

Got Power? A Comparison of Executive Powers in the *Star Wars* Films and History

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching history is fun, especially when I bring films to the classroom to allow my students to grasp visually historical events. In the process they learn new topics and concepts while being entertained. The selection of the film is important because our intended audience is young. There is a generation linked to the fast-paced information age, one that needs information in a fraction of the time it formerly took. Though it conflicts with the subject of history, this is where the selection of a film is important. I have shown films such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Gladiator* (2000), *The Patriot* (2000), *Thirteen Days* (2000), and *The Last Samurai* (2003), to list a few, to my history classes. My students derive ideas from the films and we begin a class discussion after the film ends. During the class discussion a few topics such as culture, economy, fashion, language, and technology have been gleaned from the film. After discussing these and other topics, I provide an in-depth analysis of the film depending on the participation of the students. My students get to see the entire film because they have been “captivated” by the strong story lines.

I teach at the DeBakey High School for Health Professions. I teach sophomores and juniors in my World History and U.S. History courses. DeBakey is a small inner-city magnet school of 700 students. Our student population is a diverse group representing backgrounds from every part of the social spectrum. The school is thus known for its “internationally friendly” environment.

Regarding my seminar unit, I shall show films with deep and complex story lines that will challenge my students. Because of its many branches and “loose ties” with the social studies curriculum, the underlying political topic that I have chosen to emphasize is comparative executive power structures. The *Star Wars* film series is rich in politics and history. Selecting this series as my informational vehicle was an easy choice for me. The saga has a wealth of topics to teach and has at its core the preeminent role of government and politics.

OBJECTIVES

My seminar unit will teach a combination of World History, U.S. History, and Government. The objectives will cover knowledge and skills for the latter courses. The following student objectives begin with a general scope and culminate into detailed goals:

1. Understanding the impact of totalitarianism in the 20th century by identifying the rise of Nazism/Fascism in Germany and Italy; also, the rise of communism in the former Soviet Union. (TEKS 113.33.c.9)
2. Comprehending the significance of political choices and decisions made by individuals, groups, and nations throughout history. By evaluating the last statement in the past, taking into account historical context, and apply this knowledge faced by contemporary societies – civic participation will be understood. (113.33.c.17)

3. Applying critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources. In other words, the students will apply different methods that historians use to interpret the past. It will include the use of primary and secondary sources, points of view, frames of reference, and historical context. By using film, students use the process of historical inquiry to research, but mainly interpret history. The use of film in my unit is a direct interpretation of history. Moreover, students will use multiple sources of evidence. (113.33.c.25)
4. Analyzing the effects of the Great Depression on the U.S. economy and government. This also can be enhanced to include the decline in worldwide trade that led to political instability in Europe. (113.32.c.13)
5. Recognizing the changing relationships among the three branches of the American federal government by evaluating the impact of events. The latter will include Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempt to increase the number of U.S. Supreme Court justices. (113.32.c.16)
6. Discussing the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society and describing the qualities of an effective leader. (113.32.c.19)
7. Understanding major political ideas and forms of government in history by identifying the characteristics of classical forms of government, such as authoritarianism, classical republic, despotism, liberal democracy, and totalitarianism. In other words, a student can watch a film and understand why a state politically transforms, or "re-organizes," from a representative body of elected officials to a system in which one official can rule. (113.35.c.1)
8. Analyzing the principles and ideas that underlie the U.S. Constitution. The limitations of power will be studied in detail. Identifying significant individuals in the field of government and politics, such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The understanding of how constitutional government has influenced and been influenced by people, ideas, and historical documents. (113.35.c.2)
9. Evaluating constitutional provisions for limiting the role of government, including republicanism, checks and balances, separation of powers, and individual rights. The students will study the processes by which the U.S. Constitution can be changed and evaluate its effectiveness. (113.35.c.8)
10. Finally, understanding the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution. By analyzing the bicameral structure of Congress, constitutional powers of the president, growth of presidential power, explaining checks and balances, and the major responsibilities of the federal government for domestic and foreign policy. (113.35.c.9)

