

POSC 308: THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2013
MATHER MEMORIAL 225
MON, WED, FRI, 10:30AM-11:20AM
INSTRUCTOR: MARK MAJOR
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OFFICE HOURS: BY APPOINTMENT (MATHER #09)

The American Presidency matters. The United States is both unique and unusual compared to other advanced democracies because of the presidential system. The executive is one of the most important features of the American political system and also the most poorly understood. This course will critically examine the origins, development, and powers of the presidency and its implications for politics and society. Themes will center on the institutional powers of the presidency operating in a system of checks and balances. This course will also explore *our* relationship with the president, that is, a mediated one as presented through the mass media. More importantly, this class provides the opportunity to critically assess the powers that the incumbent re-inherits January 2013.

Required Book

1) Eric A. Posner and Adrian Vermeule, *The Executive Unbound: After the Madison Republic* (University of Chicago Press, 2010). However, this is not the sole reading requirement. Additional readings are found on Blackboard: blackboard.case.edu. The majority of the required readings are posted on Blackboard or an Internet link is provided on this syllabus (**listed in bold**).

Course Evaluation:

1) Two Critical Review Essays (75 points: *Midterm Essay, 30 points and Final Essay, 45 points*)

The objective of the essays is to demonstrate your comprehension of the material as well as further develop critical thinking skills. More detailed instructions are forthcoming but you will have one week to write the midterm critical review essay (5 pages) and three weeks to write the final critical review essay (10-15 pages).

2) Class Participation (25 points)

It is extremely important to be prepared for class. The quality of the course is dependent on the quality of your preparation and engagement. You are expected to complete the assigned readings and take part in class discussions. Please come prepared to class because I reserve the right to randomly call on you or your colleagues.

In addition to class discussion, you are required to bring a news item to class that is relevant to the presidency and report on it every Friday. If you wish not to print an article, then you may email it to me but it must be no later than 10am on Friday. *I will not accept late submissions.*

Also, there will be four random open-note quizzes throughout the semester; I will count the top three scores (4pts each = 12pts). One of the quizzes, scheduled for Friday, Feb. 15th, will not be open note and will require listing every president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. The quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, if you show up late you will not be allowed to take the quiz.

Please note: Much of the class discussions will be informal and heated as we will be engaging topics that affect our daily lives. However, this exempts no one (instructor included) from civility. Finally, please turn off your cell phones/electronic devices before entering class. Also, please refrain from texting during class.

Class Reading and Topic Schedule

Introduction

WEEK 1 (JAN MON 14, WED 16, FRI 18)

- 1) Syllabus
- 2) Article II of the United States Constitution available online at <http://topics.law.cornell.edu/constitution/articleii>

Origins

WEEK 2 (MON 21-NO CLASS, WED 23, FRI 25)

- 1) Alpheus T. Mason, "America's Political Heritage: Revolution and Free Government"
- 2) Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson, "Creating the Presidency"
- 3) Gordon S. Wood, "The Greatness of George Washington"

Preface to Power: Campaigns and Elections

WEEK 3 (MON 28, WED 30, FEB FRI 1)

- 1) D. Jason Berggren, "Two Parties, Two Nominees, Two Paths to Winning a Presidential Nomination, 1972-2004"
- 2) Robert Dahl, "Electing the President" from *How Democratic is the American Constitution?*
- 3) Robert Dahl, "The Myth of the Presidential Mandate" *Political Science Quarterly* 105(3), 1990.

Individual vs. Institution: Presidents and Political Regimes

WEEK 4 (MON 4, WED 6, FRI 8)

- 1) Ron Suskind, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush" *New York Times Magazine* available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html?_r=2
- 2) Stephen Skowronek, "Presidential Leadership in Political Time"
- 3) Stanley Renshon and Stephen Skowronek, "Resolved, psychological character is a powerful predictor of presidential performance"

Presidents and Congress

WEEK 5 (MON 11, WED 13, FRI 15-**"Know Your Presidents" Quiz**)

- 1) John E. Owens, "A 'Post-Partisan' President in a Partisan Context"
- 2) Jacob S. Hacker, "The Road to Somewhere: Why Health Reform Happened"
- 3) Sanford Levinson, "Poison Pen: The Case Against the Veto" *The New Republic* available online at http://www.utexas.edu/law/news/2006/tnr_100906.pdf

Presidents and Congress (Cont'd)

WEEK 6 (MON 18, WED 20, FRI 22)

- 1) Charlie Savage, "Behind Closed Doors: Secrecy I" from *Takeover*.
- 2) William G. Howell, "Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview"
- 3) Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann, "When Congress Checks Out"
- 4) Jonathan Mahler, "After the Imperial Presidency" *New York Times* available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/09/magazine/09power-t.html?pagewanted=all>

Presidents and the Judiciary

WEEK 7 (MON 25, WED 27, MARCH FRI 1)

- 1) David Yalof and John Anthony Maltese "Resolved, the president has too much power in the selection of judges"
- 2) Sarah Binder, "Advice and Consent in the 'Slow' Senate"
- 3) Matthew Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, "Ch. 8: How the Courts Reinforce Presidential Power"

Presidents and Exam #1

WEEK 8 (MON 4, WED 6, FRI 8)

Exam #1 due Friday, March 8th.

WEEK 9 SPRING BREAK

Presidents and Foreign Policy

WEEK 10 (MON 18, WED 20, FRI 22)

- 1) David Gray Adler, "Presidential Warmaking: The Clinton Legacy"
- 2) Richard Pious, "Inherent War and Executive Powers and Prerogative Politics"
- 3) Jo Becker and Scott Shane, "Secret 'Kill List' Proves a Test of Obama's Principles and Will" *New York Times* May 29, 2012, A1.
- 4) William Howell and Jon Pevehouse, "When Congress Stops Wars" *Foreign Affairs*

Presidents and News Media

WEEK 11 (MON 25, WED 27, FRI 29)

- 1) Jeffrey Cohen, "If the News is So Bad, Why Are Presidential Polls So High? Presidents, the News Media, and the Mass Public in an Era of New Media" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (September 2004)
- 2) Regina Lawrence, "Do the Media Give Women Candidate's a Fair Shake?"
- 3) John Geer, "The News Media and the Rise of Negativity in Presidential Campaigns"
- 4) W. Lance Bennett, Regina Lawrence, and Steven Livingstone, "None Dare Call It Torture"

Executive Unbound

WEEK 12 (APRIL MON 1, WED 3, FRI 5)

Introduction and Ch.1

Executive Unbound

WEEK 13 (MON 8, WED 10, FRI 12)

Chs. 2 and 3

Executive Unbound

WEEK 14 (MON 15, WED 17, FRI 19)

Chs. 4 and 5

Executive Unbound

WEEK 15 (MON 22, WED 24, FRI 26)

Ch. 6 and Conclusion

Presidents and Final Exams

WEEK 16 (MON 29, MAY WED 1-*NO CLASS*, FRI 3-FINAL)

Exam #2 due Friday, May 3rd.