Welcome! The American president has the most important job in the world. How did it get that way? How have the men who have occupied the office since 1789 shaped it and public perceptions of it? Where does myth-making end and history begin? This class tackles these questions, exploring the office’s origins and evolution, significant presidents and their times, and how historical sources and methods can contextualize America’s political present.

**Learning goals:**

- A refined understanding of how the office of the American presidency has changed over time in relation to broader economic, political, demographic, and geopolitical transformations;
- Sharpened critical thinking and writing about history, including ability to distinguish different types of sources (primary, secondary) and analyze their context and meaning;
- An ability to apply this historical awareness to understanding present-day political, economic, and social structures; and
- Knowing sources and methods for discerning truth and separating fact from fiction.

**Course materials:**

Four books, available at the University Bookstore and on reserve at Odegaard Library.
2. Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and Slavery*
3. Alan Brinkley, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*
4. Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President 1968*

Additional articles, book chapters, and primary source materials are available on this Canvas page to registered students. You can find the readings organized under the weekly modules for each week of the term. Expect to read about 75-100 pages per week. (To obtain access to all these sources, please make sure you are signed into your computer with your UWnet ID.)
Assignments:

1) Eight 500-700 word discussion posts on course content and additional short reading tied to the post, to be posted on Canvas no later than 11:59PM on Friday. You get one “bye” week on the midterm week, and a second “bye” on the week of your choice. (5% per post, for 40% total)

2) Participation, consisting of discussion, group work, peer workshopping and content analysis, and additional in-class and “homework” discussion and research tasks. (ongoing; 10% of grade)

3) Midterm essay exam: written exam of original essays on lecture/reading content from the first half of the quarter, responding to prompts posted by instructor, taken online on Canvas. Due Friday of Week Five (Feb 4) at 11:50PM. (25% of grade)

4) Final essay exam: written exam of original essays discussing lecture/reading content for the full quarter but with particular emphasis on the second half, responding to prompts posted by instructor, taken online on Canvas. Due Wednesday of exam week (March 16) at 11:59PM. (25% of grade)

This course is W optional; if you’d like a W credit for this course, you can expand one of the first four discussion posts into a 10-12 page paper, submitting a draft for instructor feedback at the end of Week Nine of the quarter (Friday March, and revising and resubmitting by Friday of exam week at 5PM.

Course schedule:

Non-book readings and video can be found on Canvas on the module for that week. All lectures will be recorded on Panopto and available on Canvas after each class session.

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Week One
Weds Jan 5: Welcome; the invention of the presidency

READING
Coe, You Never Forget Your First – start this week, and finish by Friday, January 15

INTRODUCTION
Introduce yourself—via text, video, audio—on our class Introductions page on Canvas.

POST: THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE
Prompt for this an all further discussion posts on Canvas
Week Two
Mon Jan 10: Adams, Jefferson, & the Escalation of Partisanship
Weds Jan 12: Jackson & the Populist Presidency

READING
Finish reading Coe, You Never Forget Your First

POST: DISRUPTING PRESIDENTIAL BIOGRAPHY

Week Three
Mon Jan 17: MLK Day; no class
Wed Jan 19: The Disunion of the 1850s; Abraham Lincoln & the Unlikely Presidency

LISTEN
“The Cotton Empire,” Scene On Radio (42 min)

READ
Foner, The Fiery Trial – start this week, complete by Friday, January 28

POST: THE CIVIL WAR IN POPULAR MEMORY

Week Four
Mon Jan 24: Johnson, Grant, Reconstruction
Wed Jan 26: The Gilded Age Presidency

LISTEN
1) Eric Foner on the Unresolved Legacy of Reconstruction, NPR Fresh Air, 2006

READ
Finish reading Foner, The Fiery Trial

POST: THE ELECTION OF 1876

Week Five
Mon Jan 31: McKinley v Bryan, and Teddy!
Wed Feb 2: The 1912 Campaign

NO READING – MOVIE WEEK!
Choose and watch one of the following films about American presidents and/or their times. All available on multiple streaming services for rent ($3-4), and most free at the UW Libraries. Come to class Monday, Feb 7 prepared to discuss and write about your chosen film.
1) *Jefferson in Paris* (Dir. James Ivory, 1995)
2) *Lincoln* (Dir. Steven Spielberg, 2012)
3) *Amistad* (Dir. Steven Spielberg, 1997)
4) *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (Dir. Timur Bekmambetov, 2012)

MIDTERM EXAM questions will be posted Wednesday Feb 2 by 5PM, due Friday Feb 4 at 11:59PM.

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**Week Six**

Mon Feb 7: The New Deal Presidency

Wed Feb 9: America at War

**READING**

Brinkley, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

**POST: ROOSEVELT AS COMMUNICATOR**

**SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Short email to instructor by Sunday, Feb 13 at 11:59PM, telling me two things:

1) How you feel you’ve done in class thus far, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and outlining your goals for the remainder of the quarter.
2) One thing you’ve learned in this course so far that you have been able to apply in another class, or that’s helped you better understand or contextualize what’s in the news.

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**Week Seven**

Mon Feb 14: The Cold War Presidency

Wed Feb 16: The Television President

**WATCH**

1) Richard Nixon, *Television Address (“Checkers” speech)*, 1952 (30 min)
2) Kennedy vs. Nixon: the first 1960 presidential debate (58 min)

**READING**

McGinniss, *The Selling of the President* – start reading, complete by Friday Feb 25

**POST: POLITICAL ADVERTISING THROUGH THE YEARS**

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**Week Eight**

Mon Feb 21: Presidents’ Day, no class

Wed Feb 23: Richard Nixon and the Imperial Presidency

**WATCH**
1) *Summer of Judgement: The Watergate Hearings* (60 min)
2) *Summer of Judgement: The Impeachment Hearings* (60 min)

**READING**
Finish reading McGinniss, *The Selling of the President*

**POST: WATERGATE**

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**Week Nine**
Mon Feb 28: Reagan Revolution
Wed Mar 2: Clinton and the New Democrats

**WATCH**
1) *The War Room* (Dir. Hegedus & Pennebaker, 1993, 96 min)

**READ**

**POST: GENDER, POWER, AND THE PRESIDENCY**

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**Week Ten**
Mon Mar 7: 9/11 and the New World Order
Wed Mar 9: Hope and Change, from Obama to Trump to Biden

**READ**

**POST: COMMEMORATING, RENAMING, REMEMBERING**

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**Exam week**
Monday Mar 14: Final essay exam questions posted by 5PM on Canvas
Wednesday Mar 16: Final exam due by 11:59PM

Course policies, grade scale and more are available on the HSTAA 213 Canvas page.