RATIONALE

I plan to explore: (1) the concept of executive powers in government; (2) how random case studies in history have used it; and (3) how these have compared to our own American executive branch. I am especially interested in how emergency executive powers granted to a leader can be considered crucial to a state in a crisis. Unexpected crises that occur occasionally force the collective to give up its powers to a given individual. Certain individuals in history have made the most of such opportunities while others simply refuse to exercise their emergency executive powers. History shows us that there are many cases in which the latter has happened. For example, Cincinnatus, defending the Roman Republic, was given emergency dictatorial powers as the sole leader of the Republic to lead Rome against a foreign invasion. Julius Caesar was also a dictator given emergency dictatorial powers by the Roman Senate to end the civil wars of Rome. Both Cincinnatus and Julius Caesar were granted emergency executive powers by their state in critical times – times of crisis. Yet, both led in different ways. Cincinnatus gave his

executive powers back to the state and the people (Rome's Senate), while Julius Caesar gained ever more popularity and strength as the sole leader of Rome until his infamous assassination.

Emergency executive powers may also be studied in the modern era, as implemented by European leaders such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, and Adolf Hitler. Even in the United States of America there have been instances during which our presidents extended their executive powers in historic crises. Presidents such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin D. Roosevelt are just a few who took that course of action.

Throughout history, leaders of state have left legacies – either those good or bad, fleeting or everlasting. The best-remembered legacies are those that were made when leaders made the best (or worst) of their opportunities. Concerning my seminar unit, these were opportunities granted with emergency executive powers.

I would like to incorporate the idea of the surrender of personal liberties by the people of the state to a leader. The natural rights of the citizenry can be easily taken away if done so gradually in return for the protection of a chosen leader who must lead the state out of a crisis. The notion of the surrender of personal liberties will be supplementary to my original topic of executive powers.

Students will find my topic interesting because they always want to know how and why certain individuals gained so much power as a monarch, an emperor, or as a president. What happened in the course of their ascension to executive leadership and, later, the implementation of emergency powers? How did the consuls of the Roman Republic, such as Julius Caesar, gain their executive powers? What made Caesar important; what precedent did he establish for the future not only of emperors of Rome, but of western civilization? Even the story of Napoleon can be used as a case study. His rise to power was passed on to him by a state tired of revolution; a revolution that had gone beyond the original scope of change in France. Moreover, it was the French Revolution that handed emergency executive powers to an artillery general to be the Head of State of France.

The Fascist states of Mussolini and Hitler, infamously renowned as dictators in the 20th century, could easily serve as case studies. Our students are aware of the facts associated with their ascension to and decline in power. But, what other concepts can be analyzed or developed? How did it happen? How did they do it? Questions like these should stimulate students more than the simple facts of what they did after they acquired their emergency executive powers. In all of these case studies, there is the common thread of an economic crisis, together with social and political unrest that aided the officials' rise to power.

The topics of executive powers and the surrender of personal liberties can be introduced and studied across the Social Studies curriculum. My topics are relevant to U.S. History because there have been times when presidents were given unprecedented emergency powers as heads of the executive branch. These periods conspicuously include the presidential administrations of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. By far the most conspicuous was the way that Roosevelt expanded his executive powers. Roosevelt's dominance was so pervasive that Congress introduced term limits on the presidency by means of the 22nd Amendment, two years after FDR's death. The Great Depression and World War II were such terrible threats to American sovereignty that the masses were extra willing to sacrifice their liberty to the personality of its leader.

Executive powers also can be analyzed by students in a Government/Economics course. The executive branch has evolved to meet all sorts of challenges in the course of American history. From the administrations of George Washington to George W. Bush, presidents have exercised

their powers in different ways. Each administration has dealt with multitudes of different issues in economic, social, and political affairs. Each one is noteworthy for study, but I will concentrate on the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Why it is important to teach this unit?

Executive powers are significant and demonstrate the need for a well-disciplined leader to be the head of a state; moreover, it is virtually guaranteed that states will enter a time of crisis, or a point at which the majority of the people will need true statesmen as guides. I have introduced several world leaders who, through their exercise of executive powers, became corrupt from excess power and greed. In contrast, there have been great leaders who have been more careful in the use of their powers. Cincinnatus, acting as the emergency dictator of the Roman Republic, successfully led his people against foreign invaders. George Washington led an American nation through “uncharted waters” as the first president of a new United States of America, a new country guided by a new constitution. The U.S. Constitution limited the powers of the presidency, but could have been easily disregarded, or even destroyed, by Washington as the country’s first leader. Furthermore, a young United States of America was vulnerable to attacks on many fronts, including her own public officials elected to lead the state.

