

American Political Events
Political Science 291T
Williams College

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W 9-11:30 and by appointment

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Description.

Scandals. Wars and assassinations. Contested elections, Supreme Court decisions, and constitutional amendments. As large as they loom in our daily experience and our historical memory, these sorts of events—concrete, discrete things that happen in and around the political world—are often underestimated as catalysts of political change. Indeed, in the study of American political development, we often look to complex processes and underlying causes as explanations for how and why ideas, institutions, and policies both emerge and evolve. Yet for all our focus on long-term and subtle causal mechanisms, events often serve as political turning points in ways that vary over time, last for extended periods of time, and are not always entirely predictable at the time. Beginning from the presumption that change often has proximate as well as latent causes, this tutorial focuses on events as critical junctures in American politics. Our concern with these events is not with why they happened as or when they did but, rather, with how they altered the American political order once they did—with how they caused shifts in political alignments, created demands for political action, or resulted in a reordering of political values. Over the course of the semester, we will look at ten different types of events, ranging from those that seem bigger than government and politics (economic collapse) to those that are daily grist of government and politics (speeches), in each instance juxtaposing two different occurrences of a particular category of event. In so doing, we will seek to use controversial and consequential moments in American politics as a window into deeper questions about political change and the narratives we tell about it.

Objectives.

Thinking Causally. No small part of political science is about figuring out what causes—and was itself caused by—what. But what counts as a cause? How do we know if and when something should be treated as a cause? What kind of evidence should we want to see to feel comfortable about ascribing causality? In the course of juxtaposing—and perhaps even seeing interactions between—different kinds of events over more than 200 years of history, we will be on the lookout for causal relationships and causal chains that give rise to provocative political developments.

Thinking Constitutively. As much as causality is critical to understanding politics, an overly narrow focus on causal explanations and narratives risks obscuring so much of what is interesting about politics. After all, lots of change is the product not of a single spark but of an actor, idea, institution, interest, or event (or some combination of them) that encourages or facilitates some fissure or cleavage in the political order. Given that what the political world looks like—how it is constituted—is essential to understanding outcomes, we will seek to identify not only sufficient conditions but also necessary (and perhaps even enabling) ones, not only strict causes but also substantial contributory factors.

Thinking Contingently. Whether part of causal or constitutive explanations, chance incidents, although we tend not to dwell upon them, do happen—no less (and perhaps more!) in politics than in other endeavors. What if those incidents didn't happen? What if they happened differently? To take questions of contingency seriously is to accept that the political world is full of choices and results that easily could have gone the other way—and to reflect, counterfactually, on what might have happened (or ceased to happen) if they had. As we walk through different sorts of events and the paths along

which they placed the American political future, we will pay attention to the role of unpredictability, happenstance, randomness, and arbitrariness in fueling changes in political life.

Format.

Aside from a pair of seminar-style discussions (one in the first full week of the semester, one in the last week of the semester), we will operate in tutorial format, meeting—you, me, your partner—for approximately one hour each week for ten weeks, with you and your partner alternating between delivering an essay and presenting a critique. Unlike even the smallest of seminars, a tutorial in no small part belongs to—is motored by and dependent upon—*you*. It is your ideas that will serve as the focus of our conversations and your interests that will guide our intellectual progression. Although I will obviously be a(n active) participant in our dialogues, I fundamentally see tutorials not as an occasion for me to hold forth about my ideas but as a chance for us to play with yours. This means that you will have ample opportunity to ask questions, share your views, and generally interrogate the course material; indeed, the nature of a tutorial positively *requires* you to do so.

Materials.

- PSCI 291 course packet (in five volumes)*

Contributions.**

Essays (50%). Five 5-7 page essays, due—via email—to me and your partner no less than *twenty-four hours* prior to tutorial and then read aloud at the start of each session. In completing these essays, you may either answer one of the questions I have provided or—subject to my approval—write on a topic of your choosing, but, regardless of the origins of the prompt, the challenge remains the same: to analyze the assigned material, reflect on the issues at hand, and articulate—and then support with evidence and example—an argument that answers some question about either the specific events or category of event under consideration.

