

# George C. Edwards III Symposium

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## Introduction

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**T**his past January, during the SPSA meeting in Puerto Rico, a roomful of scholars gathered for a discussion of how presidency studies has evolved and, specifically, the role George C. Edwards III played (and continues to play) in shaping that evolution. Audience members were treated to thoughtful commentaries on the topic from august members of our field such as Will Howell, Karen Hult, and Rick Waterman.

As chair of the presidency and executive politics section of that meeting, and the individual who organized this particular discussion, I owe these participants a great deal of gratitude for not only their time but their intellectual energy. As one of George's last graduate students, I have benefitted from not only his mentorship, but also a redirected generosity from colleagues who repaid their intellectual debt to George in part by showering others and myself with professional kindnesses. Without those kindnesses, I would not have been in a position to organize what I hope will go down in history as the San Juan Summit. Without the great fortune of having George as my teacher, mentor, and now friend, however, I would not be a political scientist at all.

As a result, the comments that follow are particularly meaningful for me, though even those few in the field who have not had the opportunity to interact with and learn from George will find a great deal of valuable insight in them. This series of brief reflections starts with one from George himself, as he takes us on a first-person journey through the analytical revolution that he pioneered in the field of presidential studies, one that began while he was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin and continued through his landmark study of presidential prestige and success in Congress that was published in the *APSR* in 1976, until today. His concluding observations should prove as profitable as they are astute for the younger generations of scholars.

Subsequent commentary by Karen Hult, Richard Waterman, and William Howell underscores what George introduces. Karen traces the influence George's work has had on existing work and goes on to suggest ways we can approach the future

of presidential studies that reflect the rigor and discipline introduced by George decades ago. Rick celebrates the humane contributions George has made, acknowledges the number of members of our community he has mentored directly at Texas A&M University, and the dozens of others for whom he provided both individual support and an intellectual home at *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, which he resurrected and turned into the leading journal focused on executive politics. Finally, Will reinforces the effect George and others had on what precisely constituted presidency research, the effects of their intervention still seen today in the form of greater attention to conceptualization and measurement, theory-driven investigations of causal relationships, and an inescapable dedication to evidence and logic.

I expect that as you read these pieces, many of you will have your own recollections of both specific instances where George made an impact on your career and more general observations of how had he and others not taken the pioneering steps they did, your work today would be impossible. I encourage you to share those observations, whether with me, with George, or perhaps best of all, with the students you now mentor.

### THE REVOLUTION IN PRESIDENCY STUDIES

**George C. Edwards III**, *Texas A&M University*

One hundred and ten years ago, in the first article in the first issue of the *American Political Science Review*, A. Maurice Low criticized scholars who had complained of "executive usurpation" of power from Congress for "relying upon their rhetoric rather than their facts" (Low 1906). In fact, he argued, if there had been usurpation, it was on the part of the Senate, not the president. Thus the critics had not gotten their facts straight and completely missed the real pattern of behavior. More than a century later, political scientists are still exploring presidential leadership, yet for most of the decades since Low wrote, the study of the presidency was a backwater of the discipline.

### The Revolution Begins

In the fall of 1973, I faced a dilemma. A newly-minted PhD, I was assigned to teach a graduate seminar on the presidency at Tulane. I looked forward to the class, but what readings would I assign the students, aside from Dick Neustadt's *Presidential Power?* Edwards Corwin's magisterial *The President: Office and Powers* was considerably out of date (Corwin died in 1963), and