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Review Definitions of Transformative Presidents .

**Paper Title**: Review Definitions of Transformative Presidents, Attained through Presidential Leadership. Focus on President Ronald Reagan’s being Transformative as a result of his having a “Legacy” with the Tea Party’s Influence on the Republican Party.

**Abstract**: The most significant variable in showing whether a President is transformative is determining if he has a legacy. Reagan’s legacy exists as a result of the Tea Party adopting Reagan’s policy proposals that have been summarized by what Reagan labeled “The Great Rediscovery”. In addition compare the Reagan and Obama Presidencies to explain why one was transformative.

Richard E. Neustadt’s, Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents explained a reason for considering why some presidents are transformative: “we like to ‘“rate’ a President”. He interchanged “rating” with “Appraising” a president in a chapter on the subject. He explained that we are evaluating presidents by making “judgments about presidential leadership”. Neustadt listed four questions for determining performance. For this paper, I am selecting his fourth question, in analyzing Present Ronald Reagan’s transformative Presidency: “what was his legacy?”

Neustadt’s comment that “we like to ‘rate’ a President” suggests an excellent introduction about how to both define and introduce the meaning of transformative presidents. Neustadt does not use the term “Transformative”. Several political scientists have offered ways to understand the concept without really giving a succinct definition. Professor George C. Edwards III, has written about the vagueness of explaining the meaning:

It would be easy to become enmeshed in debates about whether a particular president

was ‘transformational’. The issue is not whether policy changes that president’s desire

occur. They do. Neither is the issue determining when change is large en oiugh that we

may consider it to be transformational. . . . I am interested in significant changes, whether

or not they are ‘transformational.”’ (Edwards, The Strategic President, 9).

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Edwards cannot define a transformation President because a President lacks the power to persuade:

“The fundamental question is whether presidents have the potential to persuade others

to follow them? . . . Can presidents transform politics through persuasion? . . . .

There is not a single systematic study that demonstrates that presidents can reliably

move others to support them.” (Ibid.)

In essence, Edwards can neither define what a transformational, and rejects the idea that Presidents can be transformative because they lack the power to persuade Congress or public opinion to enact policy. To solve the definitional problem, Edwards proposed creating a special issue of Presidential Studies Quarterly to feature historical research on the Presidency. In the article, the authors wrote, for example, that “One of the central themes of the historical turn in presidential studies is the role of presidents in the periodic transformation of American government”. (Miroff and Skowronek, “Rethinking Presidential Studies through Historical Research), p.3). In this article, the authors, including Skowronek, mention the presidents who have made major transformations, including FDR and Reagan. (Ibid.) Also, pertaining to this paper, why not utilize historical research, as well, in “rating” Presidents?

Both Edwards and Skowronek refer to James MacGregor Burns’ Leadership, that defines leadership, and explains why it is necessary for explaining the meaning of a transformative leader. Burns studied several presidents, including FDR and John Kennedy in explaining through exhaustive historical biographies of how Presidents can be transformative. Burns explains transformative leadership as “. . . when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.” (Burns, Leadership, p. 30). In his definition of leadership, Burns used the example of Gandhi, “. . . who aroused and elevated the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus has a transforming effect on both.” (Ibid.)

Stephen Skowronek, Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal, also questioned whether transformational presidents exist, but, based on Neustadt’s premise:

“we like to rate presidents” agreed that the changes that occur during their tenure may be large enough to be transformational. Skowronek applied Neustadt’s model in Presidential

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Power to explain transformational leadership as the “. . . periodization of presidential history. . . introduced a sense of cohesion into the relentless succession of Incumbents. . .” (The Politics Presidents Make, p. 5). In addition, he explainied why there were only five Presidents, Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, FDR and Reagan whose leadership could be considered transformational.

