Growth of Presidential Power

A. Article II of the Constitution
   1. Article II is the part of the Constitution that deals with the Executive Branch.
   2. Article II is basically just a short outline of powers.
   3. A large part of America’s early political history deals with defining the extent of the executive power.

B. The Changing View of Presidential Power
   1. Why Presidential Power Has Grown
      - The presidency is in the hands of one person, rather than many, and many Presidents have worked to expand the powers of their office.
      - As the country grew and industrialized, especially in times of emergency, people demanded that the Federal Government play a larger role and looked to the President for leadership.
      - Congress has delegated much authority to the President, although presidential control over foreign affairs is greater than it is over domestic affairs. Congress simply continues to assert itself in the implementation of social programs.
      - Presidents have the attention and general respect of the media, the public, and their own party.

C. How Presidents Have Viewed Their Power
   1. Stronger and more effective Presidents have taken a broad view of the powers of the office.
   2. Teddy Roosevelt viewed his broad use of Presidential powers as the “Stewardship Theory”, which means that the President should have the power to act as a “steward” over the country.
   3. Recent, very strong presidents have given rise to the phrase “Imperial Presidency”, which implies that the President becomes as strong as an emperor. The term is often used to refer to the administration of Richard Nixon.
   4. Other Presidents have viewed a strong executive as a threat to liberty, and have interpreted the powers of the office narrowly. Ironically, the President most associated with a limited view of the Presidency was Teddy Roosevelt’s handpicked successor, William Howard Taft.
Impact and Legacy of FDR

Franklin Delano Roosevelt served as President from March 1933 to April 1945, the longest tenure in American history. He may have done more during those twelve years to change American society and politics than any of his predecessors in the White House, save Abraham Lincoln. Of course, some of this was the product of circumstances; the Great Depression and the rise of Germany and Japan were beyond FDR's control. But his responses to the challenges he faced made him a defining figure in American history.

Americans elected Roosevelt President in 1932 because they believed he could combat the Depression.

FDR also reshaped the American presidency. Through his "fireside chats," delivered to an audience via the new technology of radio, FDR built a bond between himself and the public—doing much to shape the image of the President as the caretaker of the American people. Under FDR's leadership, the President's duties grew to encompass not only those of the chief executive—as implementer of policy—but also chief legislator—as drafter of policy. And in trying to design and craft legislation, FDR required a White House staff and set of advisers unlike any seen previously in Washington. The President now needed a full-time staff devoted to domestic and foreign policies, with expertise in these areas, and a passion for governance. With enactment of the Executive Reorganization bill in 1939, FDR changed the shape of the White House forever. In sum, President Roosevelt greatly increased the responsibilities of his office. Fortunately for his successors, he also enhanced the capacity of the presidency to meet these new responsibilities.
Evolution of the Presidency by Nick Ragone

More than any other branch of government, the presidency has undergone a remarkable transformation during the past 200 years. Though the framers did not provide the presidency with many powers, and George Washington tried to keep it that way, the balance of power between the presidency and Congress began to shift over the decades.

The Era of the Caretaker Presidents

The nineteenth century was the era of great legislators, not presidents. The initial wave of founding father presidents (Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison) quickly gave way to a collection of relatively weak and forgettable officeholders.

The group of presidents often referred to as the caretaker presidents includes Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, James K. Polk, Zachary Taylor, Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, Rutherford B. Hayes, James Garfield, Chester Arthur, Grover Cleveland, and Millard Fillmore, whom many historians consider the most unmemorable president of the era.

The presidency was looked upon mostly as a source of federal patronage jobs, and a platform from which to fight the Indians. In fact, the president spent much of his time actually interviewing and appointing thousands of federal workers, which included mail carriers, census officials, and patent reviewers. The dominant issues of the day — slavery and states' rights — were debated in Congress. In fact, it wasn't uncommon for the great legislators, including Henry Clay, John Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and Stephen Douglas, to enjoy greater celebrity and popularity than did the president. However, two presidents from this era do stand out: Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln.

Andrew Jackson

“Old Hickory” believed that the presidency should be the dominant force in American government. He asserted the right of the president to replace any federal officeholder without consulting Congress, and wasn’t shy about putting his cronies in key government positions (thus creating the patronage system). He stood up to the members of Congress who opposed tariffs, and threatened to use the military to enforce federal law.

Abraham Lincoln

Regarded by many as our greatest president, Lincoln's election led to the secession of the Confederate states from the Union. Faced with the greatest crisis the country had encountered up to that point (and arguably since), Lincoln understood that only the president could keep the country together. Citing the implied emergency powers of the Constitution, he freed the slaves, suspended civil liberties, and imposed martial law, even though he lacked the explicit authority to do so. His most important act, however, may have been his decision to hold the election of 1864 during the midst of the Civil War, even though he probably could have suspended it.

The Modern Presidency

The modern presidency bears little resemblance to its nineteenth-century antecedent. As the federal government has grown in size and influence, so has the presidency. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the president has been the dominant force in American government and politics. This seemingly irreversible trend was pioneered by some of the twentieth century's most prominent presidents.
**Teddy Roosevelt**

Theodore Roosevelt established the notion of the “bully pulpit” — using the prestige and reach of the White House to rally the American people to certain ideas and legislation. Roosevelt took an activist approach to both domestic and international affairs. He believed that America should pursue an expansionist foreign policy and a populist domestic policy. During his presidency, Roosevelt proved that the White House could be a platform for extraordinary change.

**Franklin Roosevelt**

FDR responded to the challenge of the Great Depression with the New Deal, a series of landmark laws that transformed the role of the federal government and solidified the presidency as the epicenter of American government. During his thirteen years in office, Roosevelt dramatically expanded the powers of the presidency to combat the Great Depression and wage war against Germany and Japan. By the end of World War II, the presidency was a much stronger office than the one that Roosevelt had inherited.

**The Cold War Presidents**

The cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union may have done more to enhance the powers of the presidency than any single event during the twentieth century. America’s role in the world became the primary preoccupation of the president, and consequently spurred an unprecedented growth of the executive branch and presidential powers. While the Congress remained instrumental in domestic affairs, it acquiesced to the president on matters of foreign policy and war powers.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the end of the cold war, the Congress began to reassert itself, particularly following the 1994 midterm elections. But with the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the ongoing war against terrorism, the president has a renewed mandate on both domestic security and international issues.