Our Worst Presidents
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
Thank You Fromm Staff!

- Derek
- Carla
- Scott
- Dawa
- Herbert

Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning at the University of San Francisco
The John Rothmann
Thank You Fromm Students!

Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning at the University of San Francisco
“The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right.”
– Learned Hand
“Nothing discloses real character like the use of power.... Most people can bear adversity; but if you wish to know what a man really is give him power.”
“Nothing to Fear But Fear Itself”?

- Temperament
- Great leaders inspire, they don’t inspire fear
- “Testosterone is the most effective solvent for human brain tissue. Just a drop or two can render a perfectly functional human cortex completely stupid.” — David Rothkopf
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APSA, 2018: out of 44

30. Bush II
31. Arthur
32. Ben Harrison
33. Nixon
34. Garfield
35. Taylor
36. Hoover
37. Tyler
38. Fillmore
39. Harding
40. Andrew Johnson
41. Pierce
42. W. Harrison
43. Buchanan
44. Trump
APSA 2018: out of 44

- Republican Scholars: 40 (F)
- Democrat Scholars: 44 (F)
- Independent Scholars: 43 (F)
- Conservative Scholars: 40 (F)
- Liberal Scholars: 44 (F)
- Moderate Scholars: 44 (F)
- Total: 44 (F)
Greg Miller, *The Apprentice*
Ken Hughes, *Chasing Shadows* (2014)
Historians have characterized Nixon as “illiterate” in economics.

Two years of expansionist economic policy in anticipation of his 1972 reelection: inflation surged in 1973, before the oil shock of October.

Consequences: By 1974, negative growth, unemployment rose to 7.2%, inflation to 12.3%.

Historian Melvin Small: though his quick fix for 1972 got him reelected, it exacerbated economic problems for the rest of the 1970s.
Nixon Sees ‘Witch-Hunt,’ Insiders Say

By Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein
The Washington Post
FEDERAL GRAND JURY INDICTS 7 NIXON AIDES ON CHARGES OF CONSPIRACY ON WATERGATE; HALED MAN, EHRlichMAN, MITCHELL ON LIST

HEATH, TRAILING LABOR PARTY IN BRITAIN, DECLINES TO RESIGN

MITCHELL JUDGE HALTS TRIAL HERE

NIXON URGES QUICK TRIALS, CAUTIONS ON PREJUDGMENT

SIRICA SAID TO GET FINDINGS ON NIXON
NIXON RESIGNS

HE URGES A TIME OF ‘HEALING’;
FORD WILL TAKE OFFICE TODAY

‘Sacrifice’ Is Praised;
Kissinger to Remain

POLITICAL SCENE SHARPLY ALTERED
Appraisal of Nixon Career

Rise and Fall

LATE CITY EDITION

The New York Times
VOL. CXXIII No. 42,566
NEW YORK, FRIDAY, AUGUST 9, 1974
The herald brave nation of New York City
The leading home daily of New York City 15 CENTS

WASHINGTON, Aug. 8—Richard Milhous Nixon, the 37th President of the United States, announced tonight that he had given up his high and arduous task to remain in office and would resign, effective at noon tomorrow. At that hour, Gerald Rudolph Ford, Jr., whom Mr. Nixon nominated for Vice President last Oct. 12, will be sworn in as the 38th President, to serve out the 875 days remaining in Mr. Nixon’s second term.

That two years after his landslide re-election victory, Mr. Nixon, in a conciliatory address on national television, said that he was leaving with a sense of bitterness but with a hope that his departure would start a “process of healing that is so desperately needed in America.” He spoke of regret for any “injuries” done “in the course of the events that led to this decision.” He acknowledged that some of his judgments had been wrong.

The 61-year-old Mr. Nixon, appearing salient and resigned in his fate as a victim of the Watergate scandal, became the first President in the history of the Republic to resign from office. Only 30 months earlier Spiro Agnew resigned the Vice-Presidency.

The 37th President Is First to Quit Post

MacNeil/Lehrer Report

Speculation Rife on Vice President

Some Ford Associates Say
Selecting a Successor
Could Take Weeks

The 37th President

Says Nixon Did Not Ask for
And Was Not Given a Way
To Avoid Prosecution
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Notable Scholar Surveys

- M-B 1982: 34 (F)
- CT 1982: 35 (F)
- Siena 1982: 28 (C)
- Siena 1990: 25 (C)
- Siena 1994: 23 (C)
- R-McI, 1996: 32 (F)
- Schlesinger, ‘96: 36 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2000: 25 (C)
- WSJ, 2000: 33 (F)
Notable Scholar Surveys

- Siena, 2002: 26 (C)
- WSJ, 2005: 32 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2009: 27 (C)
- Siena, 2010: 30 (D)
- USPC, 2011: 23 (C)
- APSA, 2015: 34 (D)
- C-SPAN, 2017: 28 (C)
- APSA, 2018: 33 (D)
- Aggregate: 33 (D)
Siena College Criteria

