

HIST 389

Fall, 2011

*42 Men: From Washington to Bush*

Office: Truland Building

Room 230

(Arlington Campus)

Richard Norton Smith

Wednesday 7:20-10:00 p.m.

Science and Tech I

Room 206

“The presidency is pre-eminently a place of moral leadership,” said Franklin D. Roosevelt. Few today would disagree. Yet for much of our history, presidents were viewed as administrators rather than advocates or agenda setters. Beginning with George Mason’s own concerns about entrusting war making powers to the executive, many of the Founders took pains to limit presidential authority. Subsequent events, including America’s evolution as an industrial and military power, the rise of mass media and TR’s famed bully pulpit – all these and more have combined to create a presidency Mason and his contemporaries would scarcely recognize.

Inevitably, too, the office has been shaped, for better *and* worse, by the personalities, characters, and leadership skills of its 42 occupants (through George W. Bush). There is no single means test to gauge a president’s success. In this course, students will be exposed to a variety of historical and biographical assessments. They will be encouraged to devise their own performance criteria.

Because the presidency is inseparable from the broader culture it both reflects and influences, Paul Johnson’s *A History of the American People* (paperback edition) will serve as a basic text, supplemented by *The American Presidency*, edited by Alan Brinkley and Davis Dyer. This volume contains brief thumbnail sketches of each chief executive. Students will be expected to read these in tandem with additional texts (see below).

The class will combine a lecture format with what will, hopefully, be lively discussion. Students will take two in-class exams, each a multiple choice essay format, and submit a final research paper of 10-12 pages. There will also be at least one field trip to a presidential site in the area.

Presidential ability, like beauty, is very much in the eye of the beholder. Honesty, on the other hand, is beyond debate. Students are referred to the GMU honor code in the University Catalogue, <http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#Anchor13>. To reiterate the obvious: cheating and plagiarism are not tolerated here (and shouldn’t be in the White House!).

### **Required Readings:**

Brands, H.W., *Woodrow Wilson*, The American Presidents Series, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., editor, New York, 2003

Johnson, Paul: *A History of the American People*, New York, 1997, paperback edition

Alan Brinkley and Davis Dyer, editors, *The American Presidency*, Boston, 2004, paperback edition

James Taranto and Leonard Leo, editors, *Presidential Leadership, Rating the Best and the Worst in the White House*, New York, 2004, paperback edition

Smith, Richard Norton: *Patriarch: George Washington and the New American Nation* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997, paperback edition

Jenkins, Roy: *Franklin D. Roosevelt*; The American Presidents Series, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., editor, New York, 2003

### **Evaluations:**

- Class participation – 30%
- 2 written exams – 40% total
- Final research paper – 30%

### **Course Outline and Assignments**

1. Aug. 31      *The Limits of Virtue: Inventing the Presidency*  
Patriarch pp. 27-54, 75-107, 154-177, 232-272  
Brinkley, pp 1-32  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 15-24
2. Sept. 7      *The Paradox of Principle: Jefferson to J. Q. Adams*  
P Johnson pp. 241-279, 311-332  
Brinkley, pp. 33-81  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 25-43
3. Sept. 14      *The Age of Jackson*  
P Johnson pp. 332-359, 370-382  
Brinkley, pp. 82-138  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 44-63

4.     Sept. 21     *The Bottom of the Barrel: Taylor to Buchanan*  
P Johnson pp. 390-400; 423-435  
Brinkley, pp. 139-172  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 64-79
5.     Sept. 28     *Division and Reunion: The Long Shadow of Abraham Lincoln*  
P Johnson pp. 435-507  
Brinkley, pp. 173-214  
Taranto-Leo, pp 80-98
6.     Oct. 5        *The Gilded Age: Hayes to Cleveland*  
P Johnson pp. 549-569  
Brinkley, pp. 215-256  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 99-118
7.     Oct. 19       *The Seeds of Modernity: McKinley, TR and Taft*  
P Johnson pp. 607-621  
Brinkley, pp. 257-296  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 113-134
8.     Oct. 26       *Woodrow Wilson and the Law of Unintended Consequences*  
Brands, H.W. (full text pp. 1-139)
9.     Nov. 2        *The Anti-Wilsons: Harding and Coolidge*  
P Johnson pp. 707-724  
Brinkley, pp. 314-333  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 141-150  
*Written exam*
10.    Nov. 9        *Nothing to Fear: New Day, New Deal*  
Brinkley, pp. 334-364  
Jenkins; (entire text pp. 1-170)  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 151-158
11.    Nov. 16       *The Cold Warriors: Truman – Ike - JFK*  
P Johnson pp. 791-869  
Brinkley, pp. 365-408  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 159-172

12. Nov. 30 *Chased From Office: LBJ and Nixon*  
P Johnson pp. 869-902  
Brinkley, pp. 409-442  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 173-182  
*Written exam*
13. Dec. 7 *The Age of Reagan: Ford, Carter and Reagan*  
P Johnson, pp. 906-940  
Brinkley, pp. 443-528  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 183-197  
*Research Paper Due*
14. Dec. 14 *The Polarizers: Bush – Clinton – Bush*  
Brinkley, pp. 487-543  
Taranto-Leo, pp. 198-213