

HIST-296-002: *A History of the White House*

Monday/Thursday, 12:55-2:10 PM

American University -- Fall 2020

Dr. Matthew Costello

Office Hours -- Thursday, 11 AM—12:30 PM or by appointment

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Introduction

This course explores the history and evolution of America's most prominent home and national landmark. Spanning from the founding of our nation's capital to the present, it will examine the architectural transformations of the President's House; the history of its occupants and staff; the presidency; the conceptualization of the White House as a "living museum"; and the building's development as a cultural symbol for political democracy and diplomacy.

Learning Outcomes

This course has three objectives: to instill historical knowledge, acquire and apply historical methods, and enhance interpretative skills. First, it will provide students with an institutional history of the President's House. This history will be presented thematically, allowing students to engage with specific topics that interest them or align with their specialty, major, or minor. Second, it will provide insight into the processes of presenting White House history as public history. Although the building is now one of the most recognized historical sites in the world and open for public tours, this was not always so. The evolution of the White House as a historic site reveals how Americans have understood the presidency and the relationship between the Chief Executive and the American people. Lastly, students will conduct primary and secondary source research on various elements of the home (its uses, residents, staff, artifacts, etc.)

Course Readings (required)

Books

Betty Monkman, *The Living White House*, 14th edition, White House Historical Association, 2017 <https://shop.whitehousehistory.org/products/the-living-white-house>

Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*

https://www.amazon.com/Behind-Scenes-Thirty-Years-Slave/dp/1684221129/ref=pd_sbs_14_1/135-3055884-4835937?_encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=1684221129&pd_rd_r=54248b91-9d01-11e9-8e1a-198b3ca63822&pd_rd_w=0mYzv&pd_rd_wg=Ijc6d&pf_rd_p=588939de-d3f8-42f1-a3d8-d556eae5797d&pf_rd_r=KYCVPHH5JDS8H87M3K0B&psc=1&refRID=KYCVPHH5JDS8H87M3K0B

Primary Sources

Every class has required readings (a book, primary sources, or excerpts from larger works). **You must purchase the books for the class.** The primary sources and excerpts will be made available online through Blackboard. The documents will be used for in-class discussion and other learning exercises. **Be sure to read and research them before class!**

Suggested Readings

William Crook, *Through Five Administrations: Lincoln, Johnson, Grant, Hayes, and Garfield*, also known as *Memories of the White House: Personal Recollections of Colonel W.H. Crook* (1911)

Elizabeth Jaffrey, *Secrets of the White House* (1926)

Henrietta Nesbitt, *White House Diary: F.D.R's Housekeeper* (1948)

Grading Scale

A	100-94	C+	79-77
A-	93-90	C	76-73
B+	89-87	C-	72-70
B	86-83	D	69-64
B-	82-80	F	63 or less

Course Assignments

This course has four components worth 1,000 total points: a take-home midterm examination (30%--300 points), classroom participation (10%--100 points), The People's House biographical essay (20%--200 points), and a final research paper (40%--400 points). **You may turn in late work, but for every day late I will subtract 10% from the final grade of the assignment.**

All assignments must be emailed to the instructor before the end of class on the date the assignment is due (2:10 pm). Please send your assignments as Word documents, as this will allow me to insert track changes and comments.

- **Midterm examination (30%)** will be a take-home examination and test knowledge of the first half of the semester through identifications, a primary source exercise, and essay questions. A review session will be provided prior to the submission deadline so students can ask any questions.
- **Classroom participation (10%)** is measured by engagement with the instructor, course materials, and in-class activities, as well as a willingness to ask questions or respond to peers, etc. This can also be measured by emailing questions and attending office hours. I encourage dialogue and debate in class, **but respectfulness is essential.**
- **The People's House biographical essay (20%)** requires students to identify, research, and write about a historic person who worked at the White House prior to 1945. **You**

cannot write about presidents, first ladies, or members of the first family—rather this assignment is designed to encourage students to research the lesser known people who worked at the White House. **You must get instructor approval of your individual, and the biographical essay should include as much detail as possible about the individual’s life and their role working at the White House. Essays should be 1,000-1,500 words, double-spaced, use 12-point font, Chicago Manual Style footnotes, and a corresponding bibliography in line with CMS. Extra credit will be given if you can find historic images of the person or any supplemental historical documentation. If so, please attach as an appendix to the essay.**

- **The final research paper (40%)** will substitute as your final examination, but it will require students to work continuously throughout the semester by **submitting stages that must be approved by the instructor.** The first stage (worth 10% of the final paper grade) is identifying the topic; the second stage (10%) is submitting a thesis, brief outline, and list of sources; the third stage (40%) is a complete draft of the paper, which the instructor will read and offer feedback with track changes and comments; the final stage (40%) requires submission of the revised paper. This paper is worth 40% of your overall grade in this class. Submitting these stages will ensure that you complete your work in a timely fashion, and it will give you feedback that will ultimately improve your final research paper. **Final papers should be five pages in length (double-spaced), use 12-point font, and include footnotes and a corresponding bibliography in line with CMS. As an additional incentive, exceptional papers will not only receive a high grade but also be considered for publication with WHHA on our website.**

These writing assignments account for 90% of your class grade. For all of these assignments, students should follow the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) for their footnotes and bibliography. For more information on CMS and to see examples of it, please see this website:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

