USS Abraham Lincoln* announcement of the end of "major combat operations" in Iraq[9] highlight very real limitations of the presidency (Brownlow 1969; Lowi 1985). Legacy should rightly focus on why some policies behave like swirling leaves, here one second gone the next, and others behave like heavy unmovable stones. Yet, an overly broad inquiry into the cause of a policy's duration obscures the point of examining the chief executive. Highly particular research questions that ask: "What did an administration, do to cause this policy to have a lasting impact?" will keep the spotlight on the intended target.

Policy scholars have developed a solid body of research on institutional stickiness, also called path dependency and agency friction, and its ensuing staccato effect upon policy change (Baumgartner and Jones 2002; Schneider 2006). Leptokurtotic distributions abound within studies addressing the non-incremental nature of sudden and powerful policy alterations (John and Margetts 2003; Jones, Baumgartner, and True 1998; Jones, Sulkin and Larsen 2003). This phenomenon of punctuated change is directly related to the chief executive, but has not been researched while centered upon the presidency. Legacy research can therefore attach itself to an extant body of literature

[9] May 1, 2003

on bureaucratic stickiness, while incorporating the knowledge of the presidency subfield. The pairing together of these two bodies of work holds much potential for understanding what a president's lasting impact is upon policy.

In summary, there is a great deal of literature on policy types, policy impact, and policy stickiness. These are critical ideas about public policy that have direct bearing on the establishment of what a president's legacy is.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

Presidential legacy is a rich concept with much more to add to the future of presidential research. Both practically and theoretically it is a topic that crosses many boundaries: the personal presidency and the administration, the modern and pre-modern presidencies, the institutional and the policy oriented. However, the concept of presidential legacy has been lacking both a clear definition and a developed research agenda.

Legacy centered research projects are important unto themselves because they can reveal valuable lessons about what impact a particular president had. But they offer something even more critical than the recounting of a historical testimony. They lay the groundwork for evaluating the effectiveness of presidential administrations, and consequently their varying approaches to government. The concept of legacy uniquely bridges the gap between personal analysis and administrative analysis. Because legacy work is primarily focused on the results of White House action, the method by which an institutional or policy change is arrived at is momentarily set aside. And then later, after

the impact analysis of legacy research is studied, then the means by which the President arrived at that point can be studied with even greater precision.

It is our hope to offer a definition of legacy, and ultimately a call for its systematic study. We have proposed concentrating legacy studies on the impacts of presidential action over time. This is accomplished by splitting actions into two first-order categories: institutional and policy. Within these categories, impacts can be further sub-divided and analyzed. It is our contention that existing neo-institutional and policy literature can be used as a starting point for such an endeavor. There is considerable unexplored conceptual territory linking the presidency subfield with policy impact studies.

After this first theoretical step has been taken, presidential legacy research can begin anew with more focused direction. First questions might include a comparison of the legacy of George Bush with the legacy of his predecessor in office. Such a comparison could begin to answer the question of the alleged expansion of executive power in recent years. Legacy is a particularly timely topic, as Democratic candidates for President are stressing "change" in their campaigns. Even the Republican frontrunner, John McCain, has long held the mantle of "maverick," a reputation solidified with the passing of BCRA. If change is indeed proposed by an incoming administration in 2009, than questions will arise about the viability of such an endeavor and it chances for success. Ultimately, it will not be the rhetoric and popularity numbers which withstand the test of time. Rather, it will be the enacted institutional and policy changes viewed as a collective body of work that will render judgment on the next chief executive.

Table 1 – Sample of Legacy Topics

Topic	Berman 1990	Campbell & Rockman 1991	Campbell & Rockman 2000	Schier 2000	Schier 2004	Campbell & Rockman 2004	Campbell & Rockman 2008
Partisan Legacy			x	xxx		x	
Rhetorical Pres		xx	x	x			
Agenda Setting			x				
Legislative Leader	xxx	x	x		xx	x	x
Judiciary	x		x			x	x
Reinventing Gov			x				
Org. Interests			x			x	x
Race and Gender			x	x		x	
Domestic Policy	xxx	x	x	x	x	x	x
Foreign Policy	xxx	x	x	x	xx	xx	xx
Comparative Pol			x			x	
Institutional Leadership	xx	xxxx	x	x	x	x	xx
Public Opinion			x	xxx	xx	x	x
Culture Wars				x		x	xxx
Constitutional							x
Religions					x		

Note: Multiple Xs indicate multiple chapters on that idea.

Table 2 – Differing Conceptions of Legacy:

Legacies tend to be malleable and changeable; impacts vary in their depth and focus. History has a way of redefining the contribution of a presidency as well as the skill with which a president exercised his leadership. (Berman 1990).
The overall effort of this book and of each specific chapter is to interpret the particular (presidential behavior) within the context of a theory about the general (structural and situational opportunities and constraints). (Campbell and Rockman 1991).
Unlike most "legacy" books, which primarily recapitulate what happened, this book assesses the impact of Bill Clinton's presidency on the future of American politics and public policy. (Schier 2000, 15)
The authors of this volume try to assess his legacy – and, indeed, whether he will actually leave one – from a variety of angles, among them politics, institutions, as well as leadership and societal context. (Campbell and Rockman 2000, ix)
But political models in the end matter less than individual character. (Harris 2004).
A president occupies a place in "political time", as well as on the calendar, and thus has a sort of peer group scattered irregularly across the decades. But an analogy in itself (to a past president) is not itself a legacy. (Campbell and Rockman, 2008, 2).
Something durable left by an administration that others will benefit by or have to deal with as a set of problems into the future. (Campbell and Rockman, 2008, 326).
Legacies are typically thought of as a president's positive contributions. But they may be a president's negative contributions as well. (Campbell and Rockman, 2008, 330).

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