“Obama Out”: A Transnational Perspective on the 2016 US Presidential Election

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Class: Wednesdays 10-11:50 (3116 Hart Hall)

When Barack Obama ended his speech at the Annual White House Correspondents’ Association dinner with the words “Obama Out” and dropped the microphone in dramatic fashion, he stretched the genre of the address itself to new levels of acceptable mockery and self-sarcasm. Obama’s speech stirred heated debates across the globe on the next chapters in what has been characterized as “the most unorthodox US presidential race in modern history”—a race that has lifted American politics to new heights of self-parody.

In this 1-2 variable unit course, we will begin with an overview of the socio-cultural history of US political structures—from parties and party conventions, to primary elections and caucuses, to election debates and nominating conventions, to endorsements and opinion polling. Subsequently, we will follow the 2016 election results, polling, and news about the presidential candidates. Our class discussions will be based on assigned material drawn from national and international news broadcasts and political commentaries, articles from scholars in the US and Europe, the candidates’ campaign speeches and advertisements, blogs and social media around the world, politics apps, as well as movies, TV shows, and music, illustrating the connection between pop culture and US politics. We will focus on a different topic every week that will be determined by the crucial debates in the 2016 campaign. Examples of topics include: the US economy versus global economy; identity politics (including race, gender and sexual orientation, class, religion, disability); immigration; healthcare and educational reform; environmental policies and energy issues; foreign policy etc. We will conclude the term by discussing the intersections between the US and the global political scene.