A Rough Course Schedule

- Lecture 1: Intro and Methods
- Lecture 2: Post-Jackson: Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler
- Lecture 3: Sectional Tensions: Taylor, Fillmore
- Lecture 4: Impending Crisis: Pierce, Buchanan
- Lecture 5: Reconstruction: Johnson, Grant, Hayes
- Lecture 6: Gilded Age: Garfield, Arthur, Ben Harrison
- Lecture 7: The 1920s: Harding, Coolidge, Hoover
- Lecture 8: The 1970s and Our Times
The 1920s: Harding, Coolidge, Hoover
A Second “Impending Crisis”?
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Harding’s personal life was a mess

- Nan Britton, Nan’s baby (Elizabeth)
- Carrie Fulton Phillips
- Torrid affair with staffer, Grace Cross
- Impregnated Rosa Cecilia Hoyle (a son, whereabouts unknown)
- Affair with another woman, Augusta Cole, resulted in an abortion
As far as I know, these boys are NOT Harding’s offspring
(Although DNA tests have not yet been conducted)
The Harding Scandals
It was more than merely “Teapot Dome”

- VA head Charles Forbes and VA attorney Charles Cramer (who killed himself in the midst of the scandal) looted $200 million from the VA
- Forbes convicted of embezzlement, taking kickbacks on contracts, selling surplus goods
- Harding grabbed Forbes by the throat and screamed that he was a “yellow rat” and a “double-crossing bastard”
The “Harding Scandals”

- Other big scandals: Office of the Alien Property Custodian; Justice Department; Department of the Interior
- Harding’s brother-in-law, Hebert Votaw, named Federal Prisons Superintendent: the drug trade suddenly prospered within the prison system
- Alien Property Custodian Thomas Miller convicted of taking bribes, sent to prison
“Justice” Department

- Attorney General Daugherty (and his assistant Jesse Smith, who killed himself in the midst of the scandal in Daugherty’s Wardham Park Hotel apartment): They illegally sold government alcohol supplies, taking bribes not to enforce prohibition, sold federal pardons
The most famous of the many scandals involved the lease of naval oil reserves located at Teapot Dome in Wyoming

- Interior Secretary Albert Fall accepted $400,000 in bribes and had oil fields transferred to his department and then leased them secretly to oilmen.

- Fall became the first cabinet member convicted of a felony and sent to prison: Fall’s acting skills didn’t spare him from prison (he actually died in 1944!).
Harding’s Fragile Health

- Increasingly overweight, ate, smoked and drank to excess
- Heart was not good, “doubtful to begin with,” as one associate put it
- Suffered constant heartburn, indigestion, fatigue, light internal bleeding
- The growing scandals added to his stress and provoked depression
His sudden death in 1923 at the Palace Hotel. Harding was on a cross-country tour in the midst of Teapot Dome. Some speculated that his wife offed him either to save him from the shame of the scandal or as retribution for his notorious philandering. Florence Harding refused to allow an autopsy.
President Harding Dies in San Francisco, August 2, 1923
Harding: Notable Scholar Surveys

- Schlesinger, 1948: 29 (F)
- Schlesinger, 1962: 31 (F)
- M-B 1982: 36 (F)
- CT 1982: 36 (F)
- Siena 1982: 39 (F)
- Siena 1990: 40 (F)
- Siena 1994: 41 (F)
- R-Mcl, 1996: 41 (F)
- Schlesinger, 1996: 39 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2000: 38 (F)
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Siena College Criteria

- Background: 43 (F)
- Party Leadership: 38 (F)
- Com. Ability: 36 (F)
- Relations w/Congress: 34 (F)
- Court Appointments: (?) 36 (F)
- Economy: (?) 39 (F)
- Luck: 37 (F)
Siena College Criteria

- Compromise: 26 (C)
- Willing to take risks: 40 (F)
- Appointments: 43 (F)
- Overall Ability: 43 (F)
- Imagination: 43 (F)
- Domestic: 40 (F)
- Integrity: 42 (F)
Siena College Criteria

- Executive skill: 43 (F)
- Foreign Policy: (?) 37 (F)
- Leadership: 41 (F)
- Intelligence: (?) 43 (F)
- Avoid Mistakes: 39 (F)
- Experts’ View: 41 (F)
- Overall: 41 (F)
C-Span Criteria:

