

Failed Presidencies

Learning from past mistakes

Course #	20SFP
Format:	Seminar
Moderator:	Jim Averill
Date and Time:	Wednesday, 1:30-3:30 10 weeks, starting Feb. 26, 2020
Location:	Smith College Campus Center, room 003
Maximum number of participants:	18
Auditors accepted:	Yes, 1

Purpose: We typically learn more from our failures than our successes; as voters, perhaps we can learn more from the failures of past presidents as well as from their successes. That is our goal.

Description: "Failure" is a relative term; it doesn't mean uniformly "terrible" or "without merit". For this seminar, it simply means below the median as ranked by a panel of presidential historians. (To find a complete listing of all 43 presidents, not including Trump, Google "presidential rankings"; we will select from the bottom 21, Grover Cleveland on down.) Some of these failures (e.g., Carter, Nixon) are well known because of their recency; most, however, are now largely forgotten or ignored (e.g., Fillmore, Hayes). We will bring them back to life, recognizing their achievements as well as their mishaps. Given the times in which they lived, and the obstacles they faced, how could they have done better? And what implications might their relative lack of success have for us when evaluating the current aspirants for president?

Role of participants: Each participant will review the highs and lows of one failed presidency, and lead a discussion of its potential relevance for the present.

Resources: Brian Lamb and Susan Swain, *The Presidents: Noted Historians Rank America's Best and Worst Chief Executives*. A C-Span publication, 2019. (Each chapter is based on an interview with a noted historian. The chapters are brief, but each historian recommends a work for further reading. For more information, enter the following in your browser: "c-span survey of presidential leadership".)

About the Moderator: I am Professor Emeritus from UMass (psychology). I have moderated five previous seminars.