Leadership in Modern American Political History
Fall Term, 2007

Instructor: Alan Ehrenhalt
Class Meeting Time: Tuesday, 3:45-6:30 p.m., Jepson 106
Office Hours: Tuesday, 1-3 p.m., Jepson 130, or by appointment
E-Mail: aehrenhalt@governing.com
Phone: (804) 484-1436 (Tuesdays only); (202) 862-1434 (other weekdays)

Course Description and Objectives

The goal of this course is to raise some important issues about the nature of political leadership by paying close attention to a simple and crucial source: the lives and careers of the people who practice it. The period we will be studying is largely a familiar one: the half-century from 1950 to 2000, from the era of Eisenhower and Joseph McCarthy to that of Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich and the Bush family. All of us have lived most of our lives during this time.

The questions we will be asking, however, are timeless ones. What is greatness in a political leader? Do individuals make history, or are they largely the passive instruments of larger forces? Do ideas create leaders, or do leaders simply cloak themselves in ideologies as a means of advancing personal goals? Do they create change largely by building consensus, and bringing people together – or do they do it more often by generating conflict, and then using the conflict to acquire power.

The first few weeks of the course will be devoted to thinking about these problems in a more or less abstract way. We will be discussing theorists of history, such as E. H. Carr, Lewis Namier and Isaiah Berlin, and reading the work of perhaps the greatest of American political historians, Richard Hofstadter. After this beginning, the course will turn to individual biography. We will look at the careers of presidents (Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Reagan, Clinton), congressional leaders (Sam Rayburn, Lyndon Johnson, Newt Gingrich and Tom DeLay, among others), Supreme Court justices (Earl Warren and Sandra Day O’Connor), mayors and governors (Richard J. Daley and Nelson Rockefeller); and examine the lives of activists who have exerted leadership form the outside (Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, Ralph Nader, and the conservative activists of the 1990s.) Where appropriate, I will bring in videos to make the style and personality of modern leadership more vivid.

It is unlikely that we will settle on a solution to our major questions, at least not on a solution that will satisfy all members of the class. Certainly I have no pat answers to distribute, and no ideological framework that I want everyone to accept. I see this course as an enterprise in which the students and the instructor will examine the evidence together, and in which, at the end, we will have learned to ask the crucial questions in a more sophisticated and more penetrating way.
Course Approach and Requirements

The essence of this course will be reading and class discussion. Some weeks there will be a considerable amount of reading, but with a few exceptions in the early weeks, the reading is not technical, and I have done my best to choose selections that are engagingly written and provocative. In any case, I want you to do all of it, and to come to class prepared to discuss it. The purpose of the reading assignments is not to induce you to master the selections as if they were sacred texts. What matters is the questions that the readings generate, and the attempts we will make to puzzle out answers to them as best we can. I will ask quite a few questions in class myself, not to elicit formal answers but to sustain a dialogue.

As a way of jump-starting the dialogue, and of establishing a more pragmatic incentive, I will ask each student to submit a brief essay of approximately 500 words, on the reading assignment for each class session. These should be e-mailed to me by 9 a.m. on Tuesday morning, the day that class meets. I will read them and be ready to discuss them with you during class sessions, and will return them with grades and comments as early in the week as I can. Remember that I am not looking merely for summaries of the reading, but comments on the implications and on the further issues a particular selection may raise. All the readings will be either available for purchase in the bookstore or (more often) on e-reserve.

The short weekly essays will be the basis for one-third of the course grade. Class participation will constitute another third. An in-class final exam will determine the rest. Needless to say, absence from class sessions or failure to complete a weekly essay will cost you at final grading time. The course will not require a research paper, and there will be no mid-term.

I am looking forward to meeting you all and to starting out on our journey through some of the most interesting and important areas of political thought.

Books Recommended for Purchase (available in bookstore)

Klein, Joe – The Natural, paperback, Broadway Books, 2002
Schedule of Reading

Opening Discussion (1 week)

Reading for Aug. 28:
Kevin P. Phillips, American Dynasty, p. 15-50 -- e-reserve

Historians’ Theories (1 week)

Ideas vs. Relationships
Individual vs. Inevitability
What is greatness?

Reading for Sept. 4:
E.H. Carr, What is History, p. 36-42, 54-69 -- e-reserve
Lewis Namier, Personalities and Powers, p. 1-7 -- e-reserve

Theories of American Politics (2 weeks)

Conflict vs. Consensus

Reading for Sept. 11:
Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition, chapters 2,3,5,9,10,12 – in bookstore

Reading for Sept. 18:
Hofstadter, The Progressive Historians, p. 437-466 -- e-reserve
Alan Ehrenhalt, The United States of Ambition, p. 5-41, 251-265 -- e-reserve

Presidential Leadership (3 weeks)

Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, Clinton

Reading for Sept. 25:
Jack Beatty, Pols, p. 223-276 -- in bookstore
Beatty, Pols, 277-296
Garry Wills, The Kennedy Imprisonment, p. 163-215 – e-reserve

Reading for Oct. 2:
Robert Dallek, Flawed Giant, p. 185-231- e-reserve
Garry Wills, Nixon Agonistes, p. 368-380 e-reserve
Richard Reeves, President Nixon, p. 11-30, 575-609 -- e-reserve
Wills, Reagan’s America, P. 299-324, 352-370 -- e-reserve

Reading for Oct 9:
Joe Klein, The Natural, entire book– in bookstore
Congressional Leadership (2 weeks)

Rayburn, Dirksen, Johnson, McCarthy, O'Neill, Burton, Gingrich, DeLay

Reading for Oct 23:
Beatty, Pols, p. 132-171 – in bookstore
Neil MacNeil, Dirksen, p. 1-21, 208-238 -- e-reserve
Robert Caro, Master of the Senate, p. 557-598 -- e-reserve
Richard Rovere, Senator Joe McCarthy, p. 3-23, 45-74 -- e-reserve

Reading for Oct. 30:
John Farrell, Tip O'Neill, p. 419-439 -- e-reserve
Connie Bruck, The Politics of Perception, New Yorker, October 9, 1995, p. 50-76 - e-reserve
Jan Reid and Lou Dubose, The Hammer, p. 1-16, 34-41, 135-147, 163-180 -- e-reserve

Judicial Leadership (1 week)

Warren, O'Connor

Reading for Nov. 6
Bernard Schwartz, Superchief, p. 7-24, 28-31, 128-151, 253-259 -- e-reserve

City and State Leadership (2 weeks)

Daley, Rockefeller, Moses

Reading for Nov. 13:
Len O'Connor, Clout, p. 16-24, 126-146, e-reserve
Elizabeth Taylor and Adam Cohen, American Pharaoh, p. 142-174 -- e-reserve
Alan Ehrenhalt, The Lost City, p. 39-58 -- e-reserve

Reading for Nov. 20:
Kramer and Roberts, I Never Wanted to be Vice President of Anything – p. 32-43, 79-89, 123-126 -- e-reserve

Activist Leadership (2 weeks)

Reading for Nov. 27:
Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters, p. 28-142, 155-168, 175-194 – e-reserve
Marshall Frady, Jesse, p. 20-30, 75-81, 253-269, 281-296 -- e-reserve
Justin Morgan, Nader, p. 38-53, 64-74, 90-96, 138-151 -- e-reserve
Reading for Dec. 4
Nina Easton, *Gang of Five*, Chapters 1,5,9, also p. 266-28, 359-378 -- in *bookstore*