- Public Persuasion: 36 (F)
- Crisis Leadership: 39 (F)
- Economic: (?) 35 (F)
- Moral Authority: 40 (F)
- International: 37 (F)
- Administrative: 42 (F)
- Rel. w/ Congress: 34 (F)
- Vision: 40 (F)
- Pursued Justice: 33 (C)
- Context: 40 (F)
- Overall: 40 (F)
Assessment

- At 881 days, Harding had the fourth shortest presidency.
- Longer than Zachary Taylor at 492 days and two weeks shorter than Gerald Ford at 895 days.
- His immediate predecessors (TR, Taft, Wilson) had none of his ethical problems, nor did his successors (Coolidge, Hoover, FDR).
Assessing Harding

- Historians have continued to regard Harding as the one of the worst presidents.

- Recent revisionist scholarship, however, has shown that he did have several strong cabinet picks (Hughes, for example), demonstrated compassion in the Debs case, and was relatively enlightened on race.
Assessing Harding

- Several of his appointees were genuine crooks
- Seemed incapable of administering effectively: lazy, out of his depth -- as even he acknowledged
- He will never escape from “The Harding Scandals”
- As with “Watergate,” it was always much more than just “Teapot Dome”
CALVIN COOLIDGE

DAVID GREENBERG
Coolidge stood about 5 feet 9 inches tall and was slightly built, with a arrow pointed nose, cleft chin, small deeply set eyes, thin pursed lips.

Spoke with a New England nasal twang.

Slicked down his hair with petroleum jelly, walked in short, quick steps.

Suffered from chronic respiratory and digestive ailments, but also hypochondria; could be neurotic.
Calvin Coolidge

- Coolidge often seemed like a stereotype of a sour New England Yankee (Alice Roosevelt’s comment)

- He was a man of few words who disdained conversation, abhorred talking to strangers, was horrified by social events

- Dressed formally, preferred to wear a necktie when exercising even preferred to wear a hat while shaving!
Young Coolidge

- Born in Plymouth Notch, Vermont
- Shy, introverted, cautious, few friends, seemed outwardly emotionless
- Paralyzing neuroses as a child
- Graduated from Amherst College in 1895
Physical Characteristics

- Frequent attacks of asthma, hay fever, bronchitis, stomach upset; took a wide variety of pills for other maladies

- Tired easily and usually slept 11 hours a day! (9 hours every night and a mandatory 2-hour nap every afternoon)

- His frugality was legendary: Once, when he sent an assistant out for a magazine, he expected change, even if it was just a nickel, and complained when he did not get it promptly!
Coolidge’s Political Rise

- Elected lieutenant governor in 1915; governor in 1918
- National reputation during Boston police strike of 1919: fired the entire police force
- Brought him national attention: He ran for the Republican presidential nomination as a favorite son in 1920
Immigration Act of 1924

- Controlled “undesirable” immigration by establishing quotas and limiting immigrants of specific national origins (Jews, Italian Catholics)

- It set an annual quota of any nationality at 2% of the number of foreign-born persons of such nationality resident in the US in the 1890 census (for example, this formula reduced immigration from Italy by more than 90%)
† Sharply curtailed immigration from origin countries of the majority of the Jews in America

† Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe & Russia had been substantial since 1890 (an estimated 75% of Jews arrived from Russia in recent decades)

† Thus, the use of figures from US population in 1890 as the basis for calculating the quotas: This massively shrank immigration from Eastern Europe and Russia, where much of the Jewish diaspora lived at the time
The centerpiece of Coolidge’s domestic agenda was his tax cutting. He championed the Revenue Acts of 1924 and 1926, the pet issue of Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, a wealthy industrialist who advocated trickle-down economics. The Revenue Acts sharply further reduced income taxes, especially taxes on the wealthy. They also further cut inheritance taxes.
Signs of Economic Trouble: Structural weaknesses lurked in the economy

- Stock market rose but underlying problems remained obscured (income inequality soared to untenable heights)
- Investment turned into pure speculation, 1925-
- Housing market softened, 1926-
- Sales of goods flagged, 1927-
- Construction faltered, 1928-
Underlying Problems

- The financial sector was an unregulated house of cards
- Many put their money into “get rich quick” schemes with no long-term prospects, invested in companies that had no real profits, and no actual products!
- No regulatory oversight of investment; banking practices grew increasingly reckless
Calvin Coolidge: “F” Student Notable Scholar Surveys, 1948-1996