Certainly, the case study of Roosevelt as president of the United States, in the midst of the Great Depression and World War II, is most noteworthy. At a time when many Americans needed hope; Roosevelt provided it. By a consensus, it may be argued that Roosevelt did not deliver the United States out of the Great Depression. War did. Roosevelt was elected to the presidency a record four times, considerably expanding his executive powers in the interim. The Roosevelt presidency may represent one of the greatest “what ifs” in history. “What if” Roosevelt had been healthier or younger after World War II? What changes would have occurred in American government? Most probably, he would have tried to expand his influence over the other two branches of government – Congress and the Supreme Court. I will provide examples and explain the acts that gave him unprecedented executive power.

Through good times or bad, wealth or poverty, a state is always in need of a competent leader – a leader chosen and controlled by the people. However, in a time of crisis, leaders often go “out of the control,” and at those times the people willingly relinquish their oversight and liberties.

A wide variety of films depict facts and stories about monarchs, emperors, or presidents exercising their powers. The field of history adds to this by producing these facts in a chronological or traditional fashion. In other words, most films depict Roosevelt as a strong American wartime president combating the atrocities of Mussolini and Hitler as the evil dictators of the Axis Powers. How about a film set in a time of crisis, such as a society in economic ruin or a state devastated by civil wars and revolution? Or, a film clearly illustrative of this that argues the need for a strong leader? A film that shows a body of government possessing executive powers, but one which in “unforeseen” circumstances an emergency crisis arises and cannot be solved unless drastic measures are taken. One of these drastic measures requires the granting of emergency executive powers to one person, a person elected, or chosen, by the state that places its trust in a certain person to lead the state out of its emergency crisis. The moment (or, in the case of a film, the scene) that captures the transfer of the power of the people to a single individual can be a very compelling focus of research.

How I intend to convey the material?

I believe the *Star Wars* film series shows the exact moment of the exchange of power and the complete transformation of a government. According to the films, the Star Wars galaxy was a Republic dominated by its democratic-republican virtues and it had an elected Chancellor at the head of its government. It was a system that was intact for “over many centuries.” It was a

system, however, that could no longer handle the large and debilitating crisis at hand: a civil war of galactic proportions. The Republic faced a civil war crisis not seen or heard of in a “thousand years,” and this crisis was tearing their government and galaxy apart. The Senators of the Republic, through a series of time segments, were forced to give up some of their powers to the Chancellor, who later accumulated emergency executive powers that were not returned. Ultimately, the Chancellor “re-organized” the Republic into the First Galactic Empire. Are there any examples of this in the real world? I believe there are two: a direct and indirect connection. The history of Ancient Rome, the French Revolution, and the Third Reich of Germany were direct references in the *Star Wars* films, and indirectly, the films refer to the presidency of Roosevelt. I will study the connection of the latter more deeply as this unit progresses.

My topic will certainly interest many students because of the popularity of the *Star Wars* films. The topic will also enrich their academic growth by making connections through popular and high culture. It seems that younger generations, even society in general, are so far removed from high culture that the only culture they know is “pop” culture.

UNIT BACKGROUND

George Lucas, without a doubt, is a brilliant and creative film director who masterminded the entire *Star Wars* series. The films’ success is a clear indicator of one man’s imagination. His imaginative world reached so many circles of society that *Star Wars* is synonymous with pop culture, and it has been analyzed and researched as an interesting study in academic circles. There have been many documentaries of the *Star Wars* films, but the latest – *Star Wars: The Legacy Revealed* – is truly a credible and respectable piece. The documentary touched on many subjects from literature, mythology, science, technology, history, politics, and government.

It is the last two subjects that inspired me to do further research on the connection of the *Star Wars* films to history and politics, especially with the shifting process of a government. According to the documentary’s website and an online source:

Star Wars reflects a cycle in our own history, the fall of the Republic and the rise of dictators and corruption in government. Palpatine seizes power gradually, and is compared to Hitler and Saddam Hussein. The Republic is shown as the Roman Empire, such as pod races being similar to chariot races. Citizens indulge in rituals of sacrifice and slaughter as well as gladiatorial combat. Palpatine’s story reflects that of Napoleon. Another big part states that society is in continual process of construction and self-destruction. (Wikipedia: “Star Wars: The Legacy Revealed”)

The character of Palpatine is very mysterious, yet interesting; it would be worthwhile to study his role in the *Star Wars* films (and, galaxy) and perhaps find out the real meaning or purpose of Palpatine. I will interpret the underlying story of Palpatine and how Lucas used his character to describe the past in world history, but also its connection to our American history.