Skowronek also added another way of analyzing transformative presidents through introducing the idea of a “new kind of presidency”, pursued by Theodore Lowi I., The Personal President, to explain the periodic changes in the presidency. Lowi described the changes in the development of the modern presidency “. . . so sweeping as to amount to the founding of a ‘second republic’”(Ibid.) The transformation that Lowi described referred to Reagan’s “Plebiscitary” presidency. Reagan’s reconstruction amounted to a “personal presidency” which could be identified through the campaign where the personality of the president is revealed. “The plebiscitary presidency is a personal presidency and that fact can already be seen in the campaign.” (Lowi, The Personal President, 115). During his campaigns, Reagan employed polling to validate and evaluate his standing with the “masses”. (Ibid., p. 116).

Skowronek listed transformative changes in the presidency that amounted to creating periodization during the succession of, for example, early, modern, or progressive presidents:

“They divide presidential history into a modern period and a traditional period; they set

the modern presidents together analytically as creatures of a different sort; they pull the

the modern presidents together analytically as a coherent group for comparison. Analysts

are directed in this way to evaluate Progressives aspirations and achievements, and the

early American presidents are rendered largely irrelevant to an understand of how the

office works today.”(Presidential Leadership, p. 15)

Skowronek realized that Lowi described periodization, as only between modern and traditional presidencies, by coupling presidents so as to identify transformative presidents who have opposed their predecessor’s existing policies. Skowronek’s The Politics Presidents Make grouped together four “periods” of presidential leadership with chapter titles: Jeffersonian Leadership: Patrician Prototypes, Jacksonian Leadership: Classic Forms, Republican Leadership (beginning with Abraham Lincoln) and Liberal Leadership: Fraying Boundaries (beginning with Franklin Roosevelt’s Reconstruction and ending with Jimmy Carter’s Disjunction)”. His fifth

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period, “Reagan, Bush, and Beyond” constituted a chapter such as the four previous ones, and was included in a chapter following “Roosevelt’s Reconstruction”.

Skowronek, explained a transformative president as one who followed a course of action using Neustadt’s “four requirements” that identified five Presidents who have made significant changes in their predecessor’s policies. (Each of these presidents was divided into one of five chapters in The Politics Presidents Make).

Skowronek discussed transformative leadership in “Is Transformational Leadership Still Possible? Barack Obama in Historical Perspective”. (Presidential Leadership in Political Time, Reprise and Reappraisal). Skowronek questioned whether transformational leadership is possible, reviewed the paths of the five transformative presidents through an appraisal of Obama’s presidency. President Obama, prior to campaigning, had written The Audacity of Hope outlined the steps he planned to improve America. The changes outlined in Hope constituted a pragmatic and progressive course of action amounting to a course of action using government to change policy, and repudiate Reagan’s belief about not using government for solutions. All transformative presidents initiated their leadership through repudiating predecessors.

Obama, during his primary campaign with Hillary Clinton, differentiated his ideas with Hillary Clinton. Obama initiated his general election campaign with John McCain by identifying and emulating with two other transformative presidents, Lincoln and Reagan to show how he wished to follow their leadership. Obama campaigned about change by belittling President Clinton’s “temporizing” rather than repudiating existing policies. (Ibid., p.169). It was not clear that Obama clearly established a “unifying vision” in attacking President George Bush’s “profound irresponsibility”. Obama was elected asserting that he wanted to unify partisan factions through mutual agreement. After being elected, Obama failed to include any of the opposition factions into his coalition. Not doing so, determined that Obama was not transformative. Skowronek, asked whether transformative leadership was possible, then, questioned if Obama’s, reelection and passing his signature health care reform resulted in his being transformative? Several other political scientists also asked whether Obama, or any other President, was transformative. Their analysis of his Presidency provides insight into defining a

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transformative .president. George C. Edwards III, too, doubted whether Obama, or any other President, was transformative. (Overreach: leadership in the Obama Presidency). Edwards’ title, Overreach, appraised Obama’s presidency as having overreached his ability to persuade Congress or public to accept his policies.

In Overreach, Edwards questioned: (1) was there opportunity for public and congressional support in promoting Obama’s major policies, including the Affordable Care Act, TARP or the Stimulus, and (2) “what were these opportunities,” and what was the likely success of creating opportunities by “going public”? (Overreach, 7). To both questions, Edwards believed that Obama pursued activist legislation without tangible opportunities for success.

