

## A Conversation with JAMES CEASER

A professor of politics at the University of Virginia, James Ceaser is one of the leading authorities on American Constitutionalism. In this conversation, Ceaser explains why the Constitution should play a greater role in our politics rather than simply in our courts. Kristol and Ceaser also discuss the character of party government and assess the presidency of Barack Obama.

**On Obama's election**, Ceaser says: [The 2008 election] doesn't speak well for the modern state of the world or democracy. It was a terrifying event to see so much hope put into one person with the obvious understanding that no person, even if Obama were more than he is, could ever have achieved that. 2008 [was] a quasi-religious phenomenon pretending something about the character of our world.

**On politics vs. policy**, Ceaser says: Politics...is going beyond the legalisms but looking to the important things of what politics produces, which is finally what sort of human beings are encouraged or produced within the society, what the character of the soul of our people is....Policy sometimes means are we get this degree of this, this degree of that, without looking to the outcome on the most important part, which is what sorts of human beings we are.

**On the Constitution as a guide**, Ceaser says: "I think the Constitution was an effort to structure how the public mind works; does the public mind work in the vein that we're going to change everything as we see fit today, or is the public mind work in such a way, well, we can change lots of things, but it's a good idea to think of what was done before, especially by those who were in a position to think deeply about a situation?"

**On the contribution of the Tea Party**, Ceaser says: "They brought to the popular level the idea that the Constitution matters. Now of course you could criticize some of their Constitutional views. But when they asked that the Constitution be read in the House of Representatives, an event which was met at first with the derision, it showed that there was something there."

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