

Master of American History and Government
Ashland University

AHG 632:
The American Presidency I
Sunday, July 29 to Friday, August 3, 2007

Instructors: Marc Landy and Jeremy Bailey

Course Description:

This course is an examination of the political and constitutional development of the office of president from the Founding era through the Civil War. It focuses on how the presidency shaped American political life as the country grew and struggled with rising sectional tensions.

Learning Objectives:

The course's key learning objectives are encompassed by the following questions:

To what extent does the presidency as described in Article Two of the Constitution serve to explain how the presidency functioned up through Lincoln? Which development is most important?

Did the "modern presidency" emerge before the 20th century?

Are there two presidencies, one domestic and one foreign?

Is the presidency the most powerful branch?

Is the presidency too powerful?

What is the role of political parties in presidential affairs?

What is presidential greatness?

Requirements:

There will be a final exam given at the end of the course. It will be based on both the readings and class discussion and will be oriented towards the listed learning objectives for the course and the focus questions for each class.

Students auditing the course as a part of a Teaching American History Grant program must complete the readings and fully participate in the seminars during the week.

Required Texts:

Marc Landy and Sidney Milkis, *Presidential Greatness*, ISBN: 0700611495

John Patrick Diggins, *John Adams*, ISBN: 0805069372

Garry Wills, *James Madison*, ISBN: 0805069054

Robert V. Remini, *John Quincy Adams*, ISBN: 0805069399

John Seigenthaler, *James K. Polk*, ISBN: 0805069429

Phillip Shaw Paludin, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln*, ISBN: 0700607455

Schedule

Sunday, July 29

4:30 – 6:00 pm **Session 1 - Constitutional Structure and Design**

Readings:

US Constitution, Art II. (CP pg. 1)

The Federalist Nos. 51, 68-77 (CP pg. 3)

Focus Questions:

Did the Constitution provide a cogent blueprint for executive power? Or did it invite an ongoing struggle over the presidency?

Does the Constitution prescribe that the President should take responsibility for the moral health of the nation? What Constitutional provision relate to this responsibility?

7:30 pm **Session 2 – Evening Lecture.**

Attendance is required.

Monday, July 30

9:00 -10:30 am **Session 3 - Constitutional Structure and Design, cont'd**

Readings:

The Federalist Nos. 51, 68-77 (cont.) (CP pg. 3)

Focus Questions:

In The Federalist No. 51, what does Madison mean by giving each department a “will”? Is this will the same thing as the “energy” discussed Hamilton in No. 70? What are the ingredients of energy? In what ways is energy compatible with republican government? Incompatible?

According to Hamilton, in No. 68, what explains the design of the Electoral College?

In No. 69, Hamilton shows the ways in which the president is not like a king? Does his discussion in the following essays confirm this argument? Does his discussion of the powers of the president explain modern practice of these presidential powers?

10:40am-12:20 pm **Session 4 - George Washington**

Readings:

Landy and Milkis, chs. 1-2

Focus Questions:

What aspects of George Washington's pre-presidential career played the greatest role in influencing his presidency. What were the most important sources of George Washington's views about politics and government prior to his becoming president? What role did George Washington play at the Constitutional Convention?

4:30 – 6:00 pm **Session 5 - George Washington, cont'd**

Readings:

George Washington, *Farewell Address* (CP pg. 51)

Focus Questions:

What contributions did Washington make as president? How does Washington's opposition to partisanship jibe with his relationship to the Federalist Party? According to conventional wisdom, Washington's rhetoric was not a critical part of his presidential leadership? Does the Farewell Address defy the conventional wisdom? Is Washington's legacy still with us?

Tuesday, July 31

9:00 – 10:30 am **Session 6 - John Adams**

Readings:

John Patrick Diggins, *John Adams*

Focus Questions:

What were Adams' greatest contributions to the development of the presidency? The Adams presidency is often considered to be a failure. Is that a fair evaluation? What were the most important sources of difficulty that Adams faced as president? How well did he cope with those difficulties? How does Adams' handling of the foreign policy crises with France and Britain help us to understand the nature of presidential involvement in foreign policy?

10:40am – 12:20 pm **Session 7: Thomas Jefferson**

Readings:

Landy and Milkis, ch. 3

Thomas Jefferson:

First Inaugural (CP pg. 63)

Second Inaugural (CP pg. 67)

Letter to Elias Shipman and Others, 1801(CP pg. 71)

Focus Questions:

Jefferson says in his First Inaugural Address, "We are all republicans; we are all federalists." Yet Alexis de Tocqueville describes the struggle between the Federalists and

Jeffersonian Republicans as one of "great party conflict," that is, one where the parties were divided by first principles. Did fundamental issues divide these parties? Or was their battle a "lovers' quarrel" in which the differences were heated but limited? In what ways does Jefferson's discussion of principles in the Second Inaugural confirm or change the principles in the First.

Again, in the First Inaugural, what does Jefferson say he fears?

What role did disputes over the appropriate authority of the executive play in arousing conflict between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans?

According to Jefferson's letter to Shipman, what is the source of the president's removal powers? What does this suggest about party principles?