Throughout the films, the audience is captivated by the story of Anakin Skywalker, from his humble origins, to his success as a masterful Jedi, and finally his conversion to the “dark side”: a fall from grace because of his greed and lust for power. It is a great moral story from an individualistic point of view, as well as a collective one too. It is also a classic story of good versus evil, the “light side” versus the “dark side” – or from another perspective, the story of Anakin versus Luke Skywalker, the latter meaning that both individuals gained a lot of power during the course of their lifetime, but it was gained through different paths. The life of Anakin Skywalker was almost given to him in a “silver spoon,” one in which many people surrounding him labeled him as the “Chosen One,” the special person to end the existence of the Sith – the “dark side” or evil in the galaxy. The life of Luke Skywalker was challenging and with minimal guidance; he was self-taught and self-disciplined. He was considered the “new and last hope” for

the galaxy to regain its lighter (good) side of things and to destroy the dark and evil Empire. In other words, Luke Skywalker represented everyman's life tribulations, compared to Anakin's triumphs of glorification. Ultimately, the underlying story of the *Star Wars* films is that of Palpatine.

Dictators: Napoleon, Hitler, and Palpatine

Who was Palpatine, or who is Palpatine? In the *Star Wars* films, Palpatine is the secondary and "shady" character that is considered the genius behind the governmental takeover of the galaxy's republic. [I will even argue the point that Anakin Skywalker, later Darth Vader, is the brain child of Palpatine, but this is obviously worth another point of discussion. I am simply pointing out the power and creativity of Palpatine.] Palpatine created a complex scheme that included war, propaganda, politicking, manipulation, conflict, and great story-telling. According to the Lucas' *Star Wars Dictionary*, "his true intentions always remained unclear" (Reynolds 76). He was a shrewd public official that rose in the ranks of the bureaucracy of the Galactic Senate. His background always remained mysterious and shrouded in secrecy. The only thing that the audience and the other characters of the films knows of the Palpatine character is his position as a Senator (of the planet of Naboo) and later as the appointed leader of the Senate – the Supreme Chancellor. As Chancellor, Palpatine "always cited the best interests of the Republic, yet he consistently increased his own power, from legal authority to his institution of the Chancellor's Red Guard..." (Reynolds 76). A question that is often asked arose from the latter statement: what are the best interests of the people? Thus far, I have only begun to describe Palpatine as he has been compared to Napoleon and Hitler, but moreover:

Palpatine had devoted almost half of his unprecedented thirteen years in office to vanquishing the Separatist threat... he has since become democracy's fierce champion, sacrificing his private life to assume the burden of leading the Republic to victory, the Jedi at his right hand, the Grand Army of the Republic at his left. Determined to preserve the Constitution at all costs, he is quick to maintain that he will gladly relinquish the extra-ordinary powers the Senate has seen fit to cede to him, once the Separatists have been eliminated. (Reynolds 146)

So similar is the latter with the challenges that world leaders such as Napoleon and Hitler faced. Recently in Venezuela, Hugo Chavez tried to modify his country's Constitution to extend his presidency to maintain power in that state. To some extent, Russia's former president Vladimir Putin has maintained his influence in Russia's government as the new Prime Minister.

All world leaders are "determined to preserve the Constitution at all costs," but its interpretation has different outcomes. In the *Star Wars* films, Palpatine was no "Cincinnatus." He extended his extraordinary powers and kept them, finally to become Emperor. The ascension of Napoleon follows the same parallels. As artillery general in the French army, he also was determined to preserve the French Constitution at all costs. Robert Asprey, an expert and author of the two-volume biography of Napoleon Bonaparte, describes and interprets the personal correspondence of Napoleon. Through his correspondence, the author describes the former general as a fair man who took control of his opportunities and rose to power in a tumultuous period in French history. In one of his letters to the Executive Directory, dated June 1, 1796, Napoleon described his army's dedication to country and fraternity: "[My grenadiers and carabinieri] are playing and laughing with death... nothing exceeds their boldness unless it is the cheerfulness with which they make the most forced marches; they sing in turn of country and love" (Asprey 154). Of course Napoleon was speaking as a soldier, but in describing his army he reveals himself as the Napoleon that history remembers. Consider the following excerpt in another letter to the Directory dated January 18, 1797: "It is said that the Roman legions marched twenty-four miles a day; our brigades have marched thirty while also fighting" (Asprey 198).

