EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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The President of the United States is often described as the most powerful individual in the world, yet numerous past presidents have commented on the challenges, frustrations, and isolation of holding office. Whether the officeholder of the time is viewed with esteem or cynicism, the American Presidency is an enduring source of fascination, both within the United States and abroad. It is no small feat that since George Washington relinquished the presidency to John Adams in 1797, there have been forty-three peaceful transitions of power, even in the face of untimely death, assassination, impeachment, resignation, and Supreme Court ruling.

This special issue brings together scholars from political science and history to shed light on the American presidency, from the first presidential contest to President Obama’s first 100 days in office. Authors of three articles and four book reviews examine such topics as presidential elections, styles of leadership and communication, world views, memoirs, libraries and museums.

Political scientists Laurie Rice and Andrew Sarver explore the Obama administration’s communication strategies through content analysis of White House blog entries and weekly web addresses in comparison to traditional forms of presidential communication: radio addresses and press briefings. The authors identify three content themes and illustrate their findings by graphing how frequently the administration used these themes during the president’s first 100 days in office. They find that whether using traditional forms of communication or new media, the content and goals of the White House are largely the same. As the first president of a new media era, this article provides an interesting baseline study with which to compare future presidential administrations.

Political scientist Jason Berggren delves into the memoirs of U.S. presidents during the late Cold War period from Lyndon Johnson to George H.W. Bush to demonstrate Jimmy Carter’s unique perspective on Israel compared to his presidential contemporaries. Whether staunchly pro-Israel or critical of its annexation of neighboring territories, Berggren argues that other U.S. presidents approached Middle East foreign policy from a secular stance of promoting U.S. interests. In contrast, the author adeptly offers evidence through numerous direct quotes of how President Carter’s evangelical Christian beliefs shaped his views on the Middle East. Berggren shows, for example, that Carter’s underlying motivation to broker peace between Israel and Egypt was driven by his religious vision of Israel as “the Holy Land.”

Historian Kate Lukaszewicz offers a fascinating look into the contrasting roles of presidential libraries in preserving historic documents for scholarly research versus the libraries’ museum exhibits, which are intended to attract the paying public. As Lukaszewicz explains, museums often glorify their presidents and whitewash their time in office, especially if the former president, his family members, friends and/or former employees serve on the board of directors. The author points out that since presidential libraries and museums are expected to be financially self-sustaining, they seek to increase attendance by offering special exhibits and programming that may have little or nothing to do with their presidential namesake. However, the author offers examples of museum exhibits that have changed with the passage of time to more objectively represent presidents’ actions or their roles in historic events, with the intent of encouraging the

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1 For a sample of presidential quotes about the presidency, see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/18/presidents-day-2013_n_2710982.html#slide=2120913
2 As one example, U.S. citizens are often surprised to encounter statues of American presidents while traveling in such diverse countries as Mexico, the United Kingdom, Cameroon, Paraguay, Albania, Kosovo, and Greece.
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general public to think more critically about the presidents and the times in which they served. This article may change the way in which readers view presidential museums.

Four book reviews of newly published works round out this special issue on the American Presidency. First, historian Spencer McBride reviews *The First Presidential Contest* in which Jeffrey L. Pasley describes the significance of the 1796 campaigns of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson as they vied to win the first contested U.S. presidential election. In the second review, historian Peter M. Nadeau introduces us to Jean Edward Smith’s new biography, *Eisenhower: In War and Peace* in which the author critically examines Eisenhower’s leadership both as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe during WWII and as chief executive of the United States in the early days of the Cold War. Continuing with the theme of leadership, political scientist Richard Holtzman reviews *Prisoners of the White House* by Kenneth T. Walsh. The “prisoners,” according to Walsh, are the presidents themselves who must confront the challenges of leading the country while living in isolation from the American public. Finally, historian Jason Friedman reviews a volume edited by Azari, Brown, and Nwokra entitled *The Presidential Leadership Dilemma* in which various authors tackle the question of how presidents balance their role as leader of the nation with leader of their respective political party.

As we mark the 225th anniversary of George Washington’s first election, the 50th anniversary of John F. Kennedy’s assassination, and the fifth anniversary of the first election of an African American to the office, it is fitting that we reflect upon “The American Presidency” in this special issue.