- Schlesinger, 1948: 23 (F)
- Schlesinger, 1962: 27 (F)
- M-B 1982: 30 (F)
- CT 1982: 29 (F)
- Siena 1982: 30 (C)
- Siena 1990: 31 (F)
- Siena 1994: 36 (F)
- R-McI, 1996: 33 (F)
Calvin Coolidge: “C” Student
Notable Scholar Surveys, 1996-2009

- Schlesinger, 1996: 30 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2000: 27 (C)
- WSJ, 2000: 25 (C)
- Siena, 2002: 29 (C)
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- C-SPAN, 2009: 26 (C)
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Calvin Coolidge
Siena College Criteria

- Background: 25 (C)
- Party Leadership: 24 (C)
- Communications: 38 (F)
- Rel. w/Congress: 21 (B)
- Court Appts.: 26 (C)
- Economy: 30 (C)
- Luck: 12 (B)
Calvin Coolidge
Siena College Criteria

- Ability to Compromise: 28 (C)
- Willing to take risks: 41 (F)
- Appointments: 30 (C)
- Overall ability: 32 (C)
- Imagination: 37 (F)
- Domestic: 31 (C)
- Integrity: 17 (B)
Calvin Coolidge
Siena College Criteria

- Executive Ability: 28 (C)
- Foreign Policy: 32 (C)
- Leadership: 33 (C)
- Intelligence: 28 (C)
- Avoid Mistakes: 19 (B)
- Experts’ View: 28 (C)
- Overall: 29 (C)
C-Span Criteria: Coolidge

- Public Persuasion: 24 (C)
- Crisis Leadership: 29 (C)
- Economic: (?) 22 (B)
- Moral Authority: 21 (B)
- International: 29 (C)
- Administrative: 25 (C)
- Rel. w/ Congress: 18 (B)
- Vision: 29 (C)
- Pursued Justice: 29 (C)
- In Context: 26 (C)
- Overall: 27 (C)
Historical Assessment

- Polls of historians and political scientists have generally ranked Coolidge as a below-average, sometimes failed, president.
- His reputation has gradually risen in recent years: Mostly “F” grades between 1948 and 1996, he has become a “C” student since 1996.
- What accounts for this gradual rise? Hard to say. Perhaps a growing recognition that Hoover’s policies exacerbated the economic downturn.
Historical Analysis

- Moreover, much depends upon how historians frame Coolidge’s economic record.
- Some, assessing him narrowly, give him high marks in the context of the economy of the mid-1920s -- without looking ahead.
- Others, taking a longer view, factor in what came later: the calamitous crash and Depression.
Assessment: David Greenberg

- The Depression eroded his reputation and changed public opinion: Many took a more critical look at his policies.

- Serious problems despite a widespread misperception of economic success: For example, his tax cuts fueled a dangerously uneven distribution of wealth, overproduction, and speculation.

- His refusal to aid the depressed farm sector proved disastrous: 5,000 rural banks failed and hundreds of thousands of farmers lost their savings.
Most historians now regard him as having been overly complacent, lacking vision, and ill equipped to deal with challenges.

Perhaps no president could have solved these problems, but modest attempts might have reduced their magnitude for his successors.

Instead, he adhered to laissez-faire ideology in all things, foreign and domestic.
Our Worst Presidents
Herbert Hoover
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Early Herbert Hoover

- Born in West Branch, Iowa, into a Quaker family
- Orphaned at the age of nine, raised by relatives in Iowa and Oregon
- Hoover’s religious training was quite rigorous, but he retained few outward signs of his Quaker upbringing, aside from his style of dress
Often fished on Sundays, albeit in a high collar and necktie.
Physical Characteristics

- Hoover stood 5 feet 11 inches tall
- Straight brown hair, parted just to the left of center,
- He developed a round fleshy face, ruddy complexion, and a husky build
- He was slightly round-shouldered
Personal Characteristics

- Trained as a mining engineer, he concentrated on small details rather than on the broader significance of a problem.
- Always a dull speaker, rarely lifting his eyes from a prepared text.
- Aloof, shy, wary of crowds, awkward at social occasions, extremely sensitive to criticism, often cold and curt with subordinates.
Some predicted that Hoover, who had enjoyed great success when focusing on specific challenges, one at a time, would have difficulty responding when faced with multiple challenges, as so often happens to political leaders.
It wasn’t just the Crash: Hoover’s early struggles, prior to the Crash of October ‘29

- Didn’t seem to grasp how politics worked and could not get along with the large GOP majorities in congress

- Hated reporters, threatened to have them arrested, claimed he kept files on them, threatened to contact their publishers, most of whom were wealthy Republicans
By the time Hoover entered the presidency, the stage was set for a deep recession and (depending on his reaction) a depression.