Critiques (15%). Five 2-3 page critiques, due—in hard copy—at tutorial and summarized (but not formally read) following the recitation of your partner’s essay. (You will also provide your partner with an annotated copy of his/her essay with any additional, smaller, or marginal comments or suggestions you may have.) The task here is neither to summarize your partner’s essay nor to answer a different question about the material but, rather, to evaluate your partner’s analytic claims and offer some combination of constructive criticism and an alternative interpretation of them.

Final Reflection (10%). A 4 page reflection on some of the broader themes inherent in the study of American political events, due the last week of the semester and to be discussed at our concluding session.

Tutorial Participation (25%). A process of *active engagement* that entails well more than simply reading an essay or authoring a critique. At base, a tutorial is a conversation, and your job is to be an active, informed, and constructive participant in that conversation. Accordingly, tutorial participation grades are not a “free 20%” but, rather, a reflection of my holistic assessment of your performance in our sessions.

Evaluation.

Written Work. Good writing is good thinking—that is to say, writing well first requires thinking well. The manner in which and the depth with which you approach writing and thinking will be the determining factors in your grade. More specifically, I base grades for written work on the

* The first volume is already available; successive volumes will be available in due course.

** I reserve the right to fail any student who fails any element—essays, critiques, final reflection, participation—of the course.

following three factors: the extent to which you make a clear, compelling, and original *argument*; the extent to which you support that argument through close analysis and consideration of scholarly *evidence*; and the extent to which you organize and articulate your thoughts in a logical and sophisticated *structure*. Needless to say, proper mechanics of writing—including features such as grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and so forth—are assumed; be sure to proofread your work in order to catch any errors along these lines.

Written work in the **A** range is characterized by a strikingly creative, perceptive, and persuasive argument; comprehensive synthesis and trenchant analysis of an abundance of course material; straightforward yet sophisticated organization of thoughts; and clear, cogent, fluid, and error-free prose. Written work in the **B** range is characterized by a sound, original, and reasonably thoughtful argument; competent analysis of various course material; logical and intelligible organization; and clear, cogent, and error-free prose. Written work in the **C** range is characterized by a relatively underdeveloped, simplistic, or derivative argument; partial, inconsistent, or faulty analysis of course material; convoluted organization; and awkward, stilted, or otherwise distracting prose. Written work in the **D** range is characterized by an incoherent or extremely confusing argument; superficial or fleeting engagement with the course material; chaotic or irrational organization; and distorted, error-riddled prose. Written work that lacks any argument or analysis, fails to engage the course material, or is any way incomprehensible earns an **F**.*

Tutorial Participation. Tutorial participation grades are based primarily on three factors: the degree to which you demonstrate analytic or critical understanding of the course material, the degree to which you articulate thoughtful or original questions and arguments in response to that material, and the degree to which you succeed in advancing discussion by responding meaningfully to what your partner has said.

Tutorial participation grades in the **A** range are reserved for those students who consistently come to tutorial with novel questions to ask, insightful comments to offer, and compelling material to reference, generally elevating the level of discussion in the process. Tutorial participation grades in the **B** range are earned by those students who are engaged and participatory but do not stimulate new points of inquiry, carefully listen to their partner, or adequately relate their comments to the direction of the conversation. Tutorial participation grades in the **C** range are for those students who are infrequent or unwilling contributors to tutorial. Participation grades of **D** and **F**, respectively, are for those students who do not arrive adequately prepared for tutorial and for those who disrupt and detract from the overall quality of the conversation.

Responsibilities.

Attendance. Put simply, I expect you to be in tutorial *each and every week*. (It should go without saying that I also expect you to be present in both of our seminar sessions.) This is true in all my courses, but, given the nature of a tutorial, it is absolutely essential here. By choosing to take this class, you are making a commitment to me, to your partner, and to yourself that you will be an active and engaged participant in our academic triumvirate. I would normally say that class will go on without you, but that is simply not possible in a tutorial setting. If there is a legitimate medical or family emergency that makes it impossible for you to attend tutorial, it is essential that you let me and your partner know *immediately*. Otherwise, you should consider your tutorial session a rare ironclad commitment in your week.

