The Unconstitutional Presidency of George W. Bush
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American History
Mr. Cotey
He is the leader of what is arguably the world’s most powerful country, and the free world itself. Yet, George W. Bush sees fit to set an example quite unheard of within the walls of the Whitehouse. Dubbed by many to be the most religious president ever, Mr. Bush’s bible studies, and support of religious views and incentives seem to go against the wall between church and state that Thomas Jefferson so carefully constructed. The Constitution of the United States of America contains the first amendment, which was written to ensure a separation of church and state. It has been interpreted by courts to include several parts necessary for the maintenance of this wall. Bush’s religious views have affected his methods of leadership, and brought a new non-extremist face to religious politics. Is this new style of politics what the framers of the constitution intended for their nation? Apparently not. President Bush’s religious policies are unconstitutional as they promote Christianity, result in laws regarding religious establishments and allow religious involvement in federal government.

Promoting a certain view tends to lead people to believe that a different view is wrong. For a person of such a position as the president, even the slightest incline to a particular side will convince the public that a certain belief is more right than another. In his inaugural address, said “Unity is within our reach because we are guided by a power larger than ourselves, Who creates us equal in His image.”\textsuperscript{1} Here, he tells the people that a unified America is possible because of the intervention of a spiritual figure. The Constitution states that “Neither can … force nor influence … [a person] to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion.”\textsuperscript{2} The government is to remain impartial and unbiased.

The president refers to Christianity in his inaugural address. For a person of the

\textsuperscript{2} Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, “Introduction to the Principle of Separation of Church and State”, http://www.religioustolerance.org/scs_intr.htm (October 9, 2006)
President’s position in society, such references become advertisements for the subject of the speech, thus influencing the selected religion of his people. This unconstitutional interference by the President shapes a more Christian America, and highlights a common favouritism of beliefs which becomes more and more apparent through the President’s time in office.

Laws regarding religious establishments are intentionally banned. It would appear that Mr. Bush sees fit to bend the rules to his liking. The constitution tells us that “Neither (the state or federal government) can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another.” However, Mr. Bush has established a ‘Whitehouse office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.’ This office will provide easier access to funding for religious organisations, so long as the event they use the funding for is non-religious. While the White House attempts to justify this office by saying that any religion’s organization may apply for funding, the Constitution states that the government may not aid any religion, even if all religions are aided. Regardless to whether or not a particular event is religious, the fact that it is hosted by a religious group means that the views presented, and the event itself will have a religious bias, or religious undertones. The government’s sponsoring of religious events shows that a government is supporting particular religions, thus the funding is meant to be banned as per the constitution. Were Mr. Bush to have named this office in a different manner, there would most likely not be an issue with it. However, including “Faith-Based” in the name shows a direct violation of the constitution.

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In the ideals of the constitution of the United States, politics and religion are meant to stay separate. A mixing of the two can easily create a mentality of one view being right where different becomes wrong. Government involvement in the affairs of religious organizations is prohibited, and rightly so. “Neither a state nor the Federal government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organisations or groups and vice versa.”\textsuperscript{6} This should, effectively, create a solid wall separating church and state. It is quite obvious that a mix between the two was not intended. The affairs of a religious group can range from the financial support of a group, to participating in activities offered by a group. One such activity can be considered bible study, a practice of the Christian faith. A White House insider tells his story: “The news that this was a White House where attendance at Bible study was, if not compulsory, not quite uncompulsory, either, was disconcerting to a non-Christian like me.”\textsuperscript{7} Not only is there a weekly bible study in Mr. Bush’s White House, but people are also indirectly coerced into participating. The Bush administration says that the members do not pressure others to attend their weekly bible study. It is possible that they simply turn their heads to such instances, as they have obviously occurred. Bible study is, essentially, an activity of the Christian church and therefore should not be permitted within a government office. When a government participates in a religious activity, it gives the pretense that the government is religious. According to the constitution, a religious government is not permissible.

The first amendment contains many smaller details that are often over-looked. Were President Bush to review this amendment, he would realize that his religious

\textsuperscript{6} Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, “Introduction to the Principle of Separation of Church and State”, http://www.religioustolerance.org/scs_intr.htm (October 9, 2006)

speeches, faith-based office, and weekly bible study all fall under the heading of ‘unconstitutional’. A wall between church and state was put into the constitution because it was seen as necessary to secure protection for all religions, and to create stability for the nation. History has shown what the mixing of religion and politics has done through the Catholic medieval ages, and Pakistan’s Islamic government. This wall is meant to save the United States from a similar fate. The policies of the Bush administration are unconstitutional due to several infractions of the first amendment such as promoting one religion over another, creating faith-based laws and offices, and openly participating in the affairs of a religious organization. The government does not belong in the church, and the church does not belong in the government. George Bush may need to look over the rules of the government in the constitution again, or he could just take a lesson from his Whitehouse reporter, Helen Thomas, who seemed to have the right idea when she spoke to him: ‘Mr. President, why do you refuse to respect the wall between church and state?... You are a secular official. And not a missionary.’ 

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The White House. President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative.. 26 Nov. 2006  
George W. Bush's presidency took place during one of the most dramatic periods in U.S. history, and began and ended in controversy. George Walker Bush was born on July 6, 1946, in New Haven, Connecticut. He is the eldest of six children of George Herbert Walker Bush and Barbara Pierce Bush. The Bush family had been involved in business and politics since the 1950s. Bush's grandfather, Prescott Bush, was a former Wall Street banker and progressive Republican senator from Connecticut, and his father was a businessman, diplomat, and vice president and president of the United States. In 1948, George H.W. Bush moved the family to Midland, Texas, where he made his fortune in the oil business. George W. Bush -- both captive and creator of this moment -- has steadily, inexorably, changed the office itself. He has created the faith-based presidency. A precious glimpse of Bush, just as he was ascending to the presidency, comes from Jim Wallis, a man with the added advantage of having deep acuity about the struggles between fact and faith. Wallis, an evangelical pastor who for 30 years has run the Sojourners -- a progressive organization of advocates for social justice -- was asked during the transition to help pull together a diverse group of members of the clergy to talk about faith and poverty with the new president-elect. George W. Bush, America's 43rd President (2001-2009), was transformed into a wartime President in the aftermath of the airborne terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, facing the "greatest challenge of any President since Abraham Lincoln. The airborne terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the thwarted flight against the White House or Capitol on September 11, 2001, in which nearly 3,000 Americans were killed, transformed George W. Bush into a wartime president. In response, Bush formed a new cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security, sent American forces into Afghanistan to break up the Taliban, a movement under Osama bin Laden that trained financed and exported terrorist teams.