Napoleon, as a soldier, reported to his superiors, but while demonstrating his determination in fighting for the French cause, he fights for his own as well. Napoleon was so successful in his military campaigns that many saw him as an internal threat to the French Republic; and, in many cases, internal threats have more, longer lasting ill-effects. Asprey quotes André François Miot de Melito, a special minister from the French government to Piedmont, on Napoleon: “Everyone had bowed before the brilliance of his victories and the haughtiness of his manners. This was no longer the general of a triumphant republic; this was a conqueror in his own right, imposing his laws on the vanquished” (Asprey 218). It is almost as if Miot de Melito, in 1797, was predicting the future of France with Napoleon as her dictator. But what makes Napoleon’s case study interesting is the fact that the French state was more vulnerable to an internal attack than a foreign one. As I previously stated, the United States of America could have fallen to a dictatorship in its infancy if not for the greater efforts of our founding fathers. In France, the story was much different, and much more violent. After ten years of revolution, France was entering its last phases as a new France under the Directory. The Directory, under internal and external pressures, abdicated its power and gave authority to one sole person who “[knew] how to do everything, who [was] able to do everything, and want[ed] to do everything” (Asprey 340). The latter was said by Emmanuelle Sieyès on the capabilities of First Consul Bonaparte. Sieyès was a chief political theorist of the French Revolution who believed in a *coup d’état* of the Executive Directory. He initially believed that Napoleon was the correct “move” for France.

The following is a proclamation to the army that was delivered by Napoleon on November 9, 1799, after receiving his new endowed powers as the First Consul of France:

You have hoped that my return would put an end to so many evils; you have celebrated it with an alliance that imposes on me some obligations which I am fulfilling; you will fulfill yours, and you will support your general with the energy, firmness, and confidence that I have always seen in you. Liberty, victory, and peace will restore the French Republic to the rank that it occupied in Europe, and that it has lost owing to ineptness or treason. (Asprey 327)

Napoleon clearly comes across as a leader who has accomplished the first of many steps in the quest of something greater. As the decade proceeded in France, Napoleon had asserted himself as the leader that Sieyès had once described him, and would proclaim himself Emperor by the year 1804. After his ascension to the “throne” of France, Napoleon was on his quest to take over Europe but would meet his end at the hands of Wellington at Waterloo. As Emperor, Napoleon’s arrogance and lust for power paralleled the downfall of the stories of Anakin Skywalker and Palpatine. Napoleon’s rise to power was clear from the beginning – his strong leadership abilities as military commander and the opportune time of the dissolving French Revolution led to the rise of history’s first modern-day dictator.

Another man, Adolf Hitler, was also mentioned in the comparisons of Palpatine and real-life dictators. Just as Napoleon, Hitler rose to the ranks of power, but primarily within his political party – the National Socialist German Workers Party, or Nazi for short. Hitler can be described as “well-suited” for the job if one considers his polished background in the military, social, and political arenas. He, too, was a man present at the right time and in the right place for someone seeking to achieve power over a state. The German economic state was in the midst of hyperinflation and low employment – a severe economic depression, just like the one the United States suffered in the 1930s. The Germans experienced theirs in the previous decade before our Stock Market Crash of 1929. The background was “ripe,” and certainly Hitler knew that a change of leadership (and government) was necessary for the Germans. Louis Koenig writes of another component: “In Europe, dictatorships were inaugurated by men who were skillful in using the prevailing catastrophes to further their own designs. Established on a despotic basis, yet anomalously claiming popular support, the dictatorships, particularly the Fascist and National

Socialist, promised to have an effect which was far more than local” (Koenig 1). The skills of manipulation are what dictators possess, and Hitler was a master. As leader of the Nazi Party, Hitler and his party leaders began making strides by becoming the country’s largest party in the Reichstag; however, they did not command a majority (Sapinsley 129). [Unlike the United States’ dominant two-party system, Germany (and, other European states) has multiple political parties with each having large voting turnouts.]

