

America Has Dangerous Devotion To Executive Power

The Cato Institute is pleased to announce the release of the paperback version of Gene Healy's must-read book, *The Cult of the Presidency: America's Dangerous Devotion to Executive Power*.

Called "the year's most pertinent and sobering public affairs book" by columnist George Will, *The Cult of the Presidency* examines how Americans have expanded presidential power over recent decades by expecting solutions for all national problems, and concludes by calling for the president's role to return to its properly defined constitutional limits.

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The Bush years have given rise to fears of a resurgent Imperial Presidency. Those fears are justified, but the problem cannot be solved simply by bringing a new administration to power. In his provocative new book, *The Cult of the Presidency*, Gene Healy argues that the fault lies not in our leaders but in ourselves. When our scholars lionize presidents who break free from constitutional restraints, when our columnists and talking heads repeatedly call upon the "commander in chief" to dream great dreams and seek the power to achieve them—when voters look to the president for salvation from all problems great and small—should we really be surprised that the presidency has burst its constitutional bonds and grown powerful enough to threaten American liberty?

The Cult of the Presidency takes a step back from the ongoing red team/blue team combat and shows that, at bottom, conservatives and liberals agree on the boundless nature of presidential responsibility. For both camps, it is the president's job to grow the economy, teach our children well, provide seamless protection from terrorist threats, and rescue Americans from spiritual malaise. Very few Americans seem to think it odd, says Healy, "when presidential candidates talk as if they're running for a job that's a combination of guardian angel, shaman, and supreme warlord of the earth."

Healy takes aim at that unconfined conception of presidential responsibility, identifying it as the source of much of our political woe and some of the gravest threats to our liberties. If the public expects the president to heal everything that ails us, the president is going to demand—or seize—the power necessary to handle that responsibility.

Interweaving historical scholarship, legal analysis, and trenchant cultural commentary, *The Cult of the Presidency* traces America's decades-long drift from the Framers' vision for the presidency: a constitutionally constrained chief magistrate charged with faithful execution of the laws. Restoring that vision will require a Congress and a Court willing to check executive power, but Healy emphasizes that there is no simple legislative or judicial "fix" to the problems of the presidency. Unless Americans change what we ask of the office—no longer demanding what we should not want and cannot have—we'll get what, in a sense, we deserve.

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