Punctuality and Preparedness. As part of your aforementioned commitment to me, your partner, and yourself, you are expected to arrive at tutorial on time, prepared, and *without technological*

* The following adjectives capture the essence of what individual grades mean in this course: truly exceptional (A+), outstanding (A), excellent (A-), very good (B+), good (B), satisfactory (B-), fair (C+), sub-par (C), poor (C-), seriously deficient (D+), minimally acceptable (D), borderline unacceptable (D-), completely unacceptable (F).

distractions. Regardless of whether you have written the essay or the critique for that particular week, you should, first, have thoroughly and carefully read the material before tutorial and, second, be willing and ready to contribute your thoughts about it to our conversation. Although I recognize that students lead busy lives, have commitments (both academic and otherwise) in addition to this course, and may occasionally be affected by unforeseen events and unpredictable circumstances that make adequate preparation difficult, the nature of a tutorial means that unpreparedness is simply not an option. Please give our tutorial the best possible chance at success by scheduling your time and organizing your workload so as to enable robust preparation.

Discourse and Decorum. You are responsible for conducting yourself appropriately—both in your own comments and in your responses (verbal or otherwise) to the comments of your partner. As respectful discourse is the norm, criticism should be reserved for ideas, arguments, and opinions rather than for people; ad hominem comments will not be tolerated.

Submitting Work. Because of the nature of a tutorial—specifically, the way that it places you and your partner in a position of mutual dependence—it is absolutely imperative that you submit work on time. Absent extreme and unavoidable circumstances necessitating the postponement of our tutorial sessions, there is simply no possibility for an extension.

Academic Honesty. I hope—frankly, I *expect*—this will not be an issue, but it is worth repeating that all work you do in this course is governed by the College’s Honor Code. (If you have any questions about how the Honor Code applies, do not hesitate to ask!) I take scholarly integrity very seriously, and any suspected violations will be pursued to the fullest extent. *No exceptions.*

Contact Information.

Email. The most efficient way to reach me is via email. As a general rule, emails received before 9pm will usually receive a reply that day; emails received after 9pm will likely receive a reply on the following day.

Office Hours. For my regularly scheduled office hours, no sign-up or prior notice is necessary, nor is a specific course-related question or concern. (If you wish to schedule an appointment for another time, you should let me know a few days in advance.) Although I am obviously available to discuss any issues that may arise in tutorial or in the reading, you are also more than welcome to stop by and join me for some friendly conversation. Indeed, I encourage you to do so; really—come see me. I am interested in learning about you and your thoughts, and I never (well, ok, hardly ever) tire of talking about American political events.

Some Final Thoughts.

I take teaching seriously, and I hope you will reciprocate by taking learning seriously. That said, I intend for our tutorials to be enjoyable—both for you and for me. This course revolves around rich, interesting, and controversial subjects, many (if not all) of which not only have deep historical resonance but also bear direct connection to contemporary American politics. So expect to teach each other and to learn from each other, but also expect to enjoy yourself; for my part, I promise to do the same.

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Introduction

Plotting American History, Punctuating American Politics (January 30)

Shifts and Shocks, Lineages and Legacies (February 5)

handouts: Mayhew, “Events as Causes”

Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics”

Collier and Collier, “Framework: Critical Junctures and Historical Legacies”

Mahoney, “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology”

Pierson, “Not Just What, but *When*”

Birkland, *After Disaster*

Birkland, *Lessons of Disaster*

Thelen, “How Institutions Evolve”

The Main Events*

I. Wars (week of February 11)

War of 1812

Vietnam

II. Attacks (week of February 18)

Pearl Harbor

9/11

III. Speeches (week of February 25)

“Cross of Gold” (Williams Jennings Bryan)

“I Have a Dream” (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

IV. Elections (week of March 4)

Jefferson-Adams (1800)

Hayes-Tilden (1876)

V. Amendments (week of March 11)

Fifteenth (African-American suffrage)

Nineteenth (women’s suffrage)

VI. Decisions (week of April 1)

McCulloch v. Maryland (national bank)

Engel v. Vitale (school prayer)

VII. Assassinations (week of April 8)

William McKinley

Osama bin Laden

* The Main *Events*! Get it? Ha! (Cue my kids rolling their eyes and groaning at my “terrible puns.” Classic Dad Humor.)