Hitler would take control of the German state little by little. The President of Germany was Paul von Hindenburg, an eighty-five year old man in 1932. He kept being elected each time for President of Germany in order to prevent the popular Hitler and the Nazi Party from taking over. Oddly, Hindenburg was the one who dissolved the powers of the Reichstag in 1930 and ended parliamentary government in Germany (Sapinsley 109). In other words, it marked the beginning to the end of a democratic German state. Dissolving the powers of the Reichstag was probably the main event that paved the ascension to power for Hitler. Under von Hindenburg, the German government never had a stable Chancellor. There were four, including Hitler, appointments in the last two years of Hindenburg’s presidency. [The Chancellor of Germany is similar to the role of the U.K’s Prime Minister, whereas the President of Germany is more “ceremonial.” He or she makes key appointments and serves as a figurehead of the country.] Hitler’s appointment came because of the political and social pressure put on the German President because of the popularity of the Nazi party. As Chancellor, Hitler controlled the state radio and was a natural in utilizing it. What made Hitler a threat was that his “plans and intentions – plain for anyone to see – had been clearly outlined in *Mein Kampf*” (Sapinsley 153). According to Barbara Sapinsley, the following would supposedly happen when Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany: “Unemployment would disappear. The hated Versailles Treaty would be ended. And Germany would become a great power again. But to accomplish this, of course, firm measures were necessary. Democracy would have to be suspended temporarily” (142).

Sure democracy was suspended, but what propelled Germany economically was the militarization it underwent. At a time when international peace was being advocated worldwide, the Germans (along with the Italians and Japanese) were violating every peace treaty in order to upgrade, modernize, and fully prepare for a massive war machine. According to T.R. Fehrenbach, who wrote on Hitler’s tremendous power, “In five years, Hitler took Germany from collapse and national impotence to the position of dominant power upon the European continent. He gained each of Germany’s legitimate foreign aims” (Fehrenbach 14). Fehrenbach, in the latter statement, was referring to the conquests of the Rhineland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia.

An army at the command of the German leader eventually “fell” into Hitler’s hands in 1934 with the death of Hindenburg. Hitler would combine the offices of the President and Chancellorship to become the sole leader of Germany and be known to everyone as – the Führer. The same scenario occurred in *Star Wars*. “Palpatine declared the Republic an Empire and himself Emperor following the defeat of the Jedi” (Reynolds 147). The latter is in reference to the waning days of the Republic when Chancellor Palpatine “reorganized” it into the First Galactic Empire. Just like Napoleon, Hitler became “nihilistic, messianic, and blinded by visions of world domination” (Fehrenbach 14). Hitler followed the same fate as Napoleon.

Two men, Napoleon and Hitler, have been highlighted in the earlier comparisons to Palpatine. Both gained their executive powers in eerily similar fashions to that of the *Star Wars* character. It is a very interesting comparison, but I believe George Lucas’ work in the *Star Wars* films was not to highlight the history of men in power, or to explore parallels to the past. Lucas created a façade of history and a deeper sense of what can happen to a republic or the fall of democracy. In other words, the *Star Wars* galaxy governed by a Republic whose virtues were democracy and liberty worthy enough to stand for “over a thousand years” was only the surface of his intended message. Lucas’ *Star Wars* is connecting the Republic to our modern-day United

States of America. The story of *Star Wars*' democratic and republican values mirrors those of the United States. I believe the message, derived from the films, is that our country can succumb to its fall just as the Republic did in *Star Wars*. Lucas is not saying that it will happen, but by showing a Republic that lasted for "over a thousand years" and fell into the hands of one man, one rule, and ultimately one empire, he is implying that the United States is not immune. It can happen and must be protected and defended. In continuation, the story of Palpatine is also the story of one of our greatest presidents in the "short" history of the United States – Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Palpatine meet FDR; FDR meet Palpatine

To argue for the idea that the story of Palpatine is the same as that of FDR, we have to revisit the ideas of George Lucas and make the observations from the films. According to Lucas' *Star Wars Dictionary*, "Since its inception, the Republic has been protected by its system of laws rather than by the force of armies. But the law is only as strong as its people, and when their vigilance fades, armies may regain the upper hand" (Reynolds 73). The latter refers to a strong government such as that of our nation. We are protected by the laws of our Constitution, a constitution that governs all aspects of government and society, and it needs good people to make it work. It is a system that depends on the good will of the people so it can work for the rest – even in a time of crisis.