Believed economy faced only a downturn and insisted the economic crisis was European.
What caused the crash?

- This is the wrong question: The crash was inevitable; stocks were massively overvalued.
- 20’s boom based on the illusion of an ever-increasing stock market.
- Values of NYSE, 1923: $4 billion.
- Start of 1929: $67 billion!
- October 1929: $87 billion!
- Stocks were not worth this; they would not come close to returning to these stated values until the mid-1950s! – nearly 30 years later.
Massive, Catastrophic, Deflation

Once panic and deflation set in, many believed they could avoid further losses by staying out of the markets. Holding money therefore became profitable as prices dropped even lower, exacerbating the drop in demand.
Hoover unquestioningly embraced the prevailing economic orthodoxy

- He worried more about the remote possibility of inflation than the massive deflation already occurring.
- Refused to consider rescue of the banking industry, rejected calls for any emergency relief.
Hoover’s Fiscal Policy: Austerity Economics, 1929-1932

- Raised taxes, cut spending to balance the budget, tightened money supply, adhered to the Gold Standard

- During the first two years of the Depression (1929 and 1930) Hoover actually achieved budget *surpluses*
The deep Recession of 1929-30 turns into the Great Depression of 1930-1940

- In 1931, conditions significantly worsened, more than 25% of the factory workforce was unemployed, GDP declined by 15%

- Hoover signed the Revenue Act of 1932, raising taxes on all brackets, tripling the rate on the poorest; on the wealthy he increased taxes from 25% to 63%
Soaring Unemployment, Massive GDP Contraction

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<td>1932</td>
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Hoover Under Siege

- 1930 midterms: Democrats gained 66 House seats
- Hoover complained that his presidency had become a prison: Yet, he desired another term
- Prior to the crisis, he had been moody and cranky toward staff – the crisis made him more so
- Isolated himself in the White House; sought affirmation, not advice (always a sign of insecurity)
Below Left: Perhaps not the most inspiring reelection slogan for 1932

- Unemployment had risen above 20 percent, GDP had shrunk from $104 billion to $59 billion
- By 1932, over 14 million Americans—one-quarter of the workforce—had become unemployed (there were no unemployment payments and no work relief programs)
- As industries failed, factories closed and stores shuttered: 100,000 jobs vanished every week
1932 Election Results
FDR 57%; Hoover 40%
Roosevelt won 42 of 48 states
Hebert Hoover: “C” Student
Notable Scholar Surveys, 1948-1996

- Schlesinger, 1948: 20 (C)
- Schlesinger, 1962: 19 (C)
- M-B 1982: 21 (C)
- CT 1982: 21 (C)
- Siena 1982: 27 (C)
- Siena 1990: 28 (C)
- Siena 1994: 29 (C)
- R-Mcl, 1996: 24 (C)
Herbert Hoover: “F” Student
Notable Scholar Surveys, 1996-2009

- Schlesinger, 1996: 33 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2000: 34 (F)
- WSJ, 2000: 29 (C)
- Siena, 2002: 31 (C)
- WSJ, 2005: 31 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2009: 34 (F)
Herbert Hoover: “F” Student
Notable Scholar Surveys, 2010-2018

- Siena, 2010: 36 (F)
- USPC, 2011: 26 (C)
- APSA, 2015: 38 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2017: 36 (F)
- APSA, 2018: 36 (F)
- Aggregate: 34 (F)
Siena College Criteria

- **Background:** 10 (A)
- **Party Leadership:** 26 (C)
- **Com. Ability:** 31 (C)
- **Rel. w/Congress:** 33 (D)
- **Court Appts:** 19 (B)
- **Economy:** 43 (F)
- **Luck:** 43 (F)
Siena College Criteria

- Ability to Compromise: 40 (F)
- Willing to take risks: 42 (F)
- Appointments: 32 (C)
- Overall ability: 26 (C)
- Imagination: 38 (F)
- Domestic: 41 (F)
- Integrity: 13 (B)
Siena College Criteria

