A LETTER FROM THE SECTION PRESIDENT

With summer just around the corner, it is not too early to start thinking about this year’s upcoming APSA conference in Chicago. This year’s conference theme, “Political Science and Beyond,” is a perfect opportunity for presidency scholars, as the conference organizers suggest, to “think across disciplinary boundaries” as we highlight all of the outstanding research being pursued by our colleagues in the Presidency Research Group. I would also like to extend an early “thank you” to Meena Bose for her hard work in putting together all of the panels for what promises to be a terrific conference experience for all of us. Remember to pre-register, particularly if you are a panel participant, and to book your hotel early.

This has been an interesting few months in Washington, D.C. following the Democratic victory in the 2006 midterm elections, especially for those of us interested in presidential/congressional relations. In addition, of particular interest to scholars has been the ongoing debate stemming from Executive Order 13233, signed by President George W. Bush in 2001 to limit access to documents in presidential libraries governed by the Presidential Records Act of 1978. EO 13233 rescinded an earlier order, EO 12667, signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1989, that established procedures for the incumbent and former president to review certain presidential records twelve years after the president left office and to block release of documents based on a claim of executive privilege. Currently, under EO 13233, the White House reviews documents after they have been reviewed and processed by the archivists prior to their release, and the current president also defers the executive privilege claim to the former president or his representative. On March 1st, a subcommittee of the House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform held a hearing on bill H.R. 1255, “The Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2007,” which called for EO 13233 to be rescinded. The PRG and APSA sent a joint letter to the House subcommittee to express concern over EO 13233. On March 14th, the House passed the bill by a 333-93 vote, and Senate consideration of the bill is planned for later this year.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that the George C. Edwards III Dissertation Award fund has reached its first milestone with initial contributions totaling just over $5,000. Our ultimate goal is to reach $10,000 for the endowment, which will provide both a $200 award for the dissertation prize recipient as well as a $200 award for the Neustadt book award each year. Please consider making a contribution to this worthy program, which will continue to recognize outstanding presidency scholarship, both in dissertation and book form, for many years to come. A reminder that the first dissertation award will be given in 2008, and the first selection committee to consider nominations will be formed this summer along with all of the other PRG award committees.

I wish everyone a restful and productive summer, and I look forward to seeing all of you at APSA in Chicago.

Lori Cox Han
Chapman University
**PRG OFFICERS**

President  
Lori Cox Han  
Chapman University  
Department of Political Science  
1 University Drive  
Orange, CA 92866  
lhan@chapman.edu

Vice President & President-Elect  
Victoria A. Farrar-Myers  
University of Texas, Arlington  
Department of Political Science  
PO Box 19539  
601 South Nedderman  
Arlington, TX 76019-0539  
victoria@uta.edu

Secretary/Treasurer  
Charles E. Walcott  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
Department of Political Science  
528 Major Williams Hall - 0130  
Blacksburg, VA 24061  
cwalcott@vt.edu

PRG Report Editor  
Richard J. Powell  
Department of Political Science  
University of Maine  
229 North Stevens Hall  
Orono, ME 04469  
Phone: (207) 581-1795  
Fax: (207) 581-4856  
rpowell@maine.edu

Editorial Assistant:  
Meghan S. Simonds

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

Randall Adkins (2005-2008), University of Nebraska, Omaha  
David Gray Adler (2004-2007), Idaho State University  
Lydia Andrade (2004-2007), University of the Incarnate Word  
Nancy Baker (2006-2009), New Mexico State University  
Terri Bimes (2006-2009), Harvard University  
James Campbell (2004-2007), University at Buffalo, SUNY  
David B. Cohen (2005-2008), University of Akron  
David Crockett (2006-2009), Trinity University  
Brendan Doherty (2005-2008), University of California, Berkeley (Graduate Student)  
Chris Dolan (2005-2008), University of Central Florida  
Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha (2006-2009), University of North Texas  
John Fortier (2004-2007), American Enterprise Institute  
Karen Hoffman (2005-2008), Wheeling Jesuit University  
Christopher S. Kelley (2006-2007), Miami University  
Martha Joynt Kumar (Ex Officio), Towson University  
Andrew Rudalevige (2006-2009), Dickinson College  
Steven Schier (2005-2008), Carleton College  
Stephen Weatherford (2005-2008), University of California, Santa Barbara

Visit the American Political Science Association’s website at [http://www.apsanet.org/](http://www.apsanet.org/) to access the online program for:  
2007 Annual Meeting: Political Science and Beyond  
Chicago, IL  
August 30 - September 2, 2007

Two great roundtables on the 2008 presidential race and the George W. Bush presidency, as well as panels on such diverse topics as presidential rhetoric, appointments, and legacies are scheduled.
Michael Grossman, one of our founding members, died May 14th in Oakland, California, from complications arising from pancreatic cancer. He was 70.

When she read of his death, Helen Thomas, dean of the White House press corps, captured his strengths with her words: “He was such a nice man. When he came into the Press Room, he was never intruding. He was quietly observing. I respected him.” She remembered him from our days researching Portraying the President: The White House and the News Media as well as from his visits on subsequent projects. Her words play to what his strengths were. He was generous, interested in people, probing, and a good listener. He brought those gifts to his personal and professional lives. He was, in the words of a chapter title in that book, a “diplomat and negotiator.”

His skill at both came from his personal strengths, but also from his personal experiences. After getting his PhD from Johns Hopkins University, Mike worked at the American Association of University Professors. He worked on cases involving academic freedom, due process, and transparency in university operations. I found out about his AAUP work when Mike and I were at a conference in the early 1980s hosted by the Center for the Study of the Presidency. We met up with the Center’s president, Gordon Hoxie, who many of you will remember for his role with that organization. Previously Hoxie served as founder and president of C. W. Post College, which Mike had investigated in his role with the AAUP. Gordon remembered Mike from their conversations when each was in his earlier post, which explained Gordon’s frosty greeting for Mike.

As department chair at Towson University, Mike was the diplomat in bringing together department factions and worked as the negotiator with the administration in building the department through increased positions. In 1971 Mike recruited me to the department and four years later we began our work together. In addition to learning a great deal about the worlds of the White House and news organization, we enjoyed a partnership where our work benefited from the thinking and action of the other. Sometimes that meant playing good-cop-bad-cop in interviews and, sometimes, getting more information than we would have individually. When one of us needed encouragement to contact a growing official, press harder for an interview with a reluctant reporter, or get through a difficult chapter, the other provided the needed boost.

We worked so closely together for so long that we learned to read where the other was headed when we were doing our interviews. One particularly memorable occasion was an interview we did with Nixon White House adviser, John Ehrlichman. It was shortly before Ehrlichman was to report to prison for his Watergate role. We came to Washington that day to interview Pierre Salinger at the Madison Hotel. Once we got there, we discovered he checked out two days earlier with no message for us. We decided to have breakfast and figure out our next steps. I spotted John Ehrlichman at the same coffee shop we were in, quickly got up to see if he would talk to us, and brought him to our table where he sat next to Mike. In my haste, I neglected to tell Mike what I was doing. Ehrlichman sat down next to Mike, which made it difficult for him to recognize who it was as he couldn’t see his face. Mike began the question-ing and started with queries from our list of press questions. With a strong frown, I redirected the questioning using our internalized list of White House staff queries. Later Mike told me he thought it was Johnny Apple of the New York Times sitting next to him and was surprised when he figured out through my line of questioning who it really was.

Mike did catch up with Pierre Salinger and, through their encounter, learned a lesson in assessing presidential library documents. Mike asked Salinger about the White House communications role of Kennedy staffer, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Salinger asked Mike what made him think Schlesinger had any role on the administration’s communications. Mike pulled out a Schlesinger memorandum he found in the Kennedy Library. Schlesinger read over it and asked Michael if he knew who the memo was written for. Sensing the question had an answer he was soon to find out, Mike asked Salinger who it was for. Salinger replied: “You.” Salinger then went on to debunk the notion of Schlesinger’s involvement in their publicity operation.

While we did not regularly write together after Mike moved to California, we stayed close friends. I spoke with him a week before he died; shortly after he learned he had pancreatic cancer. He was to have tests that week for a complete diagnosis, but a fatal infection quickly set in. During our hour-long conversation, in addition to his illness, we talked as we often did, of politics, the media, and baseball. He was looking forward to his days ahead, however many there were to be. In the end, there were far fewer than he expected or his family and friends wished.