4:30 – 6:00 pm **Session 8: Thomas Jefferson, cont'd**

Readings:

US Constitution, Twelfth Amendment (CP pg. 75)

Thomas Jefferson:

Letter to John Breckinridge, 1803 (CP pg. 77)

Letter to John Colvin, 1810 (CP pg. 79)

Focus Questions:

Where does Jefferson find the authority to purchase and incorporate the Louisiana Territory? Does he look to the Constitution? How does the letter to Colvin confirm the argument of the First Inaugural?

What does the Twelfth Amendment do? Why would Jefferson seek it in time for 1804?

Wednesday, August 1

9:00 – 10:30 am **Session 9 – James Madison and James Monroe**

Readings:

Garry Wills, *James Madison*

Focus Questions:

To what extent were Madison and Monroe Jeffersonian presidents? In what ways did they depart from the Jeffersonian gospel?

Did Madison make a good commander in chief? Party leader? Monroe? Did Jefferson's "union of sentiment" render presidential greatness impossible? Why was there no "Revolution of 1816" or Revolution of 1820"?

10:40am – 12:40 pm **Session 10 - John Quincy Adams**

Readings:

Robert Remini, *John Quincy Adams*

Focus Questions:

What were the major sources of difficulty that faced Adams as president?

How did Adams function as party leader? Why was the 1824 election so controversial?

What do you think of Adams' major public policy proposals –why did they fail?

4:30 – 6:00 pm **Session 11 - Andrew Jackson**

Readings:

Landy and Milkis, ch. 4

Focus Questions:

Did the election of Andrew Jackson pose a threat to constitutional government?

With the advent of "Jacksonian democracy," a party system is defended as a legitimate institution. How did this development change presidential politics and government?

Why did Jackson defend a "rotation in office"? Are his arguments persuasive?

Was the Democratic party a creature Jackson's ambition? Or did it constrain his power?

Thursday, August 2

9:00-10:30 am **Session 12 - Andrew Jackson, cont'd**

Readings:

Andrew Jackson:

Nullification Proclamation (CP pg. 83)

Bank Veto Message (CP pg. 95)

Focus Questions:

Jacksonian democracy championed local self-government, yet Jackson sought to defend the Union in his Proclamation against South Carolina's Nullification Ordinance. How could Jackson defend both nationalism and localism? How did changes in the executive office during the 1830s contribute to the rise of these seemingly contradictory principles?

Jackson's veto of the Bank bill is considered a critical episode in securing presidential authority to participate in legislative matters. Yet in the aftermath of the Bank fight, Tocqueville wrote, "General Jackson's power is constantly increasing, but that of the president grows less. The federal government is strong in his hands; it will pass to his successor enfeebled." Did the Bank veto strengthen or weaken the presidency?

10:40am-12:20pm **Session 13 - The Whigs to Polk**

Readings:

John Seigenthaler, *James K. Polk*

Focus Questions:

In what ways were the Whig presidents successful in repudiating Jackson? In what ways did they fail?

In what ways was Polk's situation like Monroe's? In what ways did he continue Jackson's assertion of presidential power? In what ways did he go beyond Jackson?

Can the Mexican War be disentangled from the house-divided? Was Polk the first *modern* commander-in-chief?

Writing as Helvidius, Madison argued that presidents are untrustworthy judges in commencing and concluding war because they regard war as an opportunity for glory. Does Polk confirm Helvidius?

4:30 – 6:00 pm **Session 14 – Abraham Lincoln**

Readings:

Landy and Milkis, ch. 5

Paludin, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln*

Lincoln:

Lyceum Address, 1838 (CP pg. 107)

House Divided Speech, 1858 (CP pg. 113)

Focus Questions:

What does Lincoln's Lyceum address tell us about his view of leadership and his own ambition? How were Lincoln's views on the Union similar to and different from Jackson's views?

Is it true, as Lincoln claims, that, politically speaking, a "house divided against itself cannot stand"?

Friday, August 3

9:00-10:30 am **Session 15 – Abraham Lincoln, cont'd**

Readings:

Abraham Lincoln,

First Inaugural (CP pg. 119)

Special Message to Congress, 4 July 1861 (CP pg. 125)
Emancipation Proclamation (CP pg. 135)
Gettysburg Address (CP pg. 137)
Second Inaugural (CP pg. 139)

Focus Questions:

What is the relationship between Lincoln's role as president and Lincoln's role as party leader?

Gary Wills argues that Lincoln's address at Gettysburg led to "a new founding" of the nation. What were the distinct features of the "new" republic? Did Lincoln remake American politics himself, and so fundamentally?

Presidential scholars frequently rank Lincoln as the greatest United States president. What were the most important strengths of Lincoln's leadership? Did his talents and achievements strengthen constitutional government in the United States? Or did his leadership exhibit an inherent tension between extraordinary presidential leadership and constitutional forms?

10:40am-12:20pm **Session 16 - The Constitution and Development**

Review - readings for sessions 1-2

1:30 – 3:00 pm **Session 17 - Final Exam**