In “Narrowcasting the Obama Presidency,” political scientist Andrew Rudalevige, also agreed that Obama was not transformative and sided with Neustadt that Political Science has an important role to play in rating the president and reviewed a number of studies to explain when a president could be categorized as a “transformative”.

Political Scientist Theda Skocpol, in the “Alexis De Tocqueville Lectures” at Harvard University a assessed Obama’s presidency which she paralleled with FDR’s, as inconclusive in Obama being transformative. Compared to FDR’s transformative presidency, Obama’s was “Far from the advent of sustained Democratic dominance . . . the early Obama presidency gave way to a conservative backlash . . . and, at best, a ‘halfway New Deal’”. (Skocpol, Obama and America’s Political Future, 93-94).

Transformative presidents must demonstrate their ability to sustain their repudiative authority.

Instead, Obama’s policies were consistently challenged both in Congress and with the public as evidenced by lack of poll support and defeat in the 2010 and 2014 mid-term elections. Consequently, “. . . Reconstructive leaders. . . have discovered the true basis of national unity

and are acting to restore it.” (Skowronek, Presidential Leadership, 175.)

In addition to restoring national unity, reconstructive leaders change the old order with a new vision. Skowronek explained why Obama was not transformative since he had not reconstructed his party, by bringing new groups to form political alliances favorable to his

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progressive policies. Obama failed to accomplish what Reagan had in repudiating FDR’s of New Deal policies.

Skowronek, followed Neustadt, in rating various Presidents to determine their level of presidential leadership, and suggested a format for defining a transformative, for example, by determing whether a particular president repudiated his predecessor’s vision for creating new policies. Skowronek believed five transformative presidents benefitted from problems associated with their predecessor’s policies. For example, Reagan was elected to end high inflation, high interest rates and unemployment. Reagan campaigned that the economy suffered from the welfare policies enacted by FDR’s New Deal.Reagan’s reconstructive vision attributed New Deal, government, progressive, legislation as incorrect in solving problems.

Reagan’s, instead, referred to the libertarian beliefs of the founders who opposed the expansion of government infringing on individual liberty. Reagan also attached progressive, judicial interpretations of the Constitution that perceived the Constitution as a living document to be adapted to solutions to social or economic problems. Reagan’s judicial conservatives interpreted the Constitution fundamentally, rather than according to the situation.

Reagan’s rhetoric, saying America was the “Shining City on the Hill”, provided balm for Americans who were increasingly pessimistic about the outcome and duration of the Vietnam War. Reagan’s leadership proclaimed that Government was not the solution. Reagan transformed anew the solution by explaining his attacks on welfare by saying only “welfare queens” benefitted. Reagan’s transformative presidency targeted high taxes and Reagan proposed reducing taxes and budget deficits, caused by welfare policies enacted during FDR’s New Deal.

The most important part of the Reagan Revolution that reconstructed the Republican Party consolidated a coalition “. . to support the new agenda and dominate electoral

politics.”(Skowronek, Presidential leadership, 97). Reagan enacted the 1981, Kemp-Roth Economic Recovery Act, fulfilling his campaign promises of reducing taxes, encouraging savings, to increase supply. This act reversed FDR’S New Deal Keynesian macroeconomics which expanded government funding to increase demand and encourage employment.

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David Stockman, The Triumph of Politics, advocated Supply Side economics as an economic model needed to promote economic growth ending high inflation and Carter’s stagnant economy. Stockman wrote that “. . . the supply-side synthesis offered two powerful, classic economic truths”. The first truth was “. . . our capitalist economy’s natural capacity to expand and generate new wealth and societal welfare was hobbled by sweeping anti-supply and incentive-destroying policies of the modern state.” (Stockman, 41). His second truth determined that the dollar’s value was declining, due to failed monetary policy that created global inflation. (Ibid.) Both of Stockman’s “truths” supported the Economic Recovery Act and served as the basis of the Reagan Revolution to end New Deal policies.

The Kemp- Roth Economic Recovery Act reduced personal income taxes by 25 percent over a three-year period. In addition, marginal tax rates were reduced from a range of 14 to 70 percent, resulting in only a minor reduction at the bottom end of the income brackets, but a very significant reduction at the highest income brackets. (Dye, Understanding Public Policy, 176).