Here is a thumbnail sketch of Mike’s life. He was born in 1936 in Boston, Massachusetts, and attended public schools in Brookline, Mass. He graduated from the U.S. Army Dependent High School in Frankfurt, Germany where his father was stationed with the United States Information Agency. After receiving a BA from Oberlin College in 1957, he worked briefly at the Washington Post and served in the US Army. He earned his Ph.D. in political science in 1968 from Johns Hopkins University. He was a student and life-long friend of Frank Rourke with whom he wrote several articles. From 1967-1970, Grossman served as Associate Secretary for the American Association of University Professors. He served as chairman of the Department of Political Science at Towson University from 1970 until 1977 and then taught in the department until 1993. He also taught political science and communications courses at Johns Hopkins, Goucher College, UC Davis, Cal State East Bay, and Mills College. His last academic position was as a Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He was the recipient of a Ford Foundation grant to fund research for Portraying the President, was a president of the National Capital Political Science Association, and secretary-treasurer of the Presidency Research Group. He is survived by two daughters and four grandchildren.
A Century of Presidential Plays
Bruce E. Altschuler

Although films about the presidency have been a popular subject for presidential scholars, there is no equivalent literature about plays that portray real and fictional Presidents. As I have started research to begin filling in this gap by examining how theatrical depictions of the presidency have changed over the past hundred years, I have come across many such plays, some well known, others long forgotten. Below is an annotated list which makes no pretense of being complete. If any readers are aware of omitted plays, I would appreciate their sending me details at altschul@oswego.edu. Thanks to Robert Spitzer, Andrew Rudalevige and Thomas Hischak for bringing some of these plays to my attention.

Abe Lincoln in Illinois by Robert Sherwood, 1938. This Pulitzer Prize winning play is even better known for the 1940 film version with Raymond Massey reprising his stage role as Lincoln. The play depicts Lincoln’s pre-presidential life, focusing on the personal, ending with his departure for Washington, DC to take office. Although successfully revived by the Phoenix Theatre in 1963, a 1993 version at Lincoln Center ran for only 40 performances.

Abraham Lincoln by John Drinkwater, 1919. After a triumphant London run, British poet and playwright Drinkwater’s drama transferred to Broadway for a successful 193 performance run despite Alexander Woollcott’s criticism that the play seemed “like a dramatized Child’s history of Lincoln.” It presents Lincoln’s presidency in six scenes from Lincoln’s decision to run to his assassination, each introduced by two poetry reciting chroniclers who also provide the play’s conclusion. Although by today’s standards the language is stilted and the structure awkward, the play has occasionally been revived for political or educational reasons, most notably in postwar Japan on the anniversary of Lincoln’s birth “to present the meaning of democracy to the Japanese.”

American Illiad by Donald Freed, 2001. A satirical fantasy by a co-author of Secret Honor that depicts a meeting between dead Presidents Kennedy and Nixon, this play had a run of a month and a half in Burbank, California but met with little critical success.

Assassins by John Weidman (book) and Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics), 1991. The characters in this musical are those who tried, successfully or not, to kill Presidents. In the play, they meet in a carnival shooting gallery and several other locations. Neither the critics (although many admired Sondheim’s ambition) nor the public seemed ready for so dark a musical as the off-Broadway production ran for less than two months. By the time of its belated 2004 Broadway debut, enough had changed that it won five Tony awards. When this critical acclaim failed to translate into financial success, the play closed after only 101 performances.

The Best Man by Gore Vidal, 1960. Vidal’s most successful play depicts the behind the scenes struggle for the presidential nomination at a fictional convention in “perhaps July 1960.” After a 520 performance run, it was adapted into a 1964 film for which Vidal updated some of the material, including the addition of a discussion of desegregation. The play has frequently been revived, most notably in a limited Broadway run in 2000 that won a Drama Desk award for best revival. Because the main issue in the play concerns the ethics of leaking information about candidates’ past personal behavior, the play has retained quite a bit of relevance despite the revolution in the presidential nominating process that has occurred since the play was originally written. Every four years, Vidal made a few revisions to make the play more current until concluding in 1988 that continuing to do so “didn’t work, for a lot of reasons, and I haven’t updated it since.”

Buchanan Dying by John Updike, 1974. Begun as a novel, Updike’s attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of his fellow Pennsylvanian is designed to be read rather than performed. 180 pages long, with an 80 page afterword explaining the historical background necessary to understand the play fully, and a cast of 45, it is surprising that this play has ever been performed. With some cuts it received a week’s worth of full scale productions in 1976 at Franklin and Marshall College in Buchanan’s home town of Lancaster. The only other performances were in a more sharply abridged reader’s theater production at San Diego State University. Concluding that “it is a cruel play to inflict on a performing company,” Updike noted in 2000 that “no further productions have been proposed.”

Camping with Henry and Tom by Mark St. Germain, 1995. This off-Broadway production was very loosely based on an actual 1921 camping trip on which Henry (Ford) and Tom (Edison) invited President Warren Harding. As the three men, having left their base camp containing their families’ reporters and the Secret Service, are marooned in the woods, Ford presses Harding to sell him the Muscle Shoals hydroelectric plant cheaply as Edison supplies sarcastic commentary. Most critics thought the play failed to deliver on a potentially interesting satiric premise but the play has had a number of regional productions since then.

An Evening With Richard Nixon by Gore Vidal, 1972. In this satire, Pro (based primarily on William F. Buckley, Jr.) and Con (a stand-in for Vidal) question Richard Nixon whose replies come from the historical record even if they are sometimes wrenches out of context. Other targets of Vidal’s wit include Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Eisenhower and Truman. To ensure fairness, George Washington presides. Despite a Tony Award for George S. Irving’s portrayal of Nixon, the critical and commercial drubbing of the play caused Vidal to promise never to write another one.
First Lady by Katharine Dayton and George S. Kaufman, 1936. Believing that her Saturday Evening Post series “Mrs. Democrat and Mrs. Republican” could be adapted for the theater, Katharine Dayton recruited George S. Kaufman as her co-author. The result was one of the hits of the 1935-36 season. The main character, a granddaughter of a former President, schemes to make her Secretary of State husband the next President as her arch-rival seeks to do the same for her Supreme Court Justice spouse. Even at the time this comedy was considered lightweight with reviewer Brooks Atkinson terming it “a very funny portrait of Washington manners” with “no claim to artistic eminence.” Nevertheless in 1937 it was adapted into a movie starring Kay Francis and Preston Foster. Atkinson’s verdict on a 1952 revival featuring real life politician and actress Helen Gahagan was that “the formula for ‘First Lady’ seems obsolete now and the satire does not touch on the foibles of today.” However, it is occasionally revived as a period piece. Two examples occurred at the Berkshire Theater Festival in 1980 and the Yale Rep in 1996.

The First Lady in the Land by Charles Nirdlinger, 1911. Subtitled “When Dolly Todd Took In Boarders,” this comedy depicts James Madison’s courtship of widow Dolly Todd who was introduced to him by her boarder Aaron Burr. The scene then shifts to Washington DC where the rise of the Madison and decline of Burr is chronicled. The play ran on Broadway for 46 performances, but seems to have been largely forgotten since.

Frost/Nixon by Peter Morgan, 2006. After great acclaim in London, this play about David Frost’s interviews of Richard Nixon transferred to Broadway in 2007. Playwright Morgan wrote the screenplays for the films “The Queen” and “The Last King of Scotland.”

The Gang’s All Here by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, 1958. Better known as the authors of “Inherit the Wind” and “Auntie Mame,” Lawrence and Lee depict a fictional President with striking similarities to Warren G. Harding – a Massachusetts governor as vice-president, an extramarital affair, less than honest poker buddies, a giveaway of publicly owned oil reserves and a mysterious death. Before his death, however, President Hastings realizes the error of his ways and, as co-author Lawrence put it, “enters the White House as a boy and leaves it as a man.” The play ran on Broadway for a respectable 132 performances, but, perhaps because it is more drama than comedy, has not had much of an afterlife. A rare revival was by the Arena Stage in Washington, DC during its 1960-61 season.

Give ’Em Hell Harry by Samuel Gallu, 1975. This one man show was presented not long after the publication of Merle Miller’s interviews with Truman, contributing to the enhancement of Truman’s reputation. It has been frequently performed since then, not only in the United States, but also in other countries, including Great Britain, Germany and Israel. A Seattle performance was filmed and released as a movie, also in 1975.

I’d Rather Be Right by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart (book), Richard Rodgers (music) and Lorenz Hart (lyrics), 1937. Phil Barker dreams of encountering Franklin Roosevelt in Central Park in order to tell the President that he and his fiancée cannot get married until the government balances its budget. Touched by their plight, FDR immediately orders the Cabinet to do so. In case this plot was not implausible enough, George S. Cohan played a dancing Roosevelt in the original Broadway hit. Because of this, revivals have generally been concert versions, allowing the audience to listen to the Rodgers and Hart music without being burdened by the play’s plotline.

If Booth Had Missed by Arthur Goodman, 1931. The title suggests the interesting premise of this drama. Surviving Booth’s attempted assassination due to the heroics of a black porter, Lincoln is undermined by a conspiracy including Thaddeus Stevens, Edwin Stanton, and Ulysses Grant which engineers his impeachment. Like the actual Andrew Johnson, the fictional Lincoln is narrowly acquitted by the Senate. However, he is immediately shot by a newspaper editor. Perhaps because of the contrast between the play’s incredibly benevolent Lincoln, who even shows mercy toward Booth, and the dark ending, the play ran only for 21 performances and seems to have vanished from the repertory since.