VIII. Scandals (week of April 15)

Petticoat Affair

Watergate

IX. Disasters (week of April 22)

San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

Hurricane Katrina

X. Crises (week of April 29)

Panic of 1873

Great Depression

Conclusion

Eventful Politics (May 7 or 9)

handouts: TBD

I. Wars (week of February 11)

overview: Mayhew, “Wars and American Politics”

Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy*

Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics Since 1898*

War of 1812 (1812-1815)

Hickey, *The War of 1812*

Budiansky, “The War of 1812 and the Rise of American Military Power”

Coles, *The War of 1812*

Eustace, *1812*

Taylor, “Dual Nationalisms”

Watts, *The Republic Reborn*

Kastor, “The War over Federalism”

Vietnam (1954-1975)

Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts*

Nelson, “How Vietnam Broke the Democratic Party”

Small, *At the Water's Edge*

Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics Since 1898*

Balogh, “The Domestic Legacy of the Vietnam War”

Herring, “The War That Never Seems to Go Away”

Marlantes, “Vietnam: The War That Killed Trust”

Belew, *Bring the War Home*

1) For all the talk about how Vietnam fundamentally transformed America, is there a plausible case that the War of 1812 left an even more significant legacy? How should we think about the magnitude of changes caused by each conflict?

2) Is it possible to identify a common set of likely long-term political ramifications of war? Do certain sorts of changes seem almost inevitable regardless of the contours of military engagement? Or are the ramifications too dependent on specific contextual circumstances—military strategies, death totals, popular support—to conceptualize “war” as a generalizable category of political event?

II. Attacks (week of February 18)

overview: Dower, *Cultures of War*
Mueller and Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts*
Kettl, *System under Stress*

Pearl Harbor (1941)

Gillon, *Pearl Harbor*
Lukacs, "No Pearl Harbor?"
Rosenberg, *A Day Which Will Live*
Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy*
Murray, *Historical Memories of the Japanese American Internment and the Struggle for Redress*
Takaki, *Hiroshima*

9/11 (2001)

Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency*
Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy*
Sander and Putnam, "Still Bowling Alone?"
Kettl, *System under Stress*
Liptak, "Civil Liberties Today"
Birkland, *Lessons of Disaster*
Simko, *The Politics of Consolation*

1) Are there meaningful differences in the ways that Pearl Harbor and 9/11 remain in the public consciousness and collective memory? How do citizens continue to experience and commemorate the two? How does the political system continue to wrestle with the cautionary tales of these two historic attacks?

2) Can we draw any lessons from Pearl Harbor and 9/11 about the kinds of unforeseen developments that result from surprise attacks on America from abroad? What sorts of transferable conclusions might we reach about the ways in which punctuated and unexpected violence—distinct from deliberated, declared, and durable war—disturbs the conventions of American politics?

III. Speeches (week of February 25)

overview: Golway, *American Political Speeches*
Zelizer, “In Convention Speeches, History is Made”
Cohen, *Live From the Campaign Trail*
Clymer, “When Presidential Words Led to Swift Action”

“Cross of Gold” (1896)

Bryan, “Cross of Gold”
Kazin, *A Godly Hero*
Bensel, *Passion and Preferences*
Harpine, *From the Front Porch to the Front Page*
Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996*
Magliocca, *The Tragedy of William Jennings Bryan*

“I Have a Dream” (1963)

King, “I Have a Dream”
Sundquist, *King’s Dream*
Hansen, *The Dream*
Younge, *The Speech*

1) To what extent is it possible to identify speeches as causes—as events to which we can ascribe causality—on par with wars or attacks? Does rhetoric actually have the force to provoke—or, at the very least, greatly contribute to—political change?

2) What are the relative weights of person (speaker), place (setting), and content (ideas) in the causal power of speeches? Would another civil rights leader delivering the “I Have a Dream” speech have yielded the same results? Would William Jennings Bryan delivering the “Cross of Gold” as a stump speech rather than a convention address have generated similar responses?