David A. Stockman, analyzed the impact of the Economic Recovery Act to show why the Reagan Revolution failed. Stockman explained why “Reaganomics”, or Supply Side, macroeconomics, based on economist Arthur Laffer’s curve. Laffer demonstrated why income tax rates were too high, to provide incentives to save and invest, and increase supply. The Recovery act justified reducing taxes that would lower the price of goods and services ending inflation. Instead, the Recovery Act resulted in a massive federal deficit.

David Stockman, appointed Director of the Office of Manager of the Budget, managed the Kemp-Roth tax cuts through Congress together with massive defense spending. However, without reducing Social Security and Medicare benefits from the budget, increased defense pending could not be achieved. (Stockman, Triumph of Politics, 125). According to Stockman,

the Reagan Revolution ended as a result of failing to balance the budget by reducing entitlements. What is the Reagan legacy?

Stockman believed that Reagan’s ‘legacy’ was the national debt that resulted from a lack of revenue as a result of the “Kemp-Roth” income tax reduction:

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“Regan’s most prominent legacy, the national debt weighed against the economic

miracle he had promised from the private sector as much as against the public -

sector initiatives he had renounced, and the two reconstructive ideas on which he

had rested his new course-the monetarist discipline and the supply-side stimulus

to invest-appeared all the more dubious after the recovery took hold.”

(Skowronek, Poltics Presidents Make, 428).

But, Reagan’s legacy included reducing taxes and creating a conservative agenda for limited government. A president is transformative when his policies are followed by future Presidents, i.e, President George W. Bush, who continued upgrading the military and advocating Social Security privatization. Bush also transacted a tax cut larger than Reagan’s, adhering to Kemp-Roth Supply-Side economic policy. President Bush continued Reagan’s educational reform by enacting a signature education reform that strengthened public schools with standardized, rigorous national testing of core curriculum.

In 2008, President Barack Obama, Obama was elected at the beginning of the Great Recession. He enacted progressive policies that contrasted with both Bush’s and Reagan’s conservative vision. Obama opted to promote progressive federal funding to stimulate the economy. Obama’s Presidency, was reconstructive, opposing Reagan’s belief that Government is the problem. Obama’s governmental policies to end the Great Recession caused a conservative reaction that galvanized Republican leaders to oppose Obama’s policies.

February, 2009, shortly after Obama was inaugurated, the Illinois libertarian party inspired CNBC reporter, Rick Santelli to request revolutionary, Tea Party resistance to protest mortgage assistance. Reporting from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange,

Santelli called for a “Tea Party” to protest policies such as the “Stimulus” and TARP that were enacted to end the “Great Recession”:

“This is America. . . .How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor’s mortgage

that has an extra bathroom and can’t pay their bills? . . . if you read our Founding Fathers,

people like Benjamin Franklin and Jefferson, what we’re doing in this country now is making

them roll over in their graves.” (Skocpol and Williamson, The Tea Party and the Remaking of

Republican Conservatism, 45).

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Santelli’s comment restated Reagan’s legacy. The Tea Party revived a movement to continue all that President Reagan championed during his transformative presidency. Most significantly, the Tea Party followed Reagan in opposing any form of welfare policy, including providing subsidization for “losers’ mortgages and reward people who “can carry the water instead of drink the water”. Tea Partiers demanded everything that Reagan achieved in opposing welfare policies.

Political Scientist Alan Abramowitz has described the composition of Tea Party as “. . . part of the long-term growth of partisan ideological polarization with the american electorate and hespecially the growing conservatism of the Republican Party.” (Abramowitz, “Partisan Polarization and the Rise of the Tea Party Movement,” 3).

Demographically, the Tea Party consists disproportionally of mostly older white males, affluent, evangelical Christians, gun owners who are less likely than non-supporters to be college graduates

Political Scientists Leigh Bradberry and Gary C. Jacobson, described Tea Partiers’

“. . .intense hostility to Barack Obama. . . beyond hostility to his legislative agenda-most

prominently. . . the Affordable Care Act ( ACA)-Tea Partiers questioned Obama’s character,

. . . .His name, race, origins, associations, political background, and cerebral style had

Rattled peopled sharing right-wing populist sentiments even before he was elected. . . .”

