**UPADM-GP 209/ Topics HIST-UA 93**

**The American Presidency**



**Michael Koncewicz**

**Fall 2023**

**Silver 408**

**M & W, 12:30-1:45 PM**

**Email: Michael.Koncewicz@nyu.edu**

**Office Hours: By Appointment (Zoom and in-person**)

Course Description:

The events of the last two decades have forced a national reexamination of the institution of the American presidency. Allies of former President Trump celebrated the disruption of presidential “norms” in support of rightwing populist ideas. Supporters of President Biden bemoaned the disappearance of those “norms” and saw, especially on January 6th, 2021, the threat that a resurgent “Imperial Presidency” could pose to American democracy and its constitutional system. This course will introduce students to the evolution of the presidency, especially during the modern era. Besides providing a historical context for recent presidencies, the class will examine the nuts and bolts of the most powerful executive position in the world. What role have modern presidents played in shaping our economy, institutions, environment, and global systems? How have they responded to right and left-wing social movements through campaigns and policies? Are there any limits on presidential power at home and abroad? How have the nuclear and digital ages and this extremely partisan moment affected those powers? How are presidential legacies shaped and how do they affect how we analyze present day political figures? The core objective of this course is to assist students in acquiring the knowledge and analytical skills to assess any American presidency and understand its role in shaping the United States and the wider world.

Course Requirements:

1. Two response papers (500-600 words): (2x 20%) 40%
2. One Policy Memo (1000-1200 words): 20%
3. Take Home Final Examination: 40%

Course Policies:

1. **Response Paper Guidelines**

The response papers are based strictly on the assigned reading. Students may respond to three of the prompts, with the two best grades counting toward their final grade. You can skip the third prompt if you’re happy with your first two grades.

2. **Policy Memo**

Students are required to write a three-page memo for any imaginary foreign government on the status of ONE of the following issue areas--Environment, Civil Rights, Fiscal Policy, Trade, Immigration or Foreign Policy—that both summarizes the Biden administration’s approach so far and the role played by the President. Then compare and contrast his administration’s policy with that of President Trump’s. You must also include a brief reference to at least one other president in your memo.

3. **Moses Center for Students with Disabilities**

If you are student with a disability who is requesting accommodations, please contact New York University’s Moses Center for Students with Disabilities. You must be registered with CSD to receive accommodations. Information about the Moses Center can be found at www.nyu.edu/csd. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the second floor.

4. **Religious holidays**

NYU’s policy is to accommodate students’ observances of religious holidays. In order to receive accommodation, you must notify the instructor via email during the first two weeks of the semester of any planned absences related to religious observance. Further details on [NYU’s policies may be found here](http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html).

5. **Academic honesty**

Intellectual integrity is the university’s most fundamental commitment. Plagiarism of any kind will be penalized to the fullest possible extent, without warning or exception.

The most common causes of plagiarism are not deliberate dishonesty, but stress and uncertainty. You are encouraged to begin assignments well in advance of the deadline, and to check with the instructor if you have any questions. Whenever you draw upon somebody else’s words or ideas to make a point, give them credit in a note. Too many citations in a paper is never a problem. If you have questions about documentation requirements, don’t guess – just ask. I am always willing to discuss concerns that you might have about sources.

For further details on university policy, strictly adhered to in this class, read this page.

NYU recently updated their guidance on the use of ChatGPT (and other similar tools) in the classroom. The use of these tools is generally prohibited, unless you cautiously cite the use of them. Here’s approved language from NYU’s Provost Office and NYU Wagner.

1. Ethical uses of ChatGPT, Bard, and other generative AI tools are permitted but [require clear acknowledgment](https://t.e2ma.net/click/ksma5g/4j5elg4/ob0c8k). As a reminder, please review [Wagner’s Academic Integrity Policy](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/code).
2. The [policies of Wagner](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html) require that you complete and submit your own work. If you use ChatGPT, Bard, and other generative AI tools in your work, you must cite them. If you don’t this violates the school’s norms, and you will be held to [Wagner’s Academic Integrity Policy](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/code#sec-B1).
3. Using ChatGPT and related tools will reduce what you learn in this course. Consequently, the use of ChatGPT, Bard, and other generative AI tools is not allowed in this course. As a reminder, please review [Wagner’s Academic Integrity Policy](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/code).

6. **Grading**

We use the following Grading Scale:

A = 94-100; A-= 90-93; B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86;

B- = 80-83; C+ = 77-79; C =74-76; C- = 70-73;

D+ = 67-69; D = 65-66; F = below 65

If you have any questions about your grade, please contact your grader for clarification. Should any questions remain, you may contact the instructor. Please keep in mind that should you involve the instructor, it is possible that the instructor, upon reading the work, may disagree with the grader and lower the grade. The instructor’s grade will be the grade of record.

Course Materials:

It is recommended that you purchase this book for our class. The book will also be on course reserve at Bobst Library. The rest of the readings will be posted online.

Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States Since 1974.* WW Norton & Company, 2020. Paperback Version: ISBN-13: 978-0393357707

Readings:

**Week 1: Introduction and The Final Campaigns**

September 6: How Recent Presidents Have Understood Their Legacies

**Required Readings:**

Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines*, 1-6, 349-359

Timothy Naftali, “[The Death of the Nonpartisan Presidential Library](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/06/national-archives-george-bush-privatize-history/639429/),” Atlantic, June 3, 2022

Tom Hayden, “Movements Against Machiavellians: The Theory and Practice of Social Change,” 32:1, 2010, 123-134

**Week 2: The Founders and The Expansion of the Executive**

September 11: Washington and the Origins of the American Presidency

September 13: Jefferson, Jackson and the Expansion of the Executive

**Required Readings:**

George Washington, [The Farewell Address](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp), 1796

Sidney Milkis, *The American Presidency*, (2008), 98-109; 121-133

Thomas Jefferson*, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, “A Stepping to Stone to Monarchy,” “The Conflict with Hamilton,” 985-990; 992-1001

**Week 3: The Civil War and Lincoln**

September 18: The Worst Presidents Ever?

September 20: Lincoln and the Civil War

**Required Readings:**

Michael F. Holt, *Franklin Pierce* (2010), pp. 66-94

James Buchanan[, State of the Union Address](https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/fourth-annual-message-congress-the-state-the-union%20%20/), December 1860.

David H. Donald, *Lincoln* (1995), 267-294, 303-308; 369-384; 416-421; 437-444

**Week 4: The Civil War and the War on Terror**

September 25: Comparing Lincoln and Bush

September 27: The Second Founding: Reconstruction and US Presidents

**Required Readings:**

George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (2010), 168-181

Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, (2011), 143-148; 348-353  
  
Jack Goldsmith, *The Terror Presidency* (2007), 177-216

Sidney Milkis, *The American Presidency* (2008), 158-165  
  
Annette Gordon-Reed, “[The Fight Over Andrew Johnson’s Impeachment Was a Fight Over the Future of the United States](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/fight-andrew-johnson-impeachment-fight-future-united-states-180967502/),” January 2018  
  
[Annette Gordon-Reed on Andrew Johnson’s Legacy](https://www.c-span.org/video/?437338-4/president-andrew-johnsons-legacy), November 2017  
  
Adam Gopnik, “[Pour One Out For Ulysses S. Grant](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/10/02/pour-one-out-for-ulysses-s-grant),” *New Yorker*, September 25, 2017

**First Response Paper Opportunity [Due September 27]: Citing the assigned readings for this week, Compare and Contrast Lincoln's use of the war power to George W. Bush's.**

**Week 5: Teddy Roosevelt and Wilson**

October 2: Presidents and the Progressive Movement

October 4: Early Imperial Ambitions

**Required Readings:**Theodore Roosevelt, “[New Nationalism Speech](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/12/06/archives-president-teddy-roosevelts-new-nationalism-speech#:~:text=In%20the%20speech%2C%20he%20called,to%20special%20privileges%20than%20another.),” August 31, 1910

Margaret O’Mara*, Pivotal Tuesdays: Four Elections That Shaped the 20th Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, 10-53

[Adam Hochschild on Wilson and WW1 on NPR’s Fresh Air](https://www.npr.org/2022/12/13/1142474637/woodrow-wilson-led-the-u-s-into-wwi-he-also-waged-war-on-democracy-at-home), December 13, 2022

**Week 6: FDR and the Modern Presidency**

October 9: No Class

October 11: FDR and the New Deal

October 11: FDR and the New Deal

**Required Readings:**

Sidney Milkis, 288-291

William E. Leuchtenburg, *The American President* (2015), 143-175

[Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Address at Madison Square Garden](https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-madison-square-garden-new-york-city-1) October 31, 1936

Eric Rauchway, *Why the New Deal Matters*, Yale University Press, 2021, 13-72

**Week 7: The New Deal Coalition and World War II**

October 16: FDR, Truman, and Social Movements of the 1930s and 1940s

October 18: Presidents and Public Opinion: FDR and American Intervention in World War II

**Required Readings:**

Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front*, 91-105; 137-155+

Jennifer Schuessler, “At the Roosevelt Library an Unflinching Look at Race,” *New York Times*, August 1, 2023

Harvard Sitkoff, “Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics” Taken from *Toward Freedom Land*, University of Kentucky Press, 2010, 175-190

**SECOND Response Paper Opportunity [Due October 18]:**

**\*Choose One of the Following Options**

1. **Citing the assigned readings for this week, give the arguments for and against FDR’s use and toleration of propaganda to change American public opinion on intervening in the war in Europe.**
2. **How would you describe the relationship between the President and the social movements of the Great Depression and WW2 eras? Was there anything exceptional about this period in terms of the relationship between the two? Which social movements had the most influence on the executive branch?**