IV. Elections (week of March 4)

overview: Dudley and Shiraev, *Counting Every Vote*
Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments*

Jefferson-Adams (1800)

Sharp, *The Deadlocked Election of 1800*
McCormick, *The Presidential Game*
Amar, *America's Constitution*
Ackerman, *The Failure of the Founding Fathers*
Jillson, "Fighting for Control of the American Dream"
Aldrich, "The Election of 1800"
Appleby, "Thomas Jefferson and the Psychology of Democracy"
Dudley and Shiraev, *Counting Every Vote*

Hayes-Tilden (1876)

Dudley and Shiraev, *Counting Every Vote*
Holt, *By One Vote*
Polakoff, *The Politics of Inertia*
Morris, *Fraud of the Century*

1) Does the election of 1800 justify the notion that elections are the peaceful nation's equivalent of revolution? Or, perhaps tempered by the election of 1876, should we think about their impact as far more modest—or, at the very least, highly contextual?

2) Would the election of 1800 have been a critical juncture regardless of who won? Or was it Jefferson's victory specifically rather than the burgeoning contrast between Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian visions more generally that mark the election as pivotal?

V. Amendments (week of March 11)

overview: Kyvig, *Explicit and Authentic Acts*
Bernstein (with Agel), *Amending America*
Vile, *Constitutional Change in the United States*

Fifteenth (1870)

Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America
Bernstein (with Agel), *Amending America*
Amar, *America's Constitution*
Vorenberg, "Bringing the Constitution Back In"
Farmer and Nieman, "Race, Class, Gender, and the Unintended Consequences of the Fifteenth Amendment"

Nineteenth (1920)

Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America
Andersen, *After Suffrage*
Cott, "Across the Great Divide"
Ritter, *The Constitution as Social Design*
Amar, *America's Unwritten Constitution*
Marilley, "The Unintended Consequences of the Nineteenth Amendment"

- 1) How appropriate and logical is it to think of constitutional amendments as causes in the first place? Do they play a meaningful role at the front end of reactive sequences, or are they more reasonably regarded as culminating points where the changes swept in by prior events are finally codified?
- 2) Given the political developments subsequent to the amendments that explicitly protected the franchise for African-Americans and extended suffrage to women, what sorts of changes might you expect from an amendment that granted the right to vote to any citizen 15 years or older?

VI. Decisions (week of April 1)

overview: McCann, “How the Supreme Court Matters in American Politics”
Vile, *Constitutional Change in the United States*

McCulloch v. Maryland (1819)

McCulloch v. Maryland

Killenbeck, *McCulloch v. Maryland*

Ellis, *Aggressive Nationalism*

Newmyer, *John Marshall and the Heroic Age of the Supreme Court*

Stephenson, *Campaigns and the Court*

Magliocca, *Andrew Jackson and the Constitution*

Engel v. Vitale (1962)

Engel v. Vitale

Dierenfield, *The Battle over School Prayer*

Powe, *The Warren Court and American Politics*

DeFattore, *The Fourth R*

Keynes (with Miller), *The Court vs. Congress*

Alley, *School Prayer*

Alley, *Without a Prayer*

- 1) What are the political dynamics of “backlash” to Supreme Court decisions? Are backlash effects more important in this context than in others? What types of developments result from backlash to judicial action that fail to result in other contexts? What types of developments result from other classes of events but fail to materialize following judicial intervention?
- 2) Do the aftermaths of *McCulloch* and *Engel* suggest that, even across 140+ years, there is a common conception of the role of the Supreme Court in American politics? Or can we identify differences in both the short- and long-term responses to suggest substantial evolution in political and popular understandings of that role?

VII. Assassinations (week of April 8)

overview: Havens, Leiden, and Schmitt, *Assassination and Terrorism*
Donovan, *The Assassins*
Jones and Olken, “Do Assassins Really Change History?”

William McKinley (1901)
Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*
Donovan, *The Assassins*
Fine, “Anarchism and the Assassination of McKinley”

Osama bin Laden (2011)
Schmidle, “Getting bin Laden”
Hersh, “The Killing of Osama bin Laden”
Bowden, *The Finish*
Mahler, “What Do Really Know about Osama bin Laden’s Death?”
Atwan, *After bin Laden*

1) Are the effects of assassination anything more than forcible regime change? Do assassinations alter the polity any more than an electoral defeat (McKinley) or death by ordinary means (bin Laden) would have?