(Bradbury and Jacobson, “Does the Tea Party Still Matter”, 2).

Tea Partiers expressed racist and anti-immigrant beliefs, of older, white Americans. But according to Edmund Morris’s biography, Dutch, there was no evidence that supported Reagan having racist or nativist prejudice.

Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson through interviews with Tea Partiers have added more depth to understanding Tea Partiers’ ideology as a way to link with Reagan’s legacy.

Theda Stocpol and Vanessa Williamson through interviews with Tea Partiers have provided more depth to understanding Tea Partiers’ ideology which appeared similar to Reagan’s.

Tea Partiers embraced limited government and “Freedom to Pursue Prosperity through unhindered Markets. . . and Liberty tempered Virtue . . . and hold true to the visions of our founding fathers”. (Skocpol & Williamson, The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican

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Conservatism, 48). Tea Partiers proclaimed their adherence to the Constitution and documents, including the “Declaration” and “Bill of Rights. We are fighting to preserve our Constititution and identified their inherent opinion that is embroidered on their T-Shirts: “Tea Party: Taxed Enough Already!” (Ibid., p. 50).

Another belief, in analyzing Tea Partiers’ ideology and relationship with Republican Party conservatism centered on libertarianism and explained how the mid-term elections expressed increased conservatism. Tea Partiers’ conformity adhered to social conservatism regarding race, age, or pro-life, but many are “. . .secular minded libertarians . . . who stress individual choice on cultural matters and want the Tea Party . . . to give absolute priority to fiscal issues.”(Ibid., p.35).

A direct tie of Tea Party conservatives to Reagan’s legacy is associated with Senator Rand Paul’s landslide victory over a traditional Republican in the 2010 Mid-Term elections. In addition to Tea Partiers’ opposition to Obama and Democratic Party candidates, Tea Partiers opposed Republican elites not adhering with Tea Partier ideology. Rand Paul’s 2010 mid-term Senate victory was achieved through his success in the Kentucky primaries against an “establishment” Republican. Tea Partiers remain consistently Republican, but have refuted Republicans, such as Senator Bob Bennett who voted for the “Bank Bailout” Bill. (Ibid.,p. 42). Tea Party Republicans differ with establishment Republican who compromise with Democrats. (Patrick Fisher,“The Tea Party Gap within the Republican Party,” 4).

Rand Paul’s association with Reagan’s political beliefs was described In the Tea Party Goes to Washington, and emphasized together with his father supported Reagan’s agenda. Senator Rand Paul remembered how he and his father, Ron Paul, helped Reagan’s 1976 Presidential candidacy against Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. Later, as an example of how Ron Paul

modified libertarian view against deficit spending when he supported President Reagan’s defense budget which resulted in deficit spending. Ron Paul balanced his libertarian beliefs “. . . against the need to protect his country and interests.” (Paul, Tea Party Goes to Washington., 3).

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During the 2010 election, Rand Paul explained why he and other Tea Partiers were concerned about the national debt, clearly a focus in describing the differences among Tea Party activists in allegiance with Reagan’s legislative priorities.

Rand Paul’s Tea Partiers, influenced both Republican conservative politics and libertarian ideology. Paul’s ideology always correlated with Tea Partier libertarianism, together with Reagan’s antipathy for big government. Patrick Fisher in describing the similarities, between Tea Party, Republican Party agreed all characterized as “. . . a conservative movement within the Republican Party.” (Fisher, “The Tea Party Gap within the Republican Party,” 21). Republican elites in both the Senate and house coalesced to form a conservative coalition opposed to all perceived socialist or progressive legislation, such as reform of health care President Obama that the Democratic controlled Congress passed AFC.

In the face of Republican Party opposition, strengthened by the Tea Party, President Obama pursued his signature, Affordable Health Care policy. No Republican member of the House or Senate voted for AFC. Still, the 111th Democratic controlled Congress enacted AFC through reconciliation.