- Background: 18 (B)
- Party Leadership: 20 (B)
- Communication: 26 (C)
- Rel. w/Congress: 36 (F)
- Court Appts.: 38 (F)
- Economy: (?) 25 (C)
- Luck: (?) 34 (D)
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<td>Imagination</td>
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<td>Integrity</td>
<td>43 (F)</td>
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Siena College Criteria

- Executive Ability: 24 (C)
- Foreign Policy: 11 (A)
- Leadership: 29 (C)
- Intelligence: 16 (B)
- Avoid Mistakes: 43 (F)
- Experts’ View: 37 (F)
- Overall: 30 (C)
Nixon: C-Span Criteria

- Public Persuasion: 26 (C)
- Crisis Leadership: 27 (C)
- Economic: (?) 23 (C)
- Moral Authority: 42 (F)
- International: 10 (A)
- Administrative: 24 (C)
- Rel. w/ Congress: 37 (F)
- Setting agenda: 24 (C)
- Pursued Justice: 21 (B)
- Context: 34 (D)
- Overall: 28 (C)
Assessing Nixon

- Credited for innovations like détente, China (“A’s” for foreign policy from C-Span, Siena); signed environmental legislation
- But receives criticism for the unnecessary prolongation of Vietnam War for purely political reasons (according to his own admissions on his own tapes!)
Polarization: The job of a skilled politician in a democracy is to appeal to the interests of people without feeding their prejudices

- John Ehrlichman, Nixon’s top domestic aide, summarized the spirit of his boss’s 1968 campaign as, “We’ll go after the racists” — adding, in his memoir, “The subliminal appeal to the anti-black voter was always present in Nixon’s statements and speeches.”

- That appeal has become an important component of GOP political rhetoric ever since
Assessment: Nixon

- Shakespeare might have said that Watergate will forever be the stain that will not out.
- Poisoned American public life and trust in government.
- Like Harding, poor appointments, widespread criminality.
- Multiplicity of crimes influenced the ‘68 and ‘72 elections.
Gerald R. Ford: Historical Analysis

- Only president never *elected* president nor VP (Rep. from Grand Rapids only nine months prior to assuming presidency)

- Faced big challenges: collapse of faith (when sworn in Aug. 1974, only 36% expressed trust in government, down from 77% in 1964)

- Economic crisis: inflation rate 12% (highest since ’47); unemployment 7.2; also negative GDP growth
Ford also inherited the war in Vietnam (Nixon’s cynical “decent interval” carried over into Ford’s presidency)
Rise of “Gerald R. Ford”

- Born Leslie Lynch King, Jr., after his biological father
- Renamed for his adoptive father, Gerald R. Ford, Sr.
- Michigan ’35; Yale Law ’41
- House, 1949-73; House Republican Leader 1965-73
“At Ease in the White House”
Welcome to the Presidency!
Welcome to the Presidency!
Ford Grants Nixon Full Pardon, Says He Has ‘Suffered Enough’
Ford inherited stagflation and high unemployment

- Ford was more successful than his low marks indicate: When Ford became president, Nixon left him with runaway inflation of 12%.

- When Ford departed, inflation was by no means solved but it was down to 5%.

- Is it fair to give Ford “F’s” for his handling of the economy while giving Nixon merely “C’s”?
Ford Likely would have won in 1976 had it not been for Reagan
Appeasing the Reaganite Faction of the GOP: The Ironies of Ford’s Dumping of Rockefeller
(NY, 1976: 52-48; PA: 50-48)
Ford won 240 electoral votes, 30 short (270 needed); lost 8 states (153 EVs) by less than 4.5%:

- Ohio, 0.27% (25)
- Wisconsin, 1.68% (11)
- Mississippi, 1.88% (7)
- Hawaii, 2.53% (4)
- Pennsylvania, 2.66% (27)
- Texas, 3.17% (26)
- Missouri, 3.63% (12)
- New York, 4.43% (41)
Ford: Notable Scholar Surveys

- M-B 1982: 24 (C)
- CT 1982: 23 (C)
- Siena 1982: 23 (C)
- Siena 1990: 27 (C)
- Siena 1994: 32 (D)
- R-McI, 1996: 27 (C)
- Schlesinger, 1996: 28 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2000: 23 (C)
- WSJ, 2000: 28 (C)
Ford: Notable Scholar Surveys

- Siena, 2002: 28 (C)
- WSJ, 2005: 28 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2009: 22 (C)
- Siena, 2010: 28 (C)
- USPC, 2011: 24 (C)
- APSA, 2015: 24 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2017: 25 (C)
- APSA, 2018: 25 (C)
- Aggregate: 26 (C)
Siena College Criteria

