IDEAS AND PRESIDENTIAL POWER  
*From the Founding to Trump*

Political Science 201  
Fall 2020  
Tuesdays, 1:30-3:20 PM via Zoom

**John Dearborn**, Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Yale University  
*Office Hours:* Tuesdays, 10-11:30 AM or by appointment, via Zoom  
*Email:* john.dearborn@yale.edu  
*Website:* https://campuspress.yale.edu/johndearborn/

**OVERVIEW**

The American presidency is an institution of significant power. But to understand the powers wielded by presidents, one must look at the ideas that have helped to shape and legitimate the authority of the presidency over time. In this course, we will explore how ideas have both served as claims to presidential power and transformed the presidency as an institution, covering the period from the Founding era through the Trump administration.

The course proceeds in several parts. First, we will examine several ideas about the presidency contained in the Constitution itself: the separation of powers, the executive power, and the role of Commander in Chief. We will both identify what these ideas are and consider how these ideas have affected presidential power in the subsequent centuries. Second, we will consider ideas that have impacted the presidency’s role in the legislative process – mandates, national representation, responsible party government – and how these have all contributed to the notion of “getting things done.” Third, we will examine ideas that have affected presidents’ claims of and actual control over administration: the unitary executive theory and the Deep State. Finally, we will consider how ideas about identity and American political culture have impacted the presidency: descriptive representation and American exceptionalism.

More broadly, the lectures, discussions, scholarly readings, and primary source readings will help us achieve a few course goals. First, we will gain an improved ability to make sense of how the presidency works (or doesn’t work!) and how the office and institution have changed over time. Second, we will critically discuss arguments and theories offered by various authors. Third, we will frequently place the ideas from the readings into the context of current political events. Finally, as a more general goal for the course, I hope that we all can take a step forward toward becoming more politically critical, informed, and engaged citizens.

**VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION**

This seminar course will be taught online via Zoom. Each session will feature a combination of a brief lecture to provide an overview of the week’s topic, followed by a discussion. The mode of
instruction will be synchronous. The lecture portion of each class, however, will be recorded and posted to Canvas for anyone who misses a class session. The discussion portion will not be recorded.

Political concepts and topics often may reveal differences of opinion – this is particularly true around election years! So even as some of us may have strong views and potentially disagree, I ask that we listen to each other’s viewpoints while working to ensure that civility and respect for each other are always present in our conversations.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Students are expected to complete the readings, attend class via Zoom, and participate in class discussions.

Twice during the semester, students will be expected to complete short papers critically analyzing a unit of readings and thinking through their implications for the presidency. All students will complete the first paper topic, and students will have a choice of one of two topics for the second paper. The papers should be 7-9 pages double-spaced. Be sure to have a clear argument and use evidence to support your claims.

There will be a final exam for the course.

The overall grade breakdown is as follows:

- Participation – 10%
- 2 Response Papers – 50%
- Final Exam (IDs and choice of 1 of 2 essays) – 40%

READINGS

All readings for this course will be posted on the Yale Canvas course site.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is an essential part of being a college student and scholar. On any assignment, you are expected to uphold Yale’s standards for academic integrity. These include avoiding plagiarism, avoiding cheating on any assignment, avoiding improper collaboration with other students on an assignment, and avoiding submitting the same piece of work for multiple courses without the explicit consent of each instructor. Moreover, you are expected to appropriately credit and cite scholarly sources on written assignments. Please review Yale’s standards here: https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/writing/using-sources
COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (September 1): Introduction
George Thomas, “Political Thought and Political Development,” *American Political Thought* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 114-125

I. THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Week 2 (September 8): The Separation of Powers

*Primary Sources:*
- Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), selections
- *The Constitution*, Article I & II (1787)
- James Madison, *The Federalist* # 51 (1788)

Week 3 (September 15): Executive Power
Harvey Mansfield, *Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power* (New York: Free Press, 1989), Ch. 8, 10-11

*Primary Sources:*
- Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist* # 69, 70, 72 (1788)
- *Anti-Federalist*, Cato IV (1787)
- Abraham Lincoln, “Letter to Albert G. Hodges” (1864)
- *Youngstown Sheet and Tube v. Sawyer* 343 U.S. 579 (1952), Justice Robert H. Jackson, concurring opinion

Week 4 (September 22): Commander in Chief

Amy B. Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), Ch. 2-3


**Primary Sources:**

Pacificus – Helvidius debates (1793)


**PAPER 1** – Consider the ideas of the executive power and the Commander in Chief. What did these ideas mean in Article II of the Constitution? How have these ideas changed over time? What has the impact of these two ideas been on the American polity? **DUE BY WEEK 6 (OCTOBER 9 @ 5 PM)**

**II. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

**Week 5 (September 29): Mandates**


**Primary Sources:**


Week 6 (October 6): Presidential Representation


Primary Sources:


President’s Committee on Administrative Management, Report of the President’s Committee (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), pp. iii-v, 1-6

Week 7 (October 13): Responsible Party Government


Sam Rosenfeld, The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), Ch. 1


Primary Source:

Woodrow Wilson, Constitutional Government in the United States (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), Ch. 3

Week 8 (October 20): Getting Things Done: Lawmaking and Unilateral Action


*Primary Source:*


**PAPER 2 (choice 1) –** Consider the ideas of mandates, presidential representation, and responsible party government, all of which have contributed to the expectation of “getting things done.” How have these ideas changed the role of the presidency? How have they fallen short of changing the role of the presidency? Which idea has been most transformative? **DUE BY WEEK 11 (NOVEMBER 13 @ 5 PM)**

### III. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CONTROL OVER ADMINISTRATION

**Week 9 (October 27): The Unitary Executive Theory**


Daphna Renan, “The President’s Two Bodies,” *Columbia Law Review* 120, no. 5 (June 2020): 1119-1214

*Primary Source:*


**Week 10 (November 3): The Deep State**

Stephen Skowronek, John A. Dearborn, and Desmond King, *Phantoms of a Beleaguered Republic: The Deep State and the Unitary Executive*, Ch. 1, 9


*Primary Source:*


Anonymous, *A Warning* (New York: Twelve, 2019), Ch. 1

**PAPER 2 (choice 2)** – How have claims of the unitary executive and the Deep State driven presidential politics in recent decades and today? What is the conflict this battle of ideas is ultimately about? Who has stronger authority when presidents and administrators are at odds? Who *should* have more authority? **DUE BY WEEK 13 (DECEMBER 4 @ 5 PM)**

**IV. IDENTITY AND AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE**

**Week 11 (November 10): Descriptive Representation and Race**


Megan Ming Francis, *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Ch. 3


Pavielle E. Haines, Tali Mendelberg, and Bennett Butler, “‘I’m Not the President of Black America’: Rhetorical versus Policy Representation,” *Perspectives on Politics* 17, no. 4 (December 2019): 1038-1058

*Primary Source:*


**Week 12 (November 17): Descriptive Representation and Gender**


*Primary Source:*


**Week 13 (December 1): *American Exceptionalism***


*Primary Sources:*