In Time to Come by Howard Koch and John Huston, 1941. Written by co-authors far better known for their film work, the play sympathetically recounts Woodrow Wilson’s struggle for Senate ratification of the Versailles Treaty and particularly for American membership in the League of Nations. Although concluding that it was “no great shakes as a play – at times rhetorical, at moments wooden,” Time’s reviewer noted that “the play’s title is a sharp plea that what happened after the last war shall not happen after this one.” However, perhaps because the attack on Pearl Harbor just three weeks before the play opened made arguments against isolation moot, the Broadway production lasted for only 40 performances and has remained obscure since.

Jackie: An American Life by Gip Hoppe, 1997. First written as a series of sketches presented at the Academy Playhouse in New Orleans, “Jackie” migrated to Broadway where it ran for 128 performances despite the scorn of critics and its author’s claim that “I never thought of ‘Jackie’ as a Broadway play. I wrote it as a lark, as something to keep me busy during a winter on the Cape.” Mixing puppets and live actors, its characters include John Kennedy (and most of his family), Richard Nixon and numerous news media notables. The main theme suggests that Jacqueline Kennedy felt trapped by her fame. Despite the critical verdict, “Jackie” has had a post-Broadway life as a regional theater production and was even staged in London in 1998.

Let ‘Em Eat Cake by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind (book), George Gershwin (music) and Ira Gershwin (lyrics), 1933. In this sequel to “Of Thee I Sing” (below), when President Wintergreen’s empty slogans prove insufficient to win him reelection against John Tweedledee (“Vote for Tweedledee – What’s the Difference?”) and the Supreme Court fails to overturn the election result, he successfully organizes a military coup installing him as dictator. Although he too is soon overthrown and sentenced to the guillotine, democracy is eventually restored and everyone lives happily every after. Audiences failed to find this amusing, resulting in a run of only 90 performances. The failure was so complete that most of the score and book was considered lost until it was rediscovered in 1978 in the Library of Congress. Since then there have been several concert versions, a 1978 revival by the Berkshire Theater Festival and even a 1994 BBC radio performance.
Lincoln at the White House by Benjamin Chapin, 1909. Running on Broadway for only 21 performances, this play was primarily a vehicle for the playwright to perform the lead as President Lincoln, ending as he leaves the White House for Ford’s Theatre. “It is a simple little play, lightened with humor and anecdote,” wrote one critic who concluded “as an object lesson for school children it may be heartily commended.”

The Lincoln Mask by V. J. Longhi, 1972. This play begins with Lincoln’s assassination then flashes back to his courtship of Mary Todd. Critics found few insights and little dramatic interest in the play and audiences seemed to agree as it closed after 19 previews and 8 performances.

MacBird by Barbara Garson, 1967. Lyndon Johnson is inserted into a satirical version of “Macbeth” where he is responsible for the murder of John Ken O’Dunc but is eventually vanquished by Robert Ken O’Dunc. A typical line goes “bubble and bubble, toil and trouble, burn baby burn and cauldron bubble.” The play generated so much controversy that Showcard refused to print the program and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover denounced it as “a satirical piece of trash which maliciously defames the President of our country.” None of this kept audiences away from successful runs at New York’s Village Gate and in Los Angeles. A 2006 revival in Washington, DC, however, demonstrated the limited shelf life of such satire.

A Man of the People by Thomas Dixon, 1920. This play depicts a crisis late in Lincoln’s first term when some leaders of his party, fearing defeat in the 1864 election, suggested he withdraw. News of General Sherman’s success in Atlanta ends the crisis. Playwright Dixon is far better known as the author “The Clansman,” a novel justifying the Klan that became the basis for D.W. Griffith’s film “The Birth of a Nation.” His play closed after 15 performances.

Mister Lincoln by Herbert Mitgang, 1980. Written by a New York Times correspondent who was also a Lincoln biographer, this one man show seeks to demonstrate Lincoln’s humanity by quoting from his wit and wisdom. Mitgang said that he “wanted to get across many of the things that I feel are misunderstood about Lincoln.” Although the original ran only for 16 performances, the play has proven to be a popular vehicle for actors from its first, Roy Dotrice, to amateur John Brantigham who played Lincoln in a number of cities in Asia, including Shanghai, in 2004. Dotrice’s performance at a restored Ford’s Theater in Washington, DC was taped for television on Lincoln’s birthday in 1980 and shown a year later.

Mr. President by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse (book) and Irving Berlin (music and lyrics), 1962. In Berlin’s final musical, the Soviet Union cancels a goodwill visit from a blandly virtuous American President. Nevertheless, he flies to Moscow, landing at night, quickly defending the American way of life, then returning home. So great is his virtue that after leaving office he refuses to make the political deals that would guarantee him a Senate seat. Although critics found the jokes tepid and the music less than Berlin’s best, President Kennedy attended the Washington opening and the play ran for a profitable 265 performances on Broadway. A radically rewritten version, seeking to incorporate the 2000 election with characters such as George Shrub, Jr., Al Bore and Will and Chillary Fenton seemed to the critics to be little more than an extended sketch.

Nixon’s Nixon by Russell Lees, 1996. This cleverly titled satire depicts an August 7, 1974 late night conversation between Nixon and Henry Kissinger who, seeking to protect his job as Secretary of State after Nixon’s inevitable departure, urges the President to resign rather than face impeachment. Although the meeting did occur, the conversation was not taped, leaving Lees free to use his imagination to depict what was said. The playwright sees Nixon “as a Moliere character, who is so obsessed that he goes so far that he’s funny.” Nixon and Kissinger futilely consider possible plans to create an international crisis that only Nixon could resolve, thereby saving his presidency. A surprise hit off-Broadway, this play has been a favorite of regional theaters. Fairly recent major productions include a success in London’s West End in 2001 and another in 2006 at New York’s MCC Theater featuring the original cast and director.

Of Thee I Sing by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind (book), George Gershwin (music) and Ira Gershwin (lyrics), 1931. In the first musical to win a Pulitzer Prize, the managers of dim bulb John Wintergreen’s presidential campaign need an issue, “something that everybody’s interested in, and that doesn’t matter a damn.” Hitting upon love, they arrange a beauty contest to choose a wife for bachelor Wintergreen who then jilts the gold digging winner for his more domestically inclined secretary, Mary Turner. Ultimately all is resolved when the contest winner weds the vice-president, Alexander Throttlebottom, whose name no one ever remembers. The play’s silliness seems not to have worn well as a 1952 revival ran for only 72 performances while another in 1969, judged “no satire but a futile fantasy” by Clive Barnes, closed after 21 performances. A 1972 television version tried to modernize the play by eliminating much of the topical satire and adding a few new jokes. Most revivals since then have been concert versions, including a successful 2006 production as part of New York City Center’s Encores! series.

The Patriots by Sidney Kingsley, 1943. The New York Drama Critics Circle voted this play about the conflict between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton the best play of the season. Kingsley, who wrote it during military service in World War II, hoped to respond to the question “What is this democracy we are fighting for?” by contrasting the aristocratic Hamilton with the democratic Jefferson. Notable revivals have included
two television productions, one for the Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1963, the second a recording of a 1976 Florida theater performance.

Prologue to Glory by Ellsworth Conkle, 1938. Written by a University of Iowa speech professor this play was part of the WPA's Federal Theatre Project. Critics dismissed its depiction of Lincoln’s early life (earlier even than Abe Lincoln in Illinois) as dull and overly reverential. As one wrote, “it should bob up in many a high school as an irreproachable senior class play.” Nevertheless, it ran on Broadway for 161 performances and was shown on television’s General Electric Theater in 1956.

The Rivalry by Norman Corwin, 1959. Playwright Corwin dramatizes the Lincoln-Douglas debates, relying largely on their own words. The other character is Mrs. Douglas who is both a character and narrator. Originally titled “Tonight!” Lincoln vs. Douglas, the play began as a series of readings in Hollywood in 1955, then went on national tour prior to opening on Broadway in 1959. Perhaps because it was largely a dramatic reading, the play closed after 81 performances. However, it was produced for television’s Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1975.

Secret Honor by Donald Freed and Arnold M. Stone, 1983. In this one man play, a semi-fictionalized post-pardon Richard Nixon dictates a memo seeking to justify his life and presidency. Although first presented in Los Angeles, then off-Broadway, the play is best known for Robert Altman’s 1984 film version. Critics have particularly praised Philip Baker Hall, star of the original stage and screen productions.

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue by Alan J. Lerner (book and lyrics) and Leonard Bernstein (music), 1976. Despite the pedigree of its authors and a million dollars in backing from Coca Cola, this musical turned into one of Broadway’s legendary disasters. The original version used a play-within-a-play to allow the actors to comment on racial issues in the White House during the nineteenth century. Negative reaction to out-of-town tryouts, however, led to substantial changes in that concept. This proved too little to save the play which ended its run after only one week. The only revival was in 1992 by the Indiana University Opera Theater which later brought it to Kennedy Center for three performances using an early draft of the play, no costumes and a small orchestra. After Bernstein’s death in 1990, a choral version, A White House Cantata, was pieced together and broadcast by BBC Radio in 1997 with a CD released three years later. Since then, Bernstein’s estate has only permitted that version to be performed, never the theatrical one. Many consider the score a neglected masterpiece but few lament the passing of the book.

