

The President is Not Our National Savior

Joe Biden [wants you to believe](#) he will end “American darkness” as he battles for the “soul of the nation.”

He [recently lamented](#) that “people are losing faith in what the president says.”

Faith is complete trust based on something other than proof. What more dangerous an idea is there for a free people to hold than to have “faith” in what any politician says, let alone Joe Biden or Donald Trump?

At the Republican convention, [one speaker proclaimed](#) that “Trump is the bodyguard of Western civilization.”

The conservative *Washington Examiner*, while harshly critical of the [“extreme platform”](#) of Biden and the Democrats, didn’t spare [Trump from criticism](#). Trumps reelection’s “agenda” was described as “a magic wish list. Trump might as well be promising voters he’ll sprinkle fairy dust on them to make them all princes and princesses.”

Both the Democrats and Republicans are long on promises and [short on principles](#).

When did Americans settle into the idea of an imperial presidency?

Gene Healy, in his book [The Cult of the Presidency](#), exposes the belief that some Americans hold that the president should take the role of a “national savior.”

Healy wrote his book in 2008, observing the partisan bitterness of American politics, which seems to have gotten worse. Yet, Healy points out the common ground between the two camps: “Amid all the bitterness, it’s easy to miss the fact

that, at bottom, both Left and Right agree on the boundless nature of presidential responsibility." Healy continues:

Neither Left nor Right sees the president as the Framers saw him: a constitutionally constrained chief executive with an important, but limited job: to defend the country when attacked, check Congress when it violates the Constitution, enforce the law—and little else. Today, for conservatives as well as liberals, it is the president's job to protect us from harm, to 'grow the economy,' to spread democracy and American ideals abroad, and even to heal spiritual malaise...

Healy notes that few people, "find anything amiss in the notion that it is the president's duty to solve all large national problems and to unite us all in the service of a higher calling." Like fish that do not notice the water they swim in, "The vision of the president as national guardian and redeemer is so ubiquitous that it goes unnoticed."

The "vision of the president as national guardian," Healy argues, is not "appropriate for a self-governing republic" or a "limited, constitutional government."

Before he became president, John Adams was the first vice president of the United States. Adams, while not acting on President George Washington's behalf, believed in the necessity of a fancy title for the president. At Adams's insistence, the Senate appointed a Title Committee, which proposed that the president be addressed as "His Highness, the President of the United States, and Protector of their Liberties."

The proposal was soundly rejected by Senator William Maclay. Healy writes that on the floor of the Senate, Maclay was "up from his chair to object at the merest hint of anti-republican language, such as a reference to the president's 'most gracious speech' or a resolution that suggested the president had 'rescued' the United States from 'anarchy and

confusion.'”

Pointing to the Constitution, Maclay restated, fancy titles were unconstitutional and “idolatrous”: Article I, Section 9, Clause 8: “No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States.’”

Washington himself, consistent with the founders’ intent that the president’s primary duty was to see that laws were faithfully executed, referred to the president as the “chief magistrate.”

“The president has been the central figure in American political life. But the Framers never thought of the president as America’s ‘national leader,’” writes Healy.

Healy continues, “The very notion of ‘national leadership’ raised the possibility of authoritarian rule by a demagogue who would create an atmosphere of crisis in order to enhance his power. To foreclose that possibility, the powers of the chief magistrate [the president] would be carefully limited.” Along with executing laws passed by Congress, the president’s duty was to use the veto when Congress “transgressed its constitutional bounds.”

Healy argues soundly, the president as “chief magistrate” was never intended to save the “national soul.”

We might want to blame politicians for out-of-control presidential powers, but we have only ourselves to blame. Many Americans, both Right and Left, want a president, in Healy’s words, “who trumpets his ability to protect Americans from economic dislocation, to shield them from physical harm and moral decay, and to lead them to national glory.”

No wonder presidents are always talking about wars on crime, wars on drugs, wars on poverty, trade wars, and fighting wars with nations. “It is of the nature of war to increase the executive at the expense of the legislative authority,”

Hamilton wrote in [The Federalist Papers: No. 8](#).

Healy writes, “when the president raises the battle cry, he can usually count on substantial numbers of American opinion leaders to cheer him on.”

Today, both Trump and Biden promise to defeat COVID-19. As the public cheers, our liberties continue to slip away. COVID-19 has created public acceptance of erosions to liberty we could not have imagined a mere six months ago.

We’ve seen state governors issue tyrannical COVID-19 orders, proving Hamilton a prophet. If elected, Biden and Harris promise a [national mask mandate](#) or possibly a [nationwide lockdown](#). No doubt, the “faithful” will obediently cheer and comply with other new executive orders.

If we, the people, want a president who will save the “soul of the nation” or a president who will wage war on COVID-19, the America that emerges will bear no resemblance to the republic the founders bequeathed us.

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