

HISTORY 401.01
Presidential Assassinations in Historical Perspective

Satisfies: EXP+, SPK, WRTD

Mondays, 1:00-3:50pm

Professor Nancy Tomes

This seminar will examine the history of assassinations from the mid-nineteenth- to the late-twentieth century. While Presidential assassinations in the United States will form the prime case study for our common readings, we will also consider other kinds of assassinations (for example, those of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X); depending on students' areas of interest, we will explore assassinations in other countries and time periods as well. Students not specializing in US history are very welcome in this class! Our goal will be to acquire a comparative, transnational view of assassinations as historical events. Themes to be explored include: the impact of assassinations on political institutions; the kind of collective rituals and commemorations they inspire; the theories about violence, criminality, and mental illness employed to explain the assassin's act; and the long-term integration of assassinations into historical memory. As part of that last theme, we will look at the way novels, films, and musicals have portrayed assassinations. Readings will include selections from Michael W. Kauffman, *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies*; Eric Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley: The Making of Theodore Roosevelt's America*; and a reading yet to be determined about John F. Kennedy's assassination. This will be a very reading and research-intensive course; students will write a major research paper (10-15 pages) on a topic of their choice.