State of the Union by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse, 1945. Although a great success, running for 765 performances on Broadway and winning the Pulitzer Prize, today this comedy is far better known for the film adaptation starring Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn. In the play, based very loosely on the political career of Wendel Wilke, the Republicans are so desperate to regain the White House that party leaders turn to a political novice, businessman Grant Matthews. Although tempted by the allure of power, in the end, Matthews withdraws rather than compromise his idealism. Because the play presents political issues in relatively general terms, revivals such as a 1954 television play and theatrical versions in St. Louis in 1997 and Washington DC in 2006, updated some of the material.

Stuff Happens by David Hare, 2004. A success in London, this play was presented by New York’s Public Theater in 2006. Using a mix of invented and historically accurate dialogue (the title comes from a remark by Donald Rumsfeld), Hare portrays the events leading up to the Iraq War. In the play, President Bush overcomes Colin Powell and Tony Blair’s reservations against invading Iraq. Hare has stated that he “wanted to write the story of how a supposedly stupid man completely gets his way with two supposedly clever men, and wins repeatedly.” Despite a sold out and extended run at the Public Theater, the play’s large cast makes it unlikely that there will ever be a Broadway production. However, there have been a number of regional productions during the past couple of years.

Sunrise at Campobello by Dore Schary 1958. The 1958 Tony Award winner covers a three year period from the time FDR was struck by polio to his nomination of Al Smith at the 1924 Democratic convention. In a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Schary wrote “what I propose to tell is the story of a man and the people around him, who after an ordeal, emerged strong and triumphant.” In the play’s final image, FDR is able to stand at the podium to deliver his speech. Although a film version was made in 1960, there have been few notable revivals in recent years other than one in Philadelphia in 1993.

Teapot Scandals by John Steinangen (book, music and lyrics), 2007. Taking some liberties with the historical record of the Harding administration, this vaudeville style musical recently premiered at Chicago’s Porchlight Musical Theatre.

Teddy and Alice by Jerome Alden (book), John Philip Sousa and Richard Kapp (music) and Hal Hackady (lyrics), 1987. Using music adapted from Sousa, Teddy and Alice is a comedy about President Roosevelt’s attempts to prevent his daughter from marrying. All ends happily when his ex-wife’s ghost convinces him to let go. Dismissed by most critics – Howard Kissel of the New York Daily News wrote “bring back ‘1600 Pennsylvania Avenue’” – the musical lasted only 77 performances. A radically revised version was performed in Waterbury, Connecticut in 1996.

That Awful Mrs. Eaton by John Farrar and Stephen Vincent Benet 1924. Although married to the Secretary of War, Peggy Eaton’s social position was undermined by her background as a tavern keeper’s daughter. President Andrew Jackson, with the aid of Dolly Madison, take up her cause against snobbish society and all ends well. This could not be said of the play which lasted on Broadway for only sixteen performances.

The White House by A. E. Hotchner (book and lyrics) and Lee Hoiby (music), 1964. This series of vignettes depicts 27 presidents, ending with Wilson, and 13 first ladies. The play’s main claim to fame is that it was twice performed at the real White House. Jacqueline Kennedy first expressed an interest in such a performance, but it was not scheduled until the Johnson administration in May 1964. In 1995 it returned to the White House as part of National Public Radio’s twenty-fifth anniversary celebration. Unfortunately, even with Helen Hayes playing most of the first ladies, the Broadway run lasted only 23 performances.
NOTES


Bruce E. Altschuler is Professor of Political Science at SUNY Oswego.
As Congress and the courts increasingly question the constitutionality of some of President George W. Bush’s actions in “The War on Terror” and other matters, issues of executive constitutionalism are increasingly attracting the attention not only of politicians, but also of journalists, academics, and the public. But determinations about the constitutionality of presidential actions are often tricky because the Constitution is in many respects quite vague about the presidency. Indeed, questions about whether particular executive actions comport with the Constitution are compounded by questions about why the Constitution is so vague in its treatment of the chief executive. This essay explores nine reasons for that vagueness.

Of course, much of the U.S. Constitution is vague, but this is especially so with regard to its treatment of the executive, which is mostly contained in Article II. According to Edward Corwin, “Article II is the most loosely drawn chapter of the Constitution. To those who think that a constitution ought to settle everything beforehand it should be a nightmare; by the same token, to those who think that constitution makers ought to leave considerable leeway for the future play of political forces, it should be a vision realized.” Article II is barely a thousand words long, and much of it is devoted to describing the mechanics of presidential elections and succession. The portion that describes the presidential office and its powers is very short and very vague, with a few concrete powers and several phrases that suggest possible additional powers.

Corwin called the Constitution an invitation to struggle, and the vague language of Article II has facilitated a struggle not only about the propriety of specific presidential actions but also a higher level struggle among competing interpretations of America’s constitutional executive. People have argued for one or another constitutional view of the executive by invoking the broader constitutional architecture and/or ethos, James Madison’s notes from the constitutional convention, Alexander Hamilton’s justifications of an energetic executive in the Federalist Papers, various English or colonial precedents, or the difficulties of dealing with Shay’s Rebellion under the Articles of Confederation, among other things. But none of these considerations decisively resolves the persistent constitutional vagueness about the presidency. Here are nine possible ways of accounting for -- but not fully resolving -- that vagueness.

First, perhaps the constitutional text did not spell out all of the details of the new executive because the framers were largely in agreement. In other words, maybe their views were so widely shared that there was no need to explicitly detail what they all already understood. Simple communication and even linguistic shortcuts are possible when people share a common understanding, so perhaps the presence of the former suggests the presence of the latter in the Constitution. This may seem an improbable view, but George Edwards and Stephen Wayne claim that “the relative ease with which the presidency was empowered indicates that a consensus had developed on the bounds and substance of executive authority.” Indeed, one might suppose that the convention surely would not have concluded as it did if there were substantial and widespread disagreements on major issues that were still unresolved or for which no compromise had been reached.

Second, it may be the case that the Constitution is vague about the executive because the framers could not agree on how to fill in the details. In other words, conflict, not consensus, may account for the ambiguity of the text. And the conflict may well have been both interpersonal and intrapersonal, as some delegates’ uncertainty seems to have exacerbated the clearer divisions that existed among other delegates. The fact that the delegates’ conflicting views were somehow coaxed into a semblance of unity does not mean that there was deep agreement on the nature of the executive. Indeed, the Constitution’s ambiguity may be rooted in the compromises that were necessary to produce the document. To the extent that the Constitution was more of a necessary strategic compromise than an articulation of a coherent theory of presidential power, it is not surprising that it is incomplete or problematic.

Third, maybe the Constitution’s ambiguity about the presidency resulted neither from conflict nor from consensus but rather from the simple need for the Constitution to be ratified. In other words, even if the framers were largely in agreement, they produced only a skeletal plan so as not to give potential ratifiers much to which they might object, just as Congress often leaves legislation vague in order to secure its passage. (This possibility is obviously related to the above view that the need for compromise necessitated ambiguity, but here the locus of concern is with potential ratifiers at the state conventions, rather than other delegates at the constitutional convention.) As Thomas Cronin puts it, “The framers doubtless were less specific than they may have wanted to be because they yearned for a Constitution that would win ratification.”

Fourth, maybe that the framers were content to leave the text of Article II ambiguous because they were certain that George Washington would be the first president. As Forrest McDonald explains, “ambiguity of phrasing did not seem particularly dangerous since George Washington … could be trusted to fill in the details of the office in a suitable manner.” Moreover, the framers may have believed that Washington’s precedents would be lasting, such that any constitutional gaps they left would be forever filled by his good examples.

Fifth, maybe the framers were intentionally vague in Article II because they did not want the president to be bound, and perhaps because they even wanted the office to grow, much as it has over the past 218 years. In other words, while on the previous rationale the first president was to fill in the blanks, on this rationale the blanks were to persist, such that all future presi-

THE CONSTITUTIONALLY VAGUE PRESIDENCY
Graham G. Dodds
dents could be free to act, unfettered by either textual restraints or historical precedents.

Sixth, maybe the constitutional ambiguity about the executive’s power was the result of the constitutional clarity over the executive’s structure. In other words, maybe the framers purposely chose a trade-off: to give the presidency a clear structure but to leave its powers vague.\textsuperscript{1} On one version of this rationale, the framers purposely chose not to give the executive clear powers because they were worried about tyranny and foreign influence. As McDonald explains,

Throughout the grand convention of 1787 there was at least a vague consensus that an executive must be created, but no one could think of a way of electing one that would be safe from corruption and foreign intrigue. Accordingly, no one was comfortable with the idea of entrusting the office with significant powers. Thus when the Committee of Detail prepared the first draft of a constitution in early August, a president was provided for, but most of the executive powers (including the powers to make treaties, name ambassadors, and appoint Supreme Court justices) were lodged exclusively in the Congress, especially the Senate.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, the lack of many specific presidential powers was the price to be paid for clearly stipulating the executive’s structure.

