Course Description: This is a course in contemporary American public address. I am going to interpret “contemporary” to mean primarily 20th and 21st century, although we will look at a few 18th and 19th century texts. And I am going to limit “public address” to the study of oratory, even though I am fully aware that a case could be made for a broader definition. My belief is that people learn best if there is a discrete object of analysis. In this case our objects of analysis are going to be speeches. Some of these speeches take specialized forms (as with sermons and lectures), but they are all instances of spoken discourse designed to influence one or more audience. The art of producing discourse to influence an audience is called rhetoric. The art of analyzing those discourses that try to influence audiences is called rhetorical criticism. We will be drawing on theories of rhetoric and methods of rhetorical criticism during this course, but our focus will be on the texts themselves.

I want this course to be about what I call “rhetorical literature.” By rhetorical literature, I mean those oral discourses that have defined and shaped American culture. Just as written literature features such central texts as the Bible, Shakespeare, and Milton, as well as certain poets, essay writers, short story experts, and novelists, so rhetorical literature features such central speakers as Jonathan Edwards, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, William Jennings Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Anna Howard Shaw, Huey Long, Mary Church Terrell, and many, many others. These are speakers and speeches that have helped to define what it means to be an American, to live in a democracy, to have certain rights, to exercise freedom of speech, to challenge injustice, and to adopt particular policies. The topics they have dealt with, the ideas they have expressed, the language they have used, and the ways in which they have adapted to particular audiences and situations are worthy of our study precisely because the topics are never fully resolved—they remain with us to the present day.

What are those topics? Women’s rights, civil rights, religion and morality in public life, war and peace, foreign relations, domestic relations, the rights of labor, the distribution of economic resources, and the like. The ways in which we think about these topics, discuss these topics, and ultimately try to resolve these topics owe a great deal to those who have debated them throughout American history. So this is a course in understanding the underpinnings of American culture—the culture that you and I share today—through the study of rhetorical literature.

Course Requirements: 1) attend class regularly, 2) read the daily assignments, 3) apply our template for discussion to each reading and come prepared to discuss each speech, 4) write a 12-15 page research paper on an orator, a genre of oratory, a particular issue we cover in class, or a
single speech. The paper should be 12-15 pages not counting endnotes. All endnotes should be in Chicago Style Manual form. 5) take eight quizzes on the assigned day, 6) take a final examination on the assigned day.

**Course Evaluation:**

- 8 quizzes at 5% each 40%
- 1 final exam 20%
- 1 research paper 40%

**NOTE:** Graduate students will not take the final exam, but will write a 20-30 page research paper that will count as 60% of the course grade.


**Websites:**

- *VoicesofDemocracy.com* This website grew out of an NEH-funded grant that I worked on. The full title is “Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project.” It is designed especially for courses on American public address. It features complete units devoted to individual speeches. Each unit has 1) an authenticated text of the speech, 2) an interpretive essay that gives background about the speaker and that analyzes the speech, 3) a listing of other textual, internet, and media resources concerning the speech and speaker, and 4) some prompt questions that will help you think about the significant issues raised by the speech.

- *AmericanRhetoric.com* This website reproduces hundreds of speech texts. Although most of our work will be through the VOD (Voices of Democracy) site, I will have you read a few speeches from AmericanRhetoric.com.

- *PresidentialRhetoric.com* This is my website. We will use it primarily for the speeches of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. It also features many links to other helpful sites for rhetorical research on the American presidency.

**Syllabus**

**Week 1:**

- January 11: Introduction to the course
- January 13: Rhetoric, Rhetorical Criticism, and Public Address

Week 2: January 18: Women’s Rights
READ: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Address on Women’s Rights” (1848) on VOD website.

January 20: Women’s Rights

Week 3: January 25: Women’s Rights

January 27: Women’s Rights

Week 4: February 1 Civil Rights

February 3: Civil Rights
Week 5:  February 8: Civil Rights

February 10: Civil Rights

Week 6:  February 15: Civil Rights
**READ:** Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” (1963) in Lucas and Medhurst, 375-378.

February 17: Civil Rights
**READ:** Martin Luther King, Jr., “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” (1968) in Lucas and Medhurst, 473-480. **Quiz #3**

Week 7:  February 22: Religion, Civil Society, and Morality

February 24: Religion, Civil Society, and Morality
**READ:** Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address” (1863) on VOD website; Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address” (1865) on VOD website.

Week 8:  March 1: Religion, Civil Society, and Morality
March 3: **Religion, Civil Society, and Morality**
**READ:** Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Religion and Race,” (1963) on VOD website; Dorothy Day, “Union Square Speech,” (1965) on VOD website. **Quiz #4**

**Spring Break (March 5-13)**

Week 9: March 15: **Religion, Civil Society, and Morality**

March 17: **Religion, Civil Society, and Morality**

Week 10: March 22: **War and Peace**
**READ:** Abraham Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address” (March 4, 1861) on PresidentialRhetoric.com (under “Historic Speeches” tab); Jefferson Davis, “Farewell Speech” (January 21, 1861), http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=491

March 24: **War and Peace**
**READ:** Woodrow Wilson, “War Message,” (1917) in Lucas and Medhurst, 73-79; Eugene V. Debs, “Statement to the Court,” (1918) in Lucas and Medhurst, 129-133.

Week 11: March 29: **War and Peace**
**READ:** Woodrow Wilson, “The Fourteen Points,” (1918), in Lucas and Medhurst, 124-128; Woodrow Wilson, “For the League of Nations,” (1919) in Lucas and Medhurst, 133-142. **Quiz #6**
March 31: War and Peace

Week 12: April 5: War and Peace: The Cold War

April 7: War and Peace: The Cold War

Week 13: April 12: War and Peace: The Cold War
**READ:** J. Edgar Hoover, “Speech Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities” (1947) on VOD website; Margaret Chase Smith, “Declaration of Conscience” (1950) in Lucas and Medhurst, 294-298.

April 14: Diadeloso—No Class

Week 14: April 19: Conservative Voices and Values

April 21: Liberal Voices and Values
**READ:** John F. Kennedy, “Speech at American
University,” (1963) in Lucas and Medhurst, 362-368; Lyndon B. Johnson, “The Great Society” (1964) in Lucas and Medhurst, 405-408. **Quiz #8**

**Easter Break: April 22-25**

**Week 15: April 26:** Rhetoric in an Age of Violence


**April 28**

Rhetoric in an Age of Violence


**Final Exam: Thursday, May 5: 4:30-6:30 pm.**