- Background: 27 (C)
- Party Leadership: 25 (C)
- Com. Ability: 35 (F)
- Rel. w/Congress: 17 (B)
- Court Appts.: 22 (B)
- Economy: (?) [Nixon 25, C] 36 (F)
- Luck: 31 (C)
Siena College Criteria

- Compromise: 17 (B)
- Willing to take risks: 35 (F)
- Appointments: 23 (C)
- Overall Ability: 31 (C)
- Imagination: 33 (C)
- Domestic: 30 (C)
- Integrity: 15 (B)
Siena College Criteria

- Executive Ability: 32 (C)
- Foreign Policy: 27 (C)
- Leadership: 30 (C)
- Intelligence: (?) 34 (D)
- Avoid Mistakes: 26 (C)
- Experts’ View: 25 (C)
- Overall: 28 (C)
C-Span Criteria: Jerry Ford

- Public Persuasion: 34 (D)
- Crisis Leadership: 24 (C)
- Economic: 30 (C)
- Moral Authority: 23 (C)
- International Rel.: 25 (C)
- Administrative Skill: 27 (C)
- Relations w/ Congress: 19 (B)
- Vision/Setting agenda: 35 (F)
- Pursued Justice: 14 (B)
- Context: 25 (C)
- Overall: 25 (C)
Assessment: Jerry Ford

- Ford characterized his presidency as “healing the land”
- At 895 days, Ford had the sixth shortest presidency (nearly 2½ years)
- Yet, in terms of time in the White House, his 895 days compare with Harding (881 days) and JFK (1,036 days)
Are Ford and Carter Assessed Fairly? Both had tough “luck” in office, but perhaps that says more about the problematic legacies left by their predecessor than about themselves.
The Nixon Economic Hangover

- Both Ford and Carter faced huge challenges post-Nixon: media hostility, collapse of public trust & confidence, economic chaos for the remainder of the 1970s

- Stagflation confronted Ford and Carter with unpalatable dilemmas: fight unemployment and raise inflation, or fight inflation and raise unemployment (both ultimately opted for the latter)
Early Jimmy Carter

- Born 1924
- Rosalyn Smith, 1946
- Naval Academy, 1946
- US Navy 1943-1953
- Father, Earl, died 1953
- Carter returns to Plains
- GA State Senate, 1963-67
- GA Governor, 1971-75
Carter’s Outsider-ism

- After LBJ and Nixon, Carter’s outsider-ism was seen by voters as an enormous asset
- “What’s My Line?”
- Another president without a strong feel for party (along with John Tyler, Zach Taylor, Andrew Johnson, Herbert Hoover): Carter struggled
Carl Biven, *Jimmy Carter’s Economy*

- Carter faced a combination of factors, many beyond his control, such as soaring energy costs, productivity decline, resurgent competition from Germany, Japan

- Inflation-fighting policy included controlling spending, postponing popular tax cuts, a rise in unemployment

- Despite this, economic growth under Carter was about as high as it was under Reagan, and Carter added far less to the national debt than Reagan
Carter also inherited a number of crises in foreign affairs.

Political support for détente was waning (Nixon never sought public support for détente): ferocious right-wing attacks on détente limited Ford’s and Carter’s options.

Many of Nixon’s “regional policemen” (the “Nixon Doctrine”) were tottering (the Shah, Marcos, Somoza, etc.).
Carter’s presidency was only four years but, at 94, his post-presidency has lasted nearly 40 years, the longest in history (Hoover 31 years)

- His primary post-presidential income came from 33 best-selling books, about the deep south, race relations, women’s rights, aging, fishing, woodworking, even a children’s book, *The Little Baby Snoogle-Fleejer*

- He annually costs the government only 50% of what other ex-presidents have cost; is the only president in the modern era to return full-time to the house he lived in pre-presidency: a two-bedroom rancher assessed at $167,000
Jimmy Carter: Notable Scholar Surveys

- M-B 1982: 25 (C)
- CT 1982: 27 (C)
- Siena 1982: 33 (F)
- Siena 1990: 24 (C)
- Siena 1994: 25 (C)
- R-McI, 1996: 19 (B)
- Schlesinger, ‘96: 27 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2000: 22 (C)
- WSJ, 2000: 30 (C)
Jimmy Carter: Notable Scholar Surveys

- Siena, 2002: 25 (C)
- WSJ, 2005: 34 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2009: 25 (C)
- Siena, 2010: 32 (C)
- USPC, 2011: 18 (B)
- APSA, 2015: 26 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2017: 26 (C)
- APSA, 2018: 26 (C)
- Aggregate: 27 (C)
Siena College Criteria