Such a worldwide crisis did occur in the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s. The United States hit "rock-bottom" during the Great Depression. According to Koenig, the Depression did not simply affect the economic systems, but the political systems as well. He writes, "The interval between the two World Wars was ... an era in which executive powers underwent a remarkable expansion not only in countries having the revolutionary dictatorships but also in the democracies" (Koenig 1). The United States entered the 1930s with shock and disbelief at the state of their economic situation; the situation called for a strong president. It also needed a president who at least showed the intent of helping the people. Herbert Hoover did not possess the necessary public skills to handle the severity of the crisis, thus losing to a candidate who did have reinvigorating energy and the necessary skills – FDR.

As Roosevelt took office, he initiated a series of reforms and programs to "jump start" the economy, but there is only so much the president can do when Congress is in charge of the legislative process. [The position of the President of the United States is not a weak one in any sense. It carries tremendous influence in the other two branches of government when it comes to domestic (and foreign) affairs.] It is all about politicking through the right channels. During FDR's administration, it was considered a very delicate scenario because you had a president who wanted to be in charge of things against many who valued the democratic process. Those who valued the democratic process agreed with the following: "If the democratic process is to be operative in crisis, the powers of the executive must be legitimate in character. They must not be assumed to be extra-legal means by sudden and personal usurpation" (Koenig 2). Furthermore, the American President "is confined by the separation of powers. The Supreme Court may dispute the interpretations he makes of his authority. Congress may withhold legislation which is an essential part of crisis powers. There is then the real danger that the President may be without certain powers needed to overcome the crisis" (Koenig 6). These were some of the challenges that FDR faced during his terms of office. And since then many have argued for a stronger executive branch in a time of crisis. Robert Turner, an expert in the field of executive powers, argued against the War Powers Resolution when it was passed in 1973 because of the "complex foreign policy emergencies." Turner, in favor of strong executive power, argues that:

Congress lacks the expertise... and most members are too busy with other duties to remain up-to-date on a prolonged crisis. During times of crisis, decisiveness is often

essential... Congress is not structured to make rapid decisions, and the more controversial and important the decision, the more likely it is that at least some members will want to prolong the debate to avoid having to take a position that might later prove to have been politically unwise. (109)

Turner's viewpoints are aligned with FDR's; with each challenge FDR was able to overcome them in different fashions.

The United States Supreme Court was the first to challenge FDR in regards to his New Deal programs. The New Deal was a series of programs and agencies set up in order to aid the American people during the Great Depression. One of his initiatives was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). The National Recovery Administration (NRA) was created under the act and designed to help businesses and labor. Eventually, the NRA was "shot down" because of its unconstitutionality regarding separation of powers and interstate commerce in the 1935 Supreme Court decision of *Schechter v. United States*. Another New Deal program, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was also challenged, and some of its provisions were considered unconstitutional by the Supreme Court's decision of *United States v. Butler* in 1936. According to Baker, "For two years FDR had watched, helpless, while the Supreme Court destroyed the legislative program he had tried to build. The anger had grown in him as one New Deal measure after another was declared unconstitutional by a court that FDR considered... [to be] above politics" (Baker 6). Despite the United States being in the midst of a crisis, the Supreme Court disagreed with FDR and felt compelled to keep the system in check.

Emergency does not create new constitutional power. It does not 'increase granted power or remove or diminish the restrictions imposed upon power granted or reserved.' This doctrine is strengthened, in the view of the Supreme Court, by the historical circumstance that the Constitution itself was adopted in a period of grave emergency. Its grant of powers was, therefore, determined in the light of emergency. (Koenig 11)

Of course, FDR had his difference of opinion, which called for a proposal that would shake things up – his Court Packing Plan.