2) Are assassinations the most *sui generis* political events imaginable? Do the peculiarities of assailant and purpose defy categorization? Or can we find lessons through the mythology and macabre romance of orchestrated political murder?

VIII. Scandals (week of April 15)

overview: Summers, “What Happened to Sex Scandals?”

Zelizer, *Governing America*

Fisher, “Trump, Schneiderman, Greitens, and the Changing Shape of Sex Scandals”

Prokop, “Not Every Presidential Scandal is Watergate.”

Petticoat Affair (1829)

Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*

Allgor, *Parlor Politics*

Cole, *The Presidency of Andrew Jackson*

Wood, “One Woman so Dangerous to Public Morals”

Watergate (1972)

Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*

Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency*

Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy*

Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory*

Lawrence, “How the ‘Watergate Babies’ Broke American Politics”

Malkin and Stacks, “What If Watergate Were Still Just an Upscale Address?”

1) How do scandals affect the *culture* of politics—the norms, language, images, and emotions that surround and constitute the political world? Might shifts in how elites and citizens talk and feel about political affairs actually be the most consistent (and persistent) ramification of “extra-curricular” political activity?

2) Why do political analysts and actors so frequently refer to “post-Watergate politics”? How might American politics have looked if the break-in either never happened or never came to light?

IX. Disasters (week of April 22)

overview: Hopkins, “The Political Fallout of Natural Disasters”

Birkland, *After Disaster*

Birkland, *Lessons of Disaster*

San Francisco Earthquake and Fire (1906)

Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906*

Kurzman, *Disaster!*

Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World*

Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906*

Odell and Weidenmier, “Real Shock, Monetary Aftershock”

Rozario, *The Culture of Calamity*

Roberts, *Disasters and the American State*

Perkins et al., “The 1906 Earthquake and Public Policy”

Hurricane Katrina (2005)

Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*

Cooper and Block, *Disaster*

Rozario, *The Culture of Calamity*

Angel, Bell, Beausoleil, and Lein, *Community Lost*

Boyd-Franklin, “Racism, Trauma, and Resilience”

Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*

Bouie, “Where Black Lives Matter Began”

1) What do natural disasters suggest about the capacity of *local* events to stimulate *national* political change? Do the crises in San Francisco and New Orleans point to a political system where the lives of ordinary Americans—outside the Beltway and away from corridors of power—actually matter or one in which they are largely irrelevant?

2) To what extent do different environmental catastrophes foster generally similar types of state-society relations? Do earthquakes and hurricanes—and, potentially, tornados and floods—tend to bring standard or variable citizen calls for action, predictable or arbitrary governmental responses to address damage?

X. Crises (week of April 29)

overview: Sobel, *Panic on Wall Street*
McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, *Political Bubbles*

Panic of 1873 (1873)

Lucibello, "Panic of 1873"
Wicker, *Banking Panics of the Gilded Age*
Lee, "New York and the Panic of 1873"
Nelson, "The Real Great Depression"
Barreyre, "The Politics of Economic Crises"
Rezneck, "Distress, Relief, and Discontent in the U.S. during the Depression of 1873-78"

Great Depression (1929)

McElvaine, *The Great Depression*
Smiley, *Rethinking the Great Depression*
Kennedy, "What the New Deal Did"
Cowie, *The Great Exception*
Himmelberg, *The Great Depression and the New Deal*
Leuchtenburg, *The FDR Years*
Milkis, "Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Economic Constitutional Order, and the New Politics of Presidential Leadership"
Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*

1) What do the Panic of 1873 and the Great Depression suggest about the way that politics is fundamentally driven by forces beyond political control? About the relationship between economic stability and political order?

2) In terms of its lasting influence on the shape of American political values and American governmental power, was the Depression the single most consequential event since the Revolution (or, at least, the single most consequential event we have studied this semester)? What would an event need to do—what kinds of changes would it need to cause, what kind of durability would its effects need to exhibit—in order to be deemed *more* consequential?