A seventh possible reason for the Constitution’s ambiguous treatment of the executive is that the framers simply did not do a good or thorough job. Again, McDonald articulates one version of this view:

... though we are accustomed to praising the Framers for their statecraft and wisdom, that fateful ambiguity was the result not of design but of slipshod craftsmanship... Not until the adoption of the electoral college system on September 6 -- two working days before the main labor of the convention was finished and turned over to a Committee on Style for the final drafting of the Constitution -- was a safe way of electing the president hit upon. Properly, the delegates should then have thoroughly reconsidered presidential power; but they were tired, irritable, and anxious to go home.\textsuperscript{13}

In short, McDonald suggests that the founders were eager to conclude the long, arduous convention and as a result were insufficiently attentive to some constitutional details. While this charge is not a popular or flattering one, over two centuries of hindsight suggests that the delegates might well have exercised a bit more foresight or devoted a bit more attention to filling in some constitutional details, the lack of which would later prove problematic.

Eighth, maybe the Constitution’s treatment of the executive is vague because it is contained in a constitution. As Chief Justice John Marshall put it in 1819, “we must never forget that it is a constitution we are expounding.”\textsuperscript{14} In other words, constitutions are necessarily somewhat vague, such that some indeterminacy is simply ineliminable. This may be seen at two levels. At the level of constitutional theory, it may be the case that constitutions cannot be complete; a constitution cannot fully constitute everything.\textsuperscript{15} As a result, some indeterminacy must be expected. And at the level of pragmatic, practical politics, it may be the case that constitutions should not be overly rigid. Even if a constitution could somehow account for everything, it must be able to adapt if it is to remain binding as circumstances change, so it should leave some leeway or permit some flexibility, perhaps in addition to formal amendment.\textsuperscript{16} For this reason, constitutional ambiguity may actually be an indication of strength rather than weakness. Peter Nardulli alludes to both versions of this point: “A certain level of ambiguity in a document such as a constitution is unavoidable and to some extent desirable.”\textsuperscript{17}

Ninth, insofar as constitutional indeterminacy is in some sense ineliminable, this is emphatically the case with regard to executive power. This point is perhaps best made by Harvey Mansfield in Taming the Prince. According to Mansfield, executive power is inherently ambiguous; whatever its particular constitutional instantiation, executive power is necessarily indeterminate. On Mansfield’s view, the execution of law requires a flexibility and an adaptability that is in some sense a-legal or even tyrannical.\textsuperscript{18}

Mansfield’s account of executive power as limitless and tyrannical is provocative and controversial, but other scholars share the view that executive power is inherently ambiguous or ambivalent, if not altogether tyrannical.\textsuperscript{19} For example, in his famous account of executive prerogative power, John Locke alludes to the need for discretion and distance from the law in executing the law. Similarly, Corwin notes that while the legislative and judicial functions of government can be fairly narrowly defined, executive power “is still indefinite as to function and retains, particularly when exercised by a single individual, much of its original plasticity as to method.”\textsuperscript{20} And Timothy Nichols concurs: “The executive power is not limited, because by its very nature it cannot be subject to specific limitations. The executive is to execute the laws in particular circumstances, and the diversity of those circumstances is potentially unlimited.”\textsuperscript{21} The above set of views have the merits of capturing a central feature of executive power and explaining its persistent ambiguity. If executive power is necessarily impossible to narrowly delimit, then the Constitution’s ambiguous treatment of it can be attributed to the subject matter rather than to any shortcoming of or political calculation by the framers.

In sum, there are a variety of reasons that one might adduce for why the Constitution’s treatment of the executive is so vague. Some of the nine rationales sketched here are mutually exclusive, while others are complimentary. Furthermore, each could be further developed in various ways, and there are likely other possible reasons beyond these. Regardless, it is unlikely that consensus will ever converge on any one reason. And absent agreement over why the Constitution is so vague about the presidency, it is also unlikely that debates over the constitutional propriety of particular presidential actions will be decisively resolved, either. But to the extent that we can be clearer about why the Constitution is so vague in its treatment of the presidency, we can also be somewhat clearer about the constitutionality of particular presidential actions.
NOTES

4. E.g., slavery, the nature of representation in the bicameral legislature, etc.
10. There is also the possibility that the knowledge that Washington would be the first president served no only to make any constitutionally ambiguity unproblematic but also to persuade some delegates that a powerful presidential office need not be feared, given the nature and character of the particular individual who would hold the office.
11. I am indebted to Sean Wilson for bringing a version of this point to my attention.
12. McDonald, in Fausold & Shank, p. ix-x.
13. McDonald, in Fausold & Shank, p. ix-x.
15. Cf. Kurt Goedel’s incompleteness theorems, according to which no one (mathematical) system can be all-encompassing or complete.
18. Mansfield’s precise argument is difficult to state briefly, but it may be roughly reduced to the following four steps. First, Mansfield claims that while law should ideally be both exact and self-sufficient, in practice it can be neither. Law cannot be exact because it necessarily entails some degree of generality, and law cannot be self-sufficient because it also needs an enforcement mechanism to counter our natural proclivity to disobey when doing so would suit us. Second, Mansfield claims that law’s inexactness leads to injustice, and its lack of self-sufficiency leads to a need for fear to compel obedience. Third, he says that injustice and fear therefore necessarily accompany law, and he identifies injustice and fear as the bases of tyranny. Fourth, since “some taint of tyranny necessarily accompanies law, law can only be executed tyrannically” (Mansfield, p19). Mansfield credits Machiavelli with recognizing the necessity of tyranny in the executive function of government, and he further claims that after Locke and others sought to domesticate the executive, Machiavelli’s prince was nevertheless imported into the U.S. constitutional order in the office of the president. See generally Taming the Prince and also Mansfield, Harvey C., Jr. “The Ambivalence of Executive Power.” Chapter in: Bessette, Joseph M. and Jeffrey Tulis, eds. The Presidency in the Constitutional Order. LSU, 1981. (e.g., p xi, p331).
19. McDonald finds early accounts of the ambivalence of executive power other than Machiavelli: “It had been delineated as early as the
LEARNING ABOUT THE PRESIDENCY FROM CONGRESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: 
EXPLORING THE PAPERS OF RICHARD GEPHARDT

Daniel E. Ponder

“Dear Jim: On Wednesday, February 25, 1987, at 7:00 p.m., I will celebrate the kick-off of my national campaign for the presidency with a reception at the Mayflower Hotel ballroom. This event will follow my official announcement in St. Louis on February 23.”

With these words, written to then-House Speaker Jim Wright, Congressman Richard Gephardt (D-MO) formally notified official Washington of his plans to pursue the Presidency of the United States. The letter, written on House Democratic Caucus letterhead denoting Gephardt as its Chairman, is but one document preserved in 1,343 document boxes, part of a collection of Gephardt officialdom that contains more than 1,600 boxes in all, including documents, video, and photo-file containers. These papers, gifted to the Missouri Historical Society, will be open to researchers beginning in 2008. The folder level finding aid for the main collection, as well as thousands of digitized photos and a video collection will be available online as well.

While Gephardt is most closely associated with a congressional career that spanned almost three decades, he was, of course, a two-time presidential candidate (1988 and 2004) and was the leader of the House Democrats from 1989-2003. These documents contain an enormous amount of material that relates to the study of the American presidency and from which presidency scholars will benefit. The purpose of this short essay is to introduce the collection to the community of presidency researchers, and to describe just a bit of the collection’s contents.

Background

Richard Gephardt represented the 3rd district of Missouri, encompassing the southern part of St. Louis and extending into Jefferson County. This district is an interesting political hybrid in that it affords Democrats a safe seat in the House of Representatives, but quite often casts a majority vote for the Republican presidential candidate (though not in 2000, when Al Gore won the district handily). It is a Democratic district dating back to the New Deal, when St. Louis, which had formerly been a Republican stronghold, turned Democrat and stayed that way. Gephardt began his congressional life as a moderate Democrat, often challenging traditional Democratic positions, particularly on taxes and abortion. However, in light of political pressure and a desire to build a national Democratic base suitable for a viable presidential candidacy, he slowly abandoned or modified parts of his conservative skin, dropping, for example, his once strong opposition to abortion. Over time, particularly as he moved to secure power positions within the Democratic Party, he consistently drifted leftward in his ideological stance. For example, Gephardt’s NOMINATE score in his first session (the 95th Congress) registered -.318, basically in-line with the Democratic median of -.308. As his career progressed, however, he took more liberal positions in every subsequent Congress while the Democratic median remained within a narrow band, at least until the Republican takeover of the House when the Democratic median lurched leftward. Still, Gephardt was positioned far to the left of the Democratic median, and by the time he left the House in 2005, his NOMINATE score was -.501, while the Democratic median was -.398, having fallen off from its most left-leaning -.403 during the 106th Congress. These leanings reflect a Democrat on the move, establishing himself as an effective, if down-played, party leader, and particularly as he positioned himself for national campaigns.

Presidential Campaigns

Richard Gephardt’s run for the presidency in 1988 started relatively strong, though he was always seen as something of a long shot. He was quickly branded as a potentially strong candidate by the *Almanac of American Politics*, and, in part because of Missouri’s proximity to Iowa, won that state’s caucus by 4 percent over geographic neighbor Paul Simon of Illinois. However, he faltered in New Hampshire, won South Dakota, but by Super Tuesday was able to claim victory only in Missouri, and soon dropped out. Still, it was a relatively strong showing for a member of the House of Representatives, setting him in good stead as a leader of the national Democratic Party, and he was elected House Majority Leader the following year. His presidential bid did not fare much better in 2004, particularly because he was sometimes linked to the failure of the Democrats to regain control of even one chamber of Congress, and, more devastating for Gephardt’s presidential ambitions, the fact that Republicans actually gained seats in both chambers in 2002, winning the Senate outright.