The 2010 mid-term election resulted in a 63-seat-loss of Democratic House Representatives. Political Scientists David W. Brady, et al., questioned reasons for Democratic losses other than Tea Party conservative opposition. (Brady, et al., “Why did Political Science Forecasts Go Awry?” 1).

The conservative House of Representatives, galvanized by the Tea Party countered AFC and any other policies proposed by President Obama. Is this opposition a continuing support for Reagan’s legacy? Yes, Tea Partier conservatism has followed Reagan’s ideology. In addition, Leigh Bradbury and Gary Jacobson, provided stronger evidence that Tea Partiers also affected the 2012 Presidential election wrote that “. . . goals and sentiments that motivated Tea Partiers . . . were the driving force between the broad Republican victory helped all Republicans regardless of their degree of association with the movement.” (Bradbury and Jacobson, “Does the Tea Party Still Matter?”, 32).

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**CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this paper proposed questions for rating or apprising a President, one of which is the subject for this paper. Does a President leave a legacy or “. . . clues in the conduct of the next Administration.” (Neustadt, Presidential Power, 168).

“. . . what was his legacy? What imprint did he leave on the office, its character, and public

standing; where did he leave his party and the other party nationally; what remained

by way of public policies adopted or in controversy; what remained as issues in American

society, insofar as own stance may have affected them. . . .” (Ibid., p. 167).

Neustadt explained apprised Presidents FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and LBJ, none of whom could be confirmed as transformative. He in his revised book on Presidential Power, expanded his appraisal analysis in detail to include President Reagan as compared with FDR.

Neustadt’s appraised Reagan negatively in regard to the aftermath of the “Iran Contra” affair, that Neustadt believed should have resulted in Reagan’s impeachment. Neustadt favorably balanced Reagan’s “Iran Contra”affair with his high approval ratings that equaled FDR’s. High approval of a President’s policies demonstrated “. . . the country’s consciousness of what its government should be and do.”(Ibid., p.271) When a President has persuaded public opinion to be in agreement with his administration determined the leadership rating.

I explain that Reagan’s legacy was the effect his policies and philosophy, expressed in his 1981 inaugural address became the Reagan Revolution: “In the present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.” (Skowronek, The Politics Presidents Make, p. 414). I have suggested the similarities between Reagan’s conservative ideologies and those identical ones used by current Tea Party candidates in the 2010 and 2012 elections that confirmed Reagan as a “Transformative President” I have described the leading presidential scholars on the topic. Edwards agreed with Neustadt’s classic work on Presidential Power by reviewing presidents whose leadership changed American politics have taken on “mythic

proportions as leaders”. (Edwards, Strategic President, 1). Edwards debunked each so-called transformative as failing to persuade Congress or affect public opinion. Skowronek, The Poltics Presidents Make, researched and analyzed the presidents through Clinton to create a

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framework for studying the *possibility* of having a transformative president. Skowronek’s Presidential Leadership, revised his previous conclusions In the Politics Presidents Make, by comparing Obama’s with Reagan’s, satisfy the necessary criteria for determining who is transformative. The result of the comparison demonstrated that President Obama was not transformative.

Political Scientist Larry M. Bartels’ appraised Obama’s presidency and wondered about both the meaning of the concept, transformative, and, if one ever existed. In assessing Obama’s Presidency, compared with FDR’s, Bartels queried if FDR would have been elected for a second term if the “. . . recession of 1938 had happened two years earlier.” (Bartels, “A New Deal Fantasy Meets Old Political Realities,” 108). Bartels wrote that a president’s transformative status or even reelection was based on economic distress or income growth. Bartels added, “If even the New Deal era does not live up to our heroic expectations for ‘transformational’ politics, what chance has Obama?” (Ibid., 109).

I conclude that none of the presidential scholars, included in this paper, have succinctly defined a transformational President or even its existence. Possibly Bruce Miroff and Stephen Skowrone, are correct, that future historical research would be helpful, or at least provide insights into the meaning of a transformative president. Historians used to rank or appraise all of the Presidents with simply a “Number”.

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