- Executive Ability: 29 (C)
- Foreign Policy: 36 (F)
- Leadership: 37 (F)
- Intelligence: 14 (B)
- Avoid Mistakes: 40 (F)
- Experts’ View: 38 (F)
- Overall: 36 (F)
Hoover: C-Span Criteria

- Public Persuasion: 38 (F)
- Crisis Leadership: 40 (F)
- Economic: 43 (F)
- Moral Authority: 29 (C)
- International: 31 (C)
- Administrative: 14 (B)
- Rel. w/ Congress: 31 (C)
- Vision: 38 (F)
- Pursued Justice: 28 (C)
- Context of times: 39 (F)
- Overall: 36 (F)
Assessment: Herbert Hoover

- Historians suggest that he had integrity, was intelligent, had sufficient professional background

- Yet, his failure provides substantial proof that the best background for political office is ... political office

- Lincoln and FDR were proud, skilled politicians; Hoover had never been elected to anything prior to 1928
Historical Assessment

- Hoover was a technocrat
- He might have survived during normal times
- But the Depression was anything but normal
- And he proved incapable of adapting to or coping with the enormity of the crisis
Not only did he fail to cope with the calamity, he may very well have exacerbated it by adhering to orthodox economic policies of tight money, balanced budgets, and trade restrictions.
Our Worst Presidents
The Nixon Scandals and After

Richard M. Nixon
Elizabeth Drew

Gerald R. Ford
Douglas Brinkley

Jimmy Carter
Julian E. Zelizer
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RICHARD M. NIXON

ELIZABETH DREW

THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS
Challenges of the 1970s

- Relative Economic Decline/Competitiveness
- Racial Polarization
- De-Industrialization
- Stagflation
- Foreign Policy Crises/Limits of U.S. Power
- Cultural Ferment, More Polarization
- “The Nixon Scandals” Collapse of Public Trust
Nixon’s youth was marked by hard work in the family store and the death of two brothers.

Whittier College (1934); Duke Law School (1937); practiced law in California; married Thelma (Pat) Ryan.

Served as a navy supply officer during World War II; elected to the House in 1946.
An ambitious, disciplined loner; he cultivated no hobbies, had few friends.

His tactical shrewdness was often undermined by vindictiveness and capacity for self-deception.

His rise was largely the product of the postwar Red Scare: in elections in 1946, 50, 52 he battled against “subversives” and “pink” Democrats.
Elected vice president in 1952, he served Ike dutifully for eight years, despite frequent humiliations.
The “New Nixon”

- By the late 1950s, Nixon tried to present himself as a statesmanlike “New Nixon,”

- But, partly because memories persisted of the “Old Nixon,” he lost races for president in 1960 and California governor in 1962
In 1968, private citizen Nixon, with Kissinger’s help, undermined the talks that were going on between the US government and North Vietnam.

Essentially, Nixon communicated to the other parties that they would get a better deal from his administration by sabotaging the talks.

H.R. Haldeman’s notes say that Kissinger was leaking to Nixon what was happening in the peace talks, which the Nixon campaign then undermined.
Ken Hughes, *Fatal Politics*

- Undermining the 1968 negotiations should have some effect on his foreign policy reputation.
- If granting Nixon’s credit for initiatives such as détente and China, the events of 1968, and their consequences for Vietnam, should also be contextualized.
The terms of ending the Vietnam War that were eventually negotiated were probably something that could have been done much earlier.

And the number of American deaths (21,000 of the 58,000) and Vietnamese deaths between 1968 and 1973 were very, very high indeed.

Expansion of the war into Cambodia, Laos.
The Nixon Scandals: There was much more to it than just Watergate

- Interference in peace talks, 1968
- Illegal campaign financing, 1968-72
- Foreign campaign funds 1968-72
- Illegal wire tapping, 1969-72
- Break-ins prior to Watergate, 1969-72
It was more than Watergate

- Money laundering, 1968-72
- Falsifying and altering federal documents, 1969-72
- Tax fraud: back-dating personal write-offs
- Personal corruption: personal loans, property improvements
69 Charged, 55 Convicted, 20 sent to prison

- 2 Attorneys General
- Campaign Manager
- Deputy Campaign Manager
- Secretary of Commerce
- White House Chief of Staff
- Head of Domestic Policy Council
- Personal attorney to Nixon
- Special counsel to the President
- White House Counsel
- Deputy assistant to the President