

Lowi, Theodore J. *The End of the Republican Era*. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pp. 352. \$15.99 ISBN 0-806-1288-79

**Part of the Julian J. Rothbaum Distinguished Lecture series** first published in 1994, *The End of the Republican* book represents Lowi's attempt to extend his critical analysis of 20th century liberalism set forth in *The End of Liberalism* (1969). Lowi argues that the Republican era that has succeeded the long period of liberal dominance has not remedied the ills of interest group liberalism, and contains within its coalition serious cleavages that he believes will eventually undermine the GOP's electoral effectiveness. That a book by this title was first issued in 1994 — at the high-water mark of Republican electoral success at the congressional level — should in no way undermine Lowi's analysis of the troubles within the Republican Party or with the ideological precepts that have guided it. Lowi acknowledges the irony of the timing, while persisting in his conviction that the Republican period of ideological hegemony will crumble as surely as did the liberal hegemony. While perhaps not a masterpiece on the order of *The End of Liberalism*, *The End of the Republican Era* nevertheless deserves attention as a sophisticated and eclectic analysis of major political trends in 21st century American politics.

As a self-described liberal, Lowi's principal complaint in his previous work has been the decoupling of policy from the rule of law. Struggling to find a constitutional means of extending governmental authority into realms previously left untouched by previous generations

(e.g. and esp. economic regulation, social welfare, civil rights, and environmental regulation), the tendency of politicians operating in a relatively consensual environment was to “wing it,” and in the process created interest group liberalism, with its concomitant sins of incrementalism, clientelism, and bureaucratic drift and bloat. In an acute analysis of the intersection of party politics and ideology, Lowi identifies Nixon as the last “liberal” president of the liberal era, and concludes that Clinton’s presidency was “conservative” to the extent that Clinton was compelled to move within an ideological environment that offered no space for progressive policies or positive government. In extending Lowi’s theory, the radicalism and lawlessness of the Bush administration may signal the fatal cracks appearing in Republican coalition.

Lowi’s analysis of the forces that are in the process of decomposing the dominance of the conservative reflects his somewhat dim view of how American democracy functions. Lowi resists the temptation to identify conservatism outside the framework of philosophical liberalism – and hence as “un-American” – but contends that the political forces that have brought the disparate ideological groupings that currently comprise the conservative movement will, through the process of governing, create unbridgeable fissures that will diminish Republicans’ electoral successes. Similar to his complaint regarding the later coalitions that comprised the Great Society, Lowi argues that the array of ideological interests guiding the current Republican Party are incapable of governing prudently or responsibly. In particular, Lowi predicts that as cultural conservatives grasp a greater share of attention from Republican administrations, “patrician” and economic conservatives may find such policies put into action too much to take in exchange for the tax-cuts and deregulatory policies that first brought them into the Republican “big tent.”

Lowi’s analysis of the flaws of the American political system is trenchantly critical, and betrays much of the same frustration and despair that marks his seminal work. At times his prose can be hard to follow for a scholar uninitiated in the arcane of political science, and many political scientists may voice concern at the number of times Lowi indulges in intuitively satisfying but empirically unsupported assertions. Lowi’s eclecticism may thrill and satisfy many, while frustrating less nimble minds with his theoretical leaps. In short, *The End of the Republican*

*Era* bears many of the hallmarks of course lectures converted into book form, but any serious student of American politics and history will find the book well worth their time.

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