

Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 560 pp., ISBN 0-674-68937-2, paper; \$18.95, DKK 312,50.

What makes a President? We tend to think of the American Presidency in terms of simple chronology: one president succeeding the other; each president becoming a master, rather than a creator, of American politics. Skowronek challenges that pattern by making the different kinds of politics that presidents make the objective of his book. He argues that a simple periodization scheme severely limits the analysis of leadership, and that it fails to recognize the presidents as individual agents of political change. Rather than following a chronological approach, e.g., speaking of Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton as late-twentieth century presidents, Skowronek observes a correlation of presidents by events and societal time frames. He defines four basic types of political leadership: Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, Republican and Liberal, all recurring at cyclical intervals. In Skowronek's own words, the book 'offers an analysis of the leadership patterns that are repeatedly produced through the American constitutional system.'

A re-thinking of presidential history expands the framework for understanding the impact of a president's policies, and the success of these policies on a more long-term basis. Skowronek's claim is that Presidents make politics, politics do not make presidents, though he simultaneously admits that several factors influence the success of a presidential term. By way of the Constitution and the established ways of the White House, for example, the presidency is institutionalized, but Skowronek aims to transcend this very rigid way of viewing the Presidency by expanding the basis of analysis to emphasize both historical context and personality as important factors when evaluating any president.

In assessing a Chief Executive we look to define the successes and failures, but the conclusion to such an analysis depends on our point of departure. One excellent example is the Presidency of Jimmy Carter. In their evaluations, historians and political scientists cover a wide range of opinions. Carter's term in office has been described in terms of everything from amateurish via a turning point in a American history to an impossible leadership situation. None have defined it as unequivocally successful. But what defines a successful presidency? According to Skowronek, '[s]uccessful political leaders do not necessarily do more than other leaders, successful leaders control the political definitions of their actions, the terms in which their places in history are understood.' In other words, the leader is the agenda-setter and a successful leader defines the context of the presidency; he defines the operational codes, and accordingly governs the political situation. Carter did not control the political definitions of his actions, because he 'came to power in what has proven to be an impossible leadership situation time and time again

since the Presidency of John Adams.' Carter's presidency coincided with a turbulent time in America's history. The country was in the midst of an economic recession, and its international reputation and integrity had been shattered by the Asian war. Skowronek argues that 'to take the dismal results of Carter ... as prima facie evidence of [his] political talents is to assume that presidents who have fared better played on the same field of political authority.'

In evaluating the field of political authority, Skowronek skillfully and systematically makes use of historical evidence. His approach can only be applauded as it brings a new and broader understanding of the historical evolution of the presidency.