- **Background:** 31 (C)
- **Party Leadership:** 39 (F)
- **Communication:** 27 (C)
- **Rel. w/Congress:** 39 (F)
- **Court Appts.:** 20 (B)
- **Economy:** 40 (F)
- **Luck:** 38 (F)
- **Compromise:** 31 (C)
- **Take risks:** 25 (C)
- **Appointments:** 21 (B)
- **Overall ability:** 29 (C)
Siena College Criteria

- Imagination: 21 (B)
- Domestic: 29 (C)
- Integrity: 07 (A)
- Executive Skills: 36 (F)
- Foreign Policy: 29 (C)
- Leadership: 35 (F)
- Intelligence: 13 (A)
- Avoid Mistakes: 36 (F)
- Experts’ View: 30 (C)
- Overall: 32 (C)
Carter: C-Span Criteria

- Public Persuasion: 35 (F)
- Crisis Leadership: 37 (F)
- Economic: 33 (D)
- Moral Authority: 14 (B)
- International: 32 (C)
- Administrative: 31 (C)
- Rel. w/ Congress: 33 (D)
- Vision, Agenda Setting: 22 (B)
- Pursued Justice: 05 (A)
- Context: 29 (C)
- Overall: 26 (C)
Historical Analysis

- A detail-oriented technocrat who tackled tough issues like out-of-control energy prices, energy consumption, stagflation
- Advanced human rights; Camp David Accords; Panama Canal Treaty; China normalization; SALT II (no political dividends)
- Undone by the Iran Hostage Crisis (engineer Carter later observed that he may have paid it too much attention)
Another Criteria? Legacy, Consequences?

- Jackson: economic chaos
- Tyler: sectional landmines (Texas)
- Polk: massive sectional challenges
- Pierce: ferocious sectional strife
- Buchanan: national dissolution
- A. Johnson: sabotage of Reconstruction
- Hoover: economic calamity
- Truman: Korea unresolved
- LBJ: Vietnam unresolved
- Nixon: stagflation, scandals, collapse of trust
- Bush II: economic collapse, ongoing wars
Bush’s Struggles, 2001-2009

- Tax Cut, 2001: produced return to massive deficit spending: Bush inherited a +$236 billion surplus, flipped it into an annual -$400 billion deficit by 2003

- 9/11; Afghanistan War, 2001-; Iraq War, 2003-

- Katrina, 2005; Social Security privatization, 2005

- Economic Collapse, 2008
The approval ratings of other presidents have fallen, but no president’s fall came anywhere close to George W. Bush: from an unprecedented high of 90% after 9/11, to a free-fall that continued all through his presidency to below 25% at the end. It takes a special kind of talent to squander that much public support.
Notable Scholar Surveys

- Siena, 2002: 25 (C)
- WSJ, 2005: 19 (B)
- C-SPAN, 2009: 36 (F)
- Siena, 2010: 39 (F)
- USPC, 2011: 31 (F)
- APSA, 2015: 35 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2017: 33 (D)
- APSA, 2018: 30 (C)
- Aggregate: 32 (D)
Siena College Criteria

- Background: 36 (F)
- Party Leadership: 23 (C)
- Communication Ability: 42 (F)
- Rel. w/Congress: 32 (C)
- Court Appts.: 41 (F)
- Economy: 42 (F)
- Luck: (?) 18 (B)
Siena College Criteria

- **Ability to Compromise:** 42 (F)
- **Take risks:** (okay …) 19 (B)
- **Appointments:** 41 (F)
- **Overall ability:** 40 (F)
- **Imagination:** 40 (F)
- **Domestic:** 38 (F)
- **Integrity:** (16&9) 39 (F)
Siena College Criteria

- **Executive Skills:** 39 (F)
- **Foreign Policy:** 42 (F)
- **Leadership:** 38 (F)
- **Intelligence:** 42 (F)
- **Avoid Mistakes:** 38 (F)
- **Experts’ View:** 39 (F)
- **Overall:** 39 (F)
C-Span Criteria

- Public Persuasion: 25 (C)
- Crisis Leadership: 25 (C)
- Economic: 36 (F)
- Moral Authority: 34 (D)
- International: 41 (F)
- Administrative: 34 (D)
- Rel. w/ Congress: 25 (C)
- Vision: 26 (C)
- Pursued Justice: (?) 19 (B)
- Context: 35 (F)
- Overall: 33 (D)
Siena College: the Economy

- 43 Herbert Hoover
- 42 George W. Bush
- 41 James Buchanan
- 40 Jimmy Carter
- 39 Warren Harding
- 38 Van Buren
- 37 Andrew Johnson
- 36 Gerald Ford
- 35 B. Harrison
- 34 Franklin Pierce
Siena College: Foreign Policy

- 43 LBJ
- 42 George W. Bush
- 41 James Buchanan
- 40 Franklin Pierce
- 39 W.H. Harrison
- 38 Andrew Johnson
- 37 Warren Harding
- 36 Herbert Hoover
- 35 John Tyler
- 34 Zachary Taylor
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