The MHS collection documents the two presidential campaigns in detail. In numerous boxes, researchers can trace the building of a presidential campaign (albeit an unsuccessful one) from the ground up. For example, the collection houses correspondence from voters in each state as the campaign picked up steam in 1988, and efforts by the campaigns to identify and build volunteer and donor data bases; the presidential debate script, primary campaign materials, statements and biographies, campaign announcement schedules, talking point agendas, press releases, political strategy memoranda from advisers such as later Clinton guru Paul Begala, interest group files and campaign responses, as well as issue papers, speeches, candidate research, documents leading up to Super Tuesday, position papers on issues such as labor, foreign policy, taxes, arms control, agriculture, education, itemized disbursement forms, a very interesting campaign field manual, and countless other items.

MHS also houses a collection of presidential campaign videos, talk shows, and other memorabilia. Thus, we do not just get an idea of a presidential campaign on paper, but how it was
scripted, packaged, and offered for public consumption. Additionally, researchers can cull candidate interviews, talk show appearances, and the like. For 1988, there are about twenty campaign commercials. There are even more for 2004, including a piece following the candidate in the first two days after the announcement, and the follow-up trips to Iowa and New Hampshire. Though neither of Gephardt’s presidential campaigns got very far, we get a fascinating, nearly insider account of the building of a national campaign organization and media apparatus.

In addition, for the political junkie in all of us, the collection boasts an impressive array of political memorabilia, such as presidential drinking glasses, posters, brochures, fliers, signs, buttons, stationary, yard signs, and other political minutiae that make work in archives so fascinating.

Party Leader-White House Relations

The major issues of the Gephardt tenure as party leader are present in the archive. The video collection in particular is well-positioned for bringing these issues to the forefront for analysis. We see Gephardt arguing, positioning, and defending party positions on everything from NAFTA to post-9/11 cooperation with the White House. This is where presidency scholars are most likely to be interested. There is ample documentation of White House relations with Gephardt as both Majority Leader and Democratic Leader (when Democrats were in the minority), as well as working more directly with Presidents Bush 41, Clinton, and Bush 43.

There are examples of Gephardt dealing with presidents of both parties. In the following excerpt, Gephardt addressed the short-lived line-item veto and prodded President Clinton to use the powers that came with it when he wrote in an August 5, 1997, memo:

*I write to express my dismay over a particular provision in legislation that you will sign today as part of the budget and tax agreement. I understand you and your staff had had under consideration 79 separate special interest tax giveaways which you are empowered to strike under the new line-item veto authority.... It has come to my attention, however, that the most outrageous special interest provision in this budget deal, one made on behalf of the tobacco industry, may not be under your review for veto because Congressional Republicans protected it from the procedures necessary for such official review. This tax break, which allows the makers of cigarettes to write-off the hard-won cigarette tax increase against their liability under the national tobacco settlement is nothing short of an affront to the American taxpayer and to the public interest. It is demeaning to our system of government that such a special deal could be inserted in legislation which has been hailed for the dual public good of balancing the budget and giving working families a much needed tax cut....

It is also my hope that an inquiry be made into how this item, and the 79 other special interest tax breaks found their way into this legislation....

And finally, I want to appeal to you to resist Speaker Gingrich's threat that your use of the line-item veto on this tax legislation would “violate the spirit of the agreement.” To the contrary, I believe that failure to disclose these tax breaks for the privileged few before they were voted on, passed and signed into law is a violation of the public trust. I encourage you to send a message to the Republicans in Congress that this type of special interest sleight-of-hand will not be tolerated by exercising the authority that Congress granted you when we passed the line-item authority.6

Another memo, this one to President Bush (43), addresses the threat of alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq scarcely three months before September 11. In this memo, Gephardt and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) are making as much a plea for congressional consultation in the effort to build bipartisan support as they are in seeking Democratic advantages with the administration:

*...We read with considerable interest press reports indicating that your administration has recently proposed at the United Nations Security Council sweeping changes to U.S. policy toward Iraq. Earlier this year, Secretary Powell outlined in general terms the need to re-energize efforts aimed at increasing regional security by containing Saddam Hussein and preventing his ability to build weapons of mass destruction. Although Congress has not been consulted in the intervening months since Secretary Powell's announcement, recent press reports indicate your Administration has opted to move forward with a proposal at the U.N Security Council. Now that the Security Council has decided to postpone action on this proposal until next month, we urge you to begin meaningful consultations with Congress on this important national security matter. We stand ready to work with you to develop a policy that has strong bipartisan support.

We share your view that in order for international sanctions against Iraq to be effective, they must be targeted against the regime, rather than the people, of Iraq, and they must enjoy considerable international support. In the effort to build consensus, however, we must not forget that effective sanctions must also retain teeth. Consequently, we believe that any proposal to modify current sanctions must also include clear and verifiable mechanisms to prevent Saddam Hussein from diverting goods to his weapons program or other dangerous activities.

...Contradictory statements from your Administration on the importance of inspectors have led many in the international community to conclude that the U.S. is dropping its decade-long support for inspectors inside Iraq. Changing this policy now will convince Saddam Hussein and others that they can thwart U.N. Security Council resolutions and outlast the United States.

We hope you will work with Congress on a bipartisan basis to construct a comprehensive approach that eliminates the threat that Saddam Hussein poses to the region and U.S. interests....

Other items in the White House file cover issues ranging from NAFTA, GATT, and arms control, to medical privacy, multinational forces in the Sinai, teacher education, and the
importance of issuing a proclamation commemorating Greek Independence Day, among many others.

Summary

All in all, the collection provides another perspective from different angles. We see Gephardt working as a young congressman seeking to establish himself as a player with the White House, the party leader in both unified and divided government, and the strategist working with an eye toward cultivating a national constituency for a presidential campaign.

So much is housed here that appeal to presidential scholars as well as the more obvious interests of congressional research. While the collection is certainly going to be of interest to congressional scholars, there is ample opportunity for presidency researchers to learn from it as well.

NOTES

1. All opinions and analysis here are mine, and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Missouri Historical Society.

Daniel E. Ponder is Associate Professor of Political Science at Drury University, and is the inaugural Richard A. Gephardt Fellow of the Missouri Historical Society.

Dick Neustadt had a deep affection and abiding respect for the Presidency. Those feelings were nurtured by sixty years of public life in a succession of Presidency-related roles, from White House staffer to scholar to adviser-consultant to institution builder. Somewhere in this occupational progression, he assumed what became his defining role: guardian of the Presidency. In this capacity he exhibited grace, wisdom, and fidelity to the office that came to define his legacy.

This essay examines the roots of Neustadt’s leading role: his almost seven years, from 1946 to 1953, as a staff member in the Truman administration. This period takes precedence, I shall argue, not just chronologically but also in terms of its importance to his life’s work. Neustadt derived lifelong lessons regarding the American presidency from his Truman experience—lessons most famously distilled in his path-breaking book *Presidential Power*. But Neustadt’s four years in the Bureau of the Budget (now the Office of Management and Budget) and three in the White House did more than serve as a teaching tool—they ignited a passion for the Presidency that burned brightly for the rest of his life, and that continues to serve as a source of illumination even after his death.

However, to view this period only as a professional apprenticeship, noteworthy primarily for laying the foundation for Neustadt’s life work, misses an important component of the Truman experience. Of all his many roles, his years as a Truman staffer were the most fulfilling, professionally speaking. Forever after, through a succession of occupations, Neustadt continued to identify himself in terms of that first professional experience: he was a “political bureaucrat.” He did so, I suspect, for at least two reasons. First, he was always more interested in the practice, rather than the study, of governing. And the Presidency —Teddy Roosevelt’s “bully pulpit”—stands at the vital center of governing institutions in the United States. Second, working for Truman, in the White House, was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Neustadt’s White House colleague Ken Hechler described it this way: “It was a beautiful, wonderful experience, working hard along with highly competent people. You really had a sense of history about it, too, at the end of every day, working for a really great president of the United States.” Neustadt’s perspective, given to me years later when I served as his head teaching fellow for his Presidency course at Harvard University, was more succinct but no less revealing: “It was great fun!” The rest of this essay delves more deeply into the “great fun.” The goal is to both chronicle Neustadt’s activities as a junior staffer under Truman and to show how those activities helped inspire and prepare him for a lifetime devoted to guarding the Presidency. That legacy no doubt owes much to Neustadt’s extraordinary personal characteristics. But it also benefited from a remarkable formative experience that provided an unsurpassed perspective into the American presidency—one not likely to be matched anytime soon.

