

THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY
Rutgers University-New Brunswick
FALL 2020

POLS 790:306

Mondays and Thursdays
12:35 pm – 1:55 pm
CDL, 110

Prof. Saladin Ambar

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Office Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays
11:00 am – 1:00 pm & appointment

This class explores the origins, development, and power of the American presidency within the American political system, and as a defining national political institution. The course begins with the philosophical and structural debates over executive leadership in the early American republic before moving towards the development of presidential power. We will examine the debates over questions of the presidency's place within the American constitutional system, US foreign policy, as well as its normative relationship to democratic values. The course takes a developmental approach to its subject, while also exploring a number of important theories within the discipline of political science concerning the nature of the presidency. We will also focus on a number of case studies in presidential leadership and historic controversies related to the office and its occupants.

Required Materials

Thurston Clarke, *The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days that Inspired America* (Holt, 2008)
ISBN-10: 0805077928

Sidney Milkis & Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency, Origins & Development* (CQ Press 2019)
ISBN-13: 978-1544323121

Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make* (Harvard University Press 1997)
ISBN-13: 978-0674689374

Attendance Policy and Academic Integrity

Students are expected to attend all synchronously delivered classes and be active, full participants in discussion when possible. Please access this class on Sakai for assignments, updates, and opportunities for participation. The final grade in the course will be based upon the following:

Reaction Papers (2)	30%
Midterm Essay Exam	30%
Final Essay Exam	40%

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact me as early as possible in the semester, so we can establish an appropriate accommodation.

Student Rights re: Discrimination and Harassment

Rutgers faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available.. For more information about your options at Rutgers, please visit endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu

Course Outline

Week I (September 3) Origins of the Republican Executive

Thursday

Introduction to themes of the course, assignments and expectations

Sakai: *Taming the Prince*, Harvey Mansfield, “The Ambivalence of Executive Power”

Article II, US Constitution, in Milkis and Nelson

Week II (September 7 and 10) The Presidency in the Early Republic

Monday:

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 3

Sakai: Russell Riley, “Nation-Keeping”: *The Presidency and the Politics of Racial Inequality*

Thursday

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 2

Sakai: Federalist 68, 70

Week III (September 14 and 17)

Monday

Sakai: Washington’s Farewell Address

Sakai: Terry Moe and William Howell, “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (1999)

Thursday:

Early Foreign Policy Debate: Sakai: *Pacificus and Helvidius*

Theories of Presidential Leadership: Skowronek, chapter 2

Week IV (September 21 and 24) The Presidency in the Age of Jackson

Monday:

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 5

Theories of Presidential Leadership: Skowronek, chapter 5

Abraham Lincoln and Presidential Power

Thursday:

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 6

Sakai: Gettysburg Address, Second Inaugural Address

Week V (September 28 and October 1): The Progressive Era Presidency

Monday:

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 8

Sakai: Ambar, chapter one, *How Governors Built the Modern American Presidency*

Thursday:

Sakai: David Greenberg, “Theodore Roosevelt and the Image of Presidential Activism,” in *Social Research*

First Reaction Paper Due

Week VI (October 5 and 8): FDR and the Modern American Presidency

Monday:

Milkis and Nelson, 10

Theories of Presidential Leadership: Skowronek, chapter 7

Thursday:

Sakai: FDR: Commonwealth Club Address

Week VII (October 12 and 15): The Personal Presidency: JFK and Beyond

Monday:

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 11

Sakai: JFK Inaugural

Thursday:

Sakai: David Wrono on the Zapruder Film and the JFK Assassination

Sakai: Film: Errol Morris, *November 22, 1963*

Week VIII (October 19 and 22):

Monday:

Sakai: Caro on LBJ transition, “The Cubicle” in *The Passage of Power*

Midterm Due

Thursday:

Clarke, part one

Week IX (October 26 and 29)

Monday:

Clarke, part two

Preview of 2020 Presidential Election

Thursday:

Ann Norton, “The President as Sign” in *Republic of Signs*

Sakai: Images from the American Presidency

Week X (November 2 and 5)

Monday:

Clarke, part three

Sakai: Julia Azari, “What Would a Biden Era Be Like? Recent Protests Give Us Some Ideas”

Eric Posner, “What a Second Trump Term Would Look Like,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2020

Thursday

Election 2020 Review

Sakai: Kelly Dittmar, [“Finding Gender in Election 2016: Lessons from Presidential Gender Watch.”](#) New Brunswick, NJ: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, with the Barbara Lee Family Foundation.

Week XI (November 9 and 12):

Monday:

Clarke, part four

Sakai: Julia Azari, “1968 Isn’t the Only Parallel for this Political Moment”

Thursday: **The Reagan Presidency and its Legacy**

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 12-13

Sakai: Reagan First Inaugural

Week XII (November 16 and 19)

Monday:

Skowronek, chapter 8

Second Reaction Paper Due

Thursday:

Sakai: Ambar, “Rise of the Sunbelt Governors: Conservative Outsiders in the White House,” in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*

Week XIII (November 23): The Presidencies of GW Bush, Obama, and Trump

Monday:

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 14

Sakai: Elaine Kamarck, “The Fragile Legacy of Barack Obama,” (Brookings, April 6, 2018)

Thursday ***THANKSGIVING RECESS***

Week XIV (November 30 and December 3)

Monday:

Sakai: Stephen Skowronek on the election of Donald Trump (*The Nation* and *The Washington Post*)

Milkis and Nelson, chapter 15

Thursday:

Sakai: Stephen Hess, “First Impressions: A Look Back at Five Presidential Transitions” (Brookings, March 1, 2001)

Week XV (December 7 and 10)

Monday:

Sakai: Julia Azari, “What Would a Biden Era Be Like? Recent Protests Give Us Some Ideas”

Sakai: Eric Posner, “What a Second Trump Term Would Look Like,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2020

Thursday:

Sakai: Theodore J. Lowi: “Bend Sinister: How the Constitution Saved the Republic and Lost Itself”
Final Thoughts on the American Presidency: Preview Final

Film: *The Fog of War* (Errol Morris)

FINAL EXAM DUE DATE TBA