**Week 8: Superpower Commander-in-Chiefs (Truman, Eisenhower and JFK)**

October 23: The Bomb and the Birth of the Covert Presidency

October 25: Cold War Consensus

**Required Readings:**

Robert Dallek, *Harry S. Truman*, The American Presidents Series, [2008] 19-34; 84-124

Richard H, Immerman, “Eisenhower and Dulles: Who Made the Decisions?” Political Psychology, Autumn 1979, 21-38

Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days* (1968), 21-50, 71-88

**Week 9: Civil Rights, Vietnam and the Cold War**

October 30: The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s

November 1: LBJ, Nixon and Vietnam

**Required Readings:**

John F. Kennedy, “[Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights](https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-and-television-report-the-american-people-civil-rights),” June 11, 1963

Julian E. Zelizer, *The Fierce Urgency of Now* (2015), 11-39; 46-52; 116-130+

Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*. New York: Scribner, 2009, 372, 412-458, 477-499

**Week 10: Watergate and the Imperial Presidency**

November 6: The Crimes and the Cover-Up

November 8: Post-Watergate Presidencies

**Required Readings:**

Kruse and Zelizer, 7-64

H. R. Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, June 23, 1971; June 29-July 6, 1971; September 15-16, 1972

Michael Koncewicz, [The GOP Appointees Who Defied the President](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/11/the-gop-appointees-who-defied-the-president/602230/), The *Atlantic*, November 19, 2019

Timothy Naftali, “Richard Nixon” in Jeffrey Engel, Jon Meacham, Peter Baker and Timothy Naftali, *Impeachment: An American History* [2018]. 83-92; 98-103; 109-153

J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (1976), 68-108; 146-168

Nicole Hemmer, “A Forgotten Lesson of Watergate: Conservatives May Rally Around Trump,” *Vox*, May 17, 2017

**Week 11: Race and the Rise of the Right**

November 13: The Reagan Era: 1980-?

November 15: Bush, Clinton and “The End of History”

**Required Readings:**

Kruse and Zelizer, 88-134, 160-202

Timothy Naftali, *George H. W. Bush* (2007), Pages 132-139  
  
[Ronald Reagan’s First Inaugural Address](https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/inaugural-address-1981), January 20, 1981

Gabrielle Bruney, “[How Ronald Reagan’s Racism Helped Pave the Way for Donald Trump’s,”](https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a34733508/reagans-showtime-racism-matt-tyrnauer-ian-haney-lopez-donald-trump/) *Esquire*, November 22, 2020

Joshua Leifer, “[The Damning Legacy of Clintonism](https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/lily-geismer-left-behind-qa/),” Interview with Lily Geismer, *The Nation*, April 20, 2022.

**THIRD Response Paper Opportunity [Due November 15]: According to Kruse and Zelizer what role did Race and the “Crises” of the 1960s and 1970s contribute to the Reagan Revolution of 1980?**

**Week 12: Class and Culture Wars in the 21st Century**

November 20: George W. Bush’s Domestic Policy

November 22: No Class

**Required Readings:**

Kruse and Zelizer, 203-288

George W. Bush, *Decision Points* [2010], 452-467

Mary E. Stuckey, Judging George: George W. Bush and the Fracturing of the Republican Party, Rhetoric and Public Affairs, Fall 2013

**Week 13: The Obama Presidency**

November 27: Obama’s Campaigns and 2008 Financial Collapse

November 29: Obama’s Foreign Policy Realism

**Required Readings:**

Kruse/Zelizer, 288-319

Barack Obama, *A Promised Land*, (2020), 214-220; 230-232; 315-323; 352-71; 676-701

Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (2014), 363-377

# Luke Savage, “In 2009, Pundits Predicted a New Progressive Era. It Never Came,” *Jacobin*, January 25, 2021

**Week 14: 2016 and The Trump Presidency**

December 4: The 2016 Election and 21st Century Conservatism

December 6: Evaluating Trump’s Domestic and Foreign Policy Legacies

**Required Readings:**

Kruse & Zelizer, *Fault Lines* (2019) 320-358

Hillary Clinton, *What Happened* (2017), pp. 273-279; 377-389  
  
Barack Obama, *A Promised Land*, (2020), 375-426

Rick Perlstein, “[I Thought I Understood the American Right: Trump Proved Me Wrong,”](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/11/magazine/i-thought-i-understood-the-american-right-trump-proved-me-wrong.html) New York Times Magazine, April 11, 2017

Julian Zelizer, “[What I Learned When Trump Tried to Correct the Record,” Atlantic,](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/trump-interview-a-first-historical-assessment/629454/) April 4, 2022.

**Policy Papers Due: December 6**

**Week 15: The Biden Presidency So Far and Modern Presidential History**

December 11: COVID and the Presidency

December 13: Biden and Modern Social Movements

**Required Readings:**

TBD

**Final Examination: December 18, 4-5:50 p.m.**