**Entering the Golden Age: Neustadt and the Bureau of the Budget, 1946 to 1950**

Neustadt joined the Bureau of the Budget in 1946 as a civil servant working in the Estimates Division, where he was responsible for reviewing the budget requests of the presidential staff agencies located in the Executive Office of the Presidency (EOP). He served as a budget examiner for two years, during which he acquired a deep knowledge of the operations of the major presidential staff agencies. He also honed the participant-observer skills that would characterize his later research.

It was an auspicious time to work in the BoB. Under the leadership of its director, James Webb, the agency was poised to enter its “golden age” as the preeminent presidential staff agency. To achieve this status, however, the agency had to overcome several challenges. One challenge came in the guise of new presidential staff agencies that threatened to encroach on the BoB’s turf and complicate its organizational routines. In 1946, Congress established a three-member Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), charged with advising the President on macroeconomic issues. The CEA’s creation affected the BoB in several ways. First, the BoB’s budgetary clearance and fiscal policy analysis roles now had to be meshed with the CEA’s macroeconomic policy recommendations. This meant, among other adjustments, coordinating the process of writing two annual reports to Congress: the Budget Message and the Economic Report. Second, in its administrative management role, the BoB was charged with helping the CEA work out its own organizational routines.
Archives at the Harry S Truman Presidential Library reveal that in his capacity as budget examiner with responsibility for the EOP agencies, Neustadt was centrally involved in helping the BoB make these adjustments. For example, his memo titled “Basic Questions and Assumptions” stipulates ten detailed questions “which require answers in the course of consideration of basic Bureau-Council relations and Council operations.” This is an early example of Neustadt doing what he did best: posing a series of questions as a “forward thinking” exercise designed to illuminate both choices and potential outcomes. It is precisely the strategy he recommends that Presidents undertake to guard their own power prospects.

Neustadt did more than ask the questions regarding the CEA—he was actively involved in finding answers. One way he did so was by helping the BoB devise administrative routines to stay abreast of the CEA’s policy recommendations, as contained in the Economic Report, in order to fit them into the BoB’s budgetary picture. In February 1947, for example, Neustadt notified his supervisor, Elmer Staats, that, “Hirst Sutton [a fellow BoB employee] has asked Fiscal [the BoB’s fiscal division] to check through the [CEA] Council’s breakdown for accuracy and completeness and then to develop some kind of inventory on where responsibilities for actions lie, to whom assignments have been made, and what can be done to develop status reports for the Budget Director.” The goal was “to get an inflow of information on progress whereby the Budget Director may be kept informed of developments.”

The information flow also ran in the other direction; Neustadt briefed Bertram Gross, the assistant to the CEA chair, on the BoB’s organization and procedures: “As you know, the Bureau includes five principal divisions,” he wrote Gross, and then proceeded to describe each of them in great detail. Ever cautious not to mislead, Neustadt concludes, “The foregoing summary should be handled with care, since it will not provide a complete picture without elaboration. ‘Half truths’ are as dangerous where the Bureau is concerned as anywhere I know.” Again, this presages Neustadt’s later admonitions to political practitioners regarding the necessity to understand different organizational vantage points—and the dangers in failing to do so.

And it meant discussing with CEA members how they proposed to interact with other governmental actors, including the President. After one such meeting with Leon Keyserling, one of the three CEA members appointed by Truman, Neustadt summarized Keyserling’s preferences for meeting with the President—“It boils down to the following….With the President, the full Council should meet with him once monthly at least….Agendas should be prepared in advance….He sees this as vital”—before moving on to Keyserling’s views regarding relations with the cabinet, departmental staff, and other governmental agencies.

More generally, Neustadt performed a number of what he described as “housekeeping services” for the CEA: assigning it an account number for appropriations, advising on the use of consultants, discussing procedures for hiring secretaries, and so forth. Of course, the CEA was but one of the EOP agencies for whom Neustadt did budget examinations. Extrapolating from his dealings with the CEA, one sees that Neustadt capitalized on his role as budget examiner to place budget estimates in their larger policy and institutional context; he viewed agencies’ requests as one part of a larger institutional mosaic in which all the pieces were located by reference to the President’s position. This proved invaluable to his development as a historical-institutionalist specializing in Presidency-related operations.

Not incidentally, it also brought him to Webb’s attention. “Webb sent out word that he would like to have a personal assistant, and a number of us competed for that job, including myself. Dick Neustadt…won out,” Ken Hechler remembered. In his new role as Webb’s “waterboy”, Neustadt received an unparalleled education regarding “high politics” of the time. Among other functions, he served as an informational conduit between Webb and the rest of the BoB, and listened in on Webb’s contacts with a plethora of high-level, political appointees.

At the end of 1947, Neustadt moved to the BoB’s Legislative Reference Division (LRD) as a special assistant and self-described “general handyman” to Elmer Staats, who had been appointed assistant director of the budget in charge of the legislative and executive clearance functions. Working out of his second-floor office (which he shared with two other assistants) in the Old Executive Office Building across the street from the White House, Neustadt reported directly to the LRD’s director, Roger Jones.

The promotion to the LRD took place at a fortuitous time for Neustadt’s education. A year earlier, in the 1946 midterm elections, the Republican Party had won majorities in both houses of Congress. Although divided government, in which different parties control the Presidency and Congress, has become quite frequent in the post–World War II era, 1946 was the first time it had occurred since Hoover’s last two years as president in 1931–32, and only the second time in the BoB’s entire history. No one was really sure how it would affect agency operations or influence—particularly under a President who had not yet been elected in his own right.

Despite the Republican takeover, Truman intended to resubmit his “Fair Deal” domestic program for congressional consideration. To define that program, the BoB under Webb’s direction began to use more systematically the State of the Union, the Budget Message, and other special messages (now including the Economic Report) as vehicles for transmitting Truman’s legislative preferences.

The LRD took primary responsibility for this task. In this way Truman’s interest in developing a legislative program to send to Congress dovetailed neatly with Webb’s desire to expand the BoB’s influence. By the time Neustadt came aboard, the clearance process was undergoing further refinement, with an eye to the 1948 presidential election. Truman sought to use the clearance process to contrast his full legislative agenda with an eye to the 1948 presidential election. Truman sought to use the clearance process to contrast his full legislative agenda with the lack of legislation coming out of the Republican-controlled “do-nothing” 80th Congress. Archives show that Neustadt became centrally involved in tweaking clearance procedures to implement this strategy. His memos in this regard are replete with advice regarding what action to take: “intensive development staff work” needed, or “problem requiring review to insure that we know where agencies are going.”

After Truman’s stunning upset win over Dewey in the 1948 presidential election, the President’s legislative clearance process was further expanded to include an entire legislative program along with estimates of cost. A sampling of the relevant archives suggests that Neustadt was again in the thick of
these developments. In reviewing these memos, one is struck by Neustadt’s perspicacity in linking Truman’s immediate political interests to broader institutional concerns; he is as much a partisan for the Presidency as he is for the President. For example, an October 1948 memo warns Senate that clearing legislation with multimember commissions, such as the National Security Resources Board (NSRB), was a sticky issue.12 “[The] NSRB’s functions, as a body advisory to the President, are vested by statute in its agency members collectively.” Neustadt summarized. “This means that a recommendation to the President from the Board can be expected to report the views of the members meeting as the Board. But it doesn’t automatically follow that the views of the Board are necessarily the same as those of its individual member in their capacities as heads of single departments.” In order to protect Truman’s interest in properly clearing legislation with the NSRB, then, Neustadt recommended that the BoB solicit individual board members’ views as well as those of the board as a collective entity.13

In carrying out his BoB functions, Neustadt exemplified what Hugh Heclo describes as “neutral competence”*: nonpartisan, historical memory, continuity, and—not least—administrative competence. Although Neustadt was a Democrat who supported Truman’s Fair Deal, he was acutely aware of the necessity for the BoB to avoid appearing to advocate for any particular policy. For example, in trying to determine how to respond to two apparently contradictory statements by Truman regarding his budget priorities, Neustadt identifies the danger to the BoB’s institutional interests, if it should come out strongly for one at the expense of the other. “... the Bureau as such will be hard put to play the role of a neutral Presidential staff concerned with presenting all aspects of the problem so that the President can make a sound and informed decision. Yet that is preeminently the role which the Legislative Reference Division must play in exercising our coordination and clearance functions....”14

This brief overview is enough to reveal how Neustadt’s time in the BoB helped him hone his skills as a “President watcher.” By virtue of his duties as budget examiner, and his subsequent role in clearing legislation, Neustadt absorbed intimate knowledge of the institutions on which Presidents depend for advice and expertise. Similarly, he gained keen insight regarding the policy process, particularly as it pertained to the President’s needs as a legislative leader. And he gained an appreciation for the importance to Presidents of supplementing the more political White House staff with a separate, career-based staff oriented toward the needs of the Presidency as an institution as much as to the partisan interests of the individual President. All of these would become staples of his later teachings.