- Primary sources are periodicals, newspapers, letters, correspondence, and other texts from the era in question.
- Secondary sources are books, articles, websites of creditable historical organizations, etc. that offer accurate information on a particular person, event, place, etc. These are written after the historical moment in question but rely on primary and secondary sources to tell the story.
- Here are some online resources to consult as you consider possible topics and begin researching:
 - American University research databases--
<https://subjectguides.library.american.edu/az.php>
 - WHHA--<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/>
 - WHHA’s Digital Library--<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/digital-library>
 - The American Presidency Project--<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>
 - American University First Ladies Initiative--
<https://www.american.edu/spa/gov/first-ladies/>

- The President’s Park, National Park Service--
<https://www.nps.gov/whho/index.htm>
- Founders Online--<https://wwwFOUNDERS.archives.gov/>
- Library of Congress--<https://loc.gov/>
- The National Archives--<https://www.archives.gov/>
- Any of the fourteen presidential libraries that are operated by the National Archives and Records Administration (Herbert Hoover—Barack Obama)
- <https://hoover.archives.gov/>
- <https://fdrlibrary.org/>
- <https://trumanlibrary.org/>
- <https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/>
- <https://www.jfklibrary.org/>
- <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/>
- <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/>
- <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/>
- <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/>
- <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/>
- <https://www.bush41.org/>
- <https://www.clintonlibrary.gov/>
- <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/>
- <https://www.obamalibrary.gov/>
- Other presidential libraries include:
- <http://www.alplm.org/>
- <http://www.usgrantlibrary.org/>
- <https://www.rbhayes.org/>
- <https://bhpsite.org/>
- <https://mckinleymuseum.org/>
- <https://www.trpresidentiallibrary.org/>
- <http://www.woodrowwilson.org/>
- <https://forbeslibrary.org/calvin-coolidge-presidential-library-and-museum/>
- For earlier presidents, search for the websites of their historic homes

Course Schedule

The instructor reserves the right to change readings, topics, and deadlines if need be

Constructing the White House

Week 1

8/24/20: Welcome/introduction/syllabus

Reading: HIST 296 syllabus

8/27/20: Building the President’s House

Readings: Primary Sources Week 1, discussion

The White House as a Home

Week 2

8/31/20: The First Ladies

Readings: *White House History*, “The Office of the First Lady: Managing Public Duties, Private Lives, and Changing Expectations”

Guest Speaker: Diana Carlin

9/3/20: The First Ladies, discussion

Reading: Primary Sources Week 2

Guest Speaker: Deesha Dyer

Week 3

9/7/20: No class (Labor Day)

9/10/20: First Families

Readings: Monkman, Chapter 3: The First Family at Home; Primary Sources Week 3, discussion

Assignment: Stage 1 due (email topic idea for instructor approval before 2:10 pm)

Week 4

9/14/20: The President’s Park

9/17/20: The White House Grounds

Guest Speaker: Jonathan Pliska

Readings: Jonathan Pliska, “A Beautiful Spot Capable of Every Improvement,” <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/a-beautiful-spot-capable-of-every-improvement>; Primary Sources Week 4

Week 5

9/21/20: Slavery and the White House

Reading: <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/building-the-white-house>

9/24/20: Slavery in the President's Neighborhood

Readings: <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/slavery-in-the-thomas-jefferson-white-house>
<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/additional-resources-for-slavery-in-the-presidents-neighborhood> (explore the galleries of images and primary sources at the bottom)

Guest Speaker: Lina Mann

Week 6

9/28/20: Class discussion on *Behind the Scenes*, reading guide on Blackboard

Reading: Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*

10/1/20: The Working White House

Guest Speaker: Adrian Miller

The White House as an Office

Week 7

10/5/20: The Presidency

Guest Speaker: Colleen Shogan

Reading: William Howell, "On Being President", in *Thinking About the Presidency* available on Blackboard

10/8/20: The Presidency

Readings: Monkman, Chapter 1: Presidents at Work in Their Home

Assignment: Stage 2 (outline and sources, email to instructor by 2:10 pm)

Week 8

10/12/20: The East and West Wings

Readings: Elizabeth Beard Goldsmith, "Tempest in a Teapot: Truman's Failed Attempt at an Office Addition," *White House History* no. 5, spring 1999 (13-22)
http://issuu.com/whhapubl/docs/spring1999_scan?e=1800979/8531347

10/15/20: Guest speaker Anita McBride

Assignment: The People's House Biographical Essay (email to instructor by 2:10 pm)

Week 9

10/19/20: Review session before exam (optional)

10/22/20: Midterm Exam (no class, exam due by email to instructor by 2:10 pm)

Week 10

10/26/20: The Press and the Presidency

10/29/20: Discussion, guest speaker—Mike McCurry

Readings: Primary Sources Week 10

Week 11

The White House as a Museum

11/2/20: History of the White House Collection

11/5/20: Guest speaker William Allman

Reading: William G. Allman, “The White House Collection: Reminders of 1814—A New Look for the Bicentennial,” *White House History* 35 (summer 2014), 46-67.

http://issuu.com/whhapubl/docs/31_reduced?e=1800979/34527606

The White House as a Symbol

Week 12

11/9/20: White House as Symbol and Stage

11/12/20: Discussion

Guest speaker: Stewart McLaurin

Week 13

White House Myths in Popular Culture

11/16/20: Debunking White House Myths

11/19/20: Discussion, Primary Sources Week 13

Assignment: Stage 3 due (rough draft of paper, email to instructor by 2:10 pm)

Week 14

11/23/20: Monday before Thanksgiving—no class

Week 15

11/30/20: White House Security

12/3/20: Guest Speaker TBD

12/10/20: Research Paper (final paper due by email to instructor by 5:00 pm)