

Grading notes
10/29 essay assignment

Essay prompt:

What feature of American constitutional structure does Riggs propose as an explanation for the unusual constitutional stability of the U.S.? How does this effect work?

Grading issues

1. federalism and private sector as main explanations. Riggs says they are differences, but that he will disregard them as not being features of bureaucratic design.
 2. Treatment of Jackson & what he does with bureaucracy: it's more about rotation than just about presidential role per se.
 3. Morrill Act: land-grant colleges. Why important (connect to property of the bureaucracy?); Pendleton Act without saying anything about exceptions – esp., top political appointees
 4. Paper should include some discussion of the “unusual stability” that is being “explained”
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Essay should realize that the “unusual stability” refers to the rarity of a presidentialist system that has never been overthrown by elements based in the bureaucracy.

Although Riggs suggests that this stability may be partly due to U.S. difference from other presidentialist system in terms of the scope and power of the private sector, and the relatively strong system of federalism, he primarily explores differences in bureaucratic structure.

His central point is that the U.S. bureaucracy is “semi-powered.” It lacks a very large class of careerists having broad political power or ability to coalesce into a political force. Although it is managed by political appointees, these are transient administrators. It has a large class of professionals, who are subject to influences from outside the bureaucracy. And its lower level personnel are widely recruited, based on generalist examinations and decentralized training, into the civil service. These professionals and civil servants create a centrifugal tendency to bureaucratic political action. The transient management level based in presidential patronage, strengthening presidential control over the bureaucracy. Moreover, there is not and has never been a significant mandarin class of elite generalists for whom the bureaucracy might serve as their political power base.

Riggs also traces historical underpinnings of American bureaucratic stability. Before there was professionalism or a strong system of elite education, Jacksonianism imposed a spoils system in which transient, patronage appointees filled the bureaucratic ranks from top to bottom. Not only does such a bureaucracy have little capacity for independent political organizing for its own interests—or even formation of a separate interest—their occasional tendency toward

incompetence and clumsy corruption brought on strong public demands resulting ultimately in the creation by the federal government of a decentralized professional training system (the Morrill Act) and the civil service system (the Pendleton Act).