**In Truman’s White House, 1950 to 1953**

In May 1950, Neustadt officially joined the White House staff as one of Special Counsel Charlie Murphy’s five assistants, after working hand in glove with Truman’s White House aides on budget and policy matters for several months.15 Because existing statute only authorized a limited number of White House aides to bear the title “administrative assistant,” Neustadt received a newly created title: “special assistant to the President.”16 Although his office remained in the Old Executive Office Building (along with most of Murphy’s staff), he spent much of his time working directly with Murphy.17

The White House staff under Truman operated under a different code of conduct than does its contemporary counterpart. Staffers were then expected to work out of the limelight, in the cloak of anonymity famously prescribed by the 1937 Brownlow Committee Report.18 As George Elsey, another White House aide, remembers, Truman would have it no other way: “The White House staff in the Truman days was a very personal staff to President Truman. White House staff members did not seek publicity for themselves....In those days there was only one man in the White House who had any authority and that was the President himself.”19

Truman’s White House staff was also much smaller than its modern counterpart. Neustadt estimates that during the 1951–52 period, when it reached its maximum size, the White House numbered no more than twenty-two aides with substantive policy roles, compared to more than four times that number today. This meant, by necessity, that Truman’s aides were generalists whose roles were tied to the President’s daily activities as dictated by recurring cycles of governing—the budgetary and legislative clearance process, appointments and cabinet meetings, annual speeches, press conferences, as well as the requisite ad hoc troubleshooting of problems as they arose. Although composed of generalists, Truman’s White House staff did divide into two somewhat distinct functional orbits that revolved around John Steelman and Murphy, respectively. At the risk of oversimplification, Steelman’s group dealt with “operational” problems, such as mediating labor disputes. Murphy’s shop, in addition to putting together Truman’s legislative program, wrote speeches and was generally involved on the policy side.

As one of Murphy’s assistants, Neustadt performed a variety of roles. In a 1951 memo, Neustadt summarized his job as “handling matters involving presidential programs and policies, with special reference to the legislative program.” He elaborated on this overview by breaking his job into nine subcategories, including identifying and reviewing “problem areas” related to the development of the President’s legislative program; coordinating the development of presentations of these program to Congress; helping Murphy maintain contact with congressional leaders and committee chairs, and representatives of private organizations; reviewing BoB recommendations regarding enrolled bills and other legislative proposals; undertaking ad hoc assignments from...
with great fondness, in large part because of their respect and from families, Truman’s staffers looked back on the experience day or two, which did not coincide with weekends. …You could barely got home to sleep. Then there would be a breather of…a
tadt recalled, “Everybody worked hard, and the hours [were] did not differ substantially from working there today; as Neus
In one respect, working in Truman’s White House
tadt and others puzzled through, with huge implications for the gap between the two White House power centers that were involved collecting and disseminating intelligence and serving as a conduit for information. In this capacity he helped bridge the gap between the two White House power centers that were often viewed as competing for Truman’s support across a range of policies. One of the important methods by which Truman’s senior White House aides stayed abreast of each other’s work was through the daily staff meeting chaired by the President. Neustadt did not regularly attend this meeting—only the senior staff did—but archives suggested that he did occasionally participate if his particular task required his attendance. However, as a junior staffer, he was intimately involved with coordinating Murphy’s activities with the other senior staff members, including Steelman and, beginning with the Korean War, Averell Harriman. Much of this took place informally, through Neustadt’s interactions with the other principals’ junior staff in hallways and through other informal get-togethers.

Although Neustadt did not report directly to Truman on a daily basis, his job brought him into frequent contact with the President. For instance, Neustadt traveled with the President when he flew out to San Francisco to address the opening session of the Japanese Peace Treaty conference, in September 1951. He also participated in several of the eleven trips Truman made to his Key West vacation spot, where the President often stayed for up to a month, taking working vacations.

In one respect, working in Truman’s White House did not differ substantially from working there today; as Neustadt recalled, “Everybody worked hard, and the hours [were] long…. When we were involved with a message or speech…you barely got home to sleep. Then there would be a breather of…a day or two, which did not coincide with weekends…. You could tell the results in terms of the families—wives and small children suffered.” And yet, despite the long hours and the separation from families, Truman’s staffers looked back on the experience with great fondness, in large part because of their respect and admiration for Truman. “President Truman was an exceptionally kindly man, [a] humble human being in all of his relations with subordinates,” Neustadt remembered. That humility made the working experience more pleasurable for all the staff members. But they were also, for the most part, very fond of one another. In Murphy’s words, “We did have a lot of fun. You could hear Dick Neustadt laughing across the hall, and then the rest of us laughed too.”

When Dwight Eisenhower handily defeated Adlai Stevenson in the 1952 presidential election Neustadt—not yet thirty-five, married, and with two young children—faced an uncertain future. The precariousness of his position was brought home when Emmet Hughes, one of Eisenhower’s assistants, met with some of Truman’s staff, including Bell and Neustadt, to discuss transition issues. Bell remembers, “This was the subject of a joke between Neustadt and myself…. because we were in our early thirties, but Hughes was even younger, and we ruefully remarked to each other that this was the first time we had ever been replaced in our jobs by a younger man.” Neustadt later summarized, in his typical fashion, his feelings at having to leave government service after seven years: “You can’t have fun all your life.”

**Conclusion**

If someone set out to design a practical curriculum for learning about the Presidency, it is hard to see how one could improve on Neustadt’s seven years working for Truman. This is not to suggest that just anyone who took this “course” would have benefited to quite the degree that Neustadt did; he had the instincts, intelligence, and temperament to fully capitalize on these experiences to a far greater degree than most people. As a budget examiner, assistant to the Bureau of the Budget director, and member of the Legislative Reference Division, Neustadt became intimately acquainted with the key presidential staff agencies and the process of legislative development. His four years in the BoB coincided with its maturation as the primary presidential staff agency in the Executive Office of the Presidency. By the time he moved officially to the White House, in 1950, he had already served as a de facto staff member there for many months. As a junior White House aide, he was involved in a range of activities, from policy development to speechwriting to political liaison and general troubleshooting. In contrast to his years as a civil servant in the BoB, Neustadt’s White House service exposed him to the more partisan side of the Presidency, including party and congressional relations.

By all accounts he was effective in these roles. David Bell, Neustadt’s White House colleague, recalled, “I learned a lot from argument and conversation with Dick Neustadt…. We developed together… the process of recording what the President’s legislative program was, and what progress was being made on it through the various stages of congressional consideration.” There was no blueprint for this task—it was something that Neustadt and others puzzled through, with huge implications for the President’s role as legislative leader.

Unlike White House staff members today, Neustadt joined Truman’s personal staff possessing extensive governmental experience. So did most of his White House colleagues. “Almost all the members of the presidential staff had government
work histories far antedating their White House service,” Neustadt remembered. More important, the “largest single group of aides came not only from government, but from a single agency, the Bureau of the Budget.” This reflected Webb’s effort to make the BoB useful to the White House staff, and thus to Truman. But in progressing from the civil service–dominated BoB to the more politically oriented White House staff, Neustadt benefited by in effect viewing the Presidency from both the institutional and the political-partisan perspective; he understood the distinction between serving the President, and serving the Presidency. In later years he would lament that neither scholars nor presidential aides seemed to recognize the difference.

Of course, these seven years provided the raw material from which he fashioned his theories of the Presidency. Philleo Nash remembers that Neustadt “was a very bright, very capable, very attractive personality, and one who made clear that he was observing as he was operating, and he was a practicing political scientist, at the same time that he was a functionary. This was understood by everybody …” Although he earned his Ph.D. at Harvard University in the Government and Political Economy program, his understanding of the Presidency derived more from his actual service to Truman than to any academic training. Likewise, his later research on the Presidency, unlike that of most contemporary Presidency scholars, was motivated more by a concern for governing than for abstract theorizing or puzzle solving. As he noted in *Presidential Power*, “I never had much interest in exposing problems, period. The point is to pursue at least the glimmerings of possible solutions…. Presidents and their staffs seek advice; they need it; they deserve the best the rest of us can offer.”

In seeking those solutions, Neustadt as scholar valued objectivity and dispassionate analysis—this extended even to his examination of the Truman Presidency. In an interview with Truman in 1955, one of two he conducted with the ex-President for *Presidential Power*, Neustadt quizzed Truman regarding his initial support for MacArthur’s decision to push beyond the 38th parallel into North Korea, an action that precipitated a massive Chinese counterattack. Truman explained his support: “[MacArthur] was the commander in the field. You pick your man, you’ve got to back him up. That’s the only way a military organization can work.” But Neustadt pressed Truman: If State or the Pentagon had “showed some spine” in recommending that MacArthur stop before crossing the 38th parallel, would Truman have acted differently? “To this,” Neustadt writes in his notes, “Truman makes no real reply; perhaps didn’t grasp; perhaps didn’t want to.”

Although Neustadt went on to write the best-selling study of the Presidency, he never considered himself a scholar first; he was, he told Chuck Jones, “a political-level bureaucrat who drifted back to academia, where I had never been except as a graduate student.” But neither in later years did he trumpet his presidential experience; visitors to his Kennedy School office saw few visible indicators of his White House service. He remained committed to that “anonymity” that was so much a part of the Truman-era ethos of service. It was an ethos that in so many ways steered him toward his life’s role as guardian of the Presidency—a role that enriched everyone, from President to student, who had the great fortune to know Dick.


Look for the next issue of the *PRG Report* in December 2007.
Deadline for submissions is November 15.