Roosevelt in 1937 met with his staff and congressional leaders to discuss a "reorganization" of the executive and judicial branches of government. FDR was also "struggling to determine if the Presidency, the Congress, and the judiciary were indeed equal branches of the federal government, as the people understood the Constitution to say, or whether on branch, the Presidency, was supreme" (Baker 6). With all the qualifications and skills, FDR should be considered a strong (and, even suspicious) leader, with his views regarding the strengths of the executive branch. What was the Court-Packing Plan or what were the intentions of FDR? According to Baker, "The FDR plan was simple. The Supreme Court had nine members. Six were over seventy years of age. For each member of the Court who declined to retire at age seventy, Roosevelt proposed that a co-justice be appointed to the Court to serve alongside the older justice... the Court would jump in size from nine to fifteen members." Baker goes further on to add, "Although the argument in the message was based on physical age, everyone... understood there was another motive" (Baker 9). What other motives? FDR was being challenged but his philosophy was this: as President of the United States, especially in a crisis, he should be dictating the affairs of the state. Why the focus on the Supreme Court? Senator Henry Ashurst, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said it best: "Persons who believe in President Roosevelt opposed his bill because they were haunted by the terrible fear that some future President might, by suddenly enlarging the Supreme Court, suppress free speech, free assembly and invade other constitutional guarantees of citizens" (Baker 47). In other words, the "reorganization" of the Judicial Branch is considered the beginning to something much greater down the road. During the era of dictatorships in Europe, there was a "genuine" possibility of it

happening in the United States. Even an old friend of FDR, Jerome D. Green, wrote against the Court Packing Plan in the editorial column of the *New York Times*. He wrote, “For one who knows the President it is impossible to believe that he is aiming at a future dictatorship; but it is also impossible not to recognize the packing of the Supreme Court as exactly what a dictator would adopt as his first step” (Baker 49). Let us keep in mind that FDR believed that the Supreme Court justices were politicians just as the President and Congress. He thought of them as politicians because of “the manners in which federal judges were selected” and thought of the Constitution as a “document of politics.” All the facts point to the conclusion that the Supreme Court was just another “political organization” (Baker 109). FDR frequently went on the radio to make speeches; his March 9, 1937, address was in the defense of the Court Packing idea: “You who know me will accept my solemn assurance that in a world in which democracy is under attack, I seek to make American democracy succeed” (Baker 56). As simple as it seemed, it never evolved into law. The idea was simply “replaced” because of a much greater threat outside our borders – foreign affairs in Europe and Asia.

Domestic affairs took more of the administration’s time and attention during the Great Depression, while foreign affairs took a “back seat” because of the accepted foreign policy of the time – isolationism. The United States, from its people to its many prominent legislators, felt that Europe had “suckered” them into a foreign entanglement with the First World War. President Woodrow Wilson tried to expand his role and administration by introducing his League of Nations as part of his *Fourteen Points*. His idea of a League of Nations was welcomed by everyone in Europe but totally unwelcome back at home. It was eventually “shot down” by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and his group known as the Irreconcilables. They felt that the League of Nations contradicted the Constitution, especially in the matters of war, but also left Congress powerless when it came to foreign affairs. FDR faced the effects of these politics and policies from the First World War. Baker better addresses the issue that FDR faced. “The people of the United States had forgotten about strong presidents. FDR had been preceded by three presidents who in their combined dozen years in office had either surrendered power or failed to take it when it was available. For this reason there was an undercurrent of suspicion directed against FDR’s personal ambitions” (Baker 48). Senator Hiram Johnson concurred with the American sentiment and cautioned any future entanglements. “Beware the words, ‘We cannot keep out,’ ‘Our entry in the war is inevitable,’ or ‘We must fight to preserve democracy,’ and all the Devil’s messages we heard twenty years ago” (Fehrenbach 34).

Roosevelt addressed the neutrality issue in his September 3, 1939, radio speech that the United States would remain a neutral country. It must have been difficult taking a stand on the issue because of the mounting pressures of the Great Depression and no viable solution to end it, especially during his second term in office. Congress had done a fine job of keeping the United States out of any foreign involvement through legislation. The Neutrality Acts and the Johnson Act of 1934 forbade the export of arms and war material and prohibited loans to any nation behind in its World War I debts respectively. FDR faced another formidable challenge – Congress.

According to Fehrenbach, FDR began an intense two year campaign against Congress to remove any restrictions that curtailed, or “handicap[ped],” as Fehrenbach puts it, the powers of the President. This campaign went mostly unnoticed to the public. It was the politics behind the politics, as I say. Many prominent Senators were against FDR’s motives of getting involved, such as Senator William Edgar Borah, who felt that foreign politics were “power politics” and all power politics were bad. [Senator Borah was also a member of the Irreconcilables that protested Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations.] Senator Lynn Frazier also acknowledged Borah when he said, “Roosevelt is playing politics with World War II” (Fehrenbach 45). Another challenger, Senator Burton Wheeler, protested that “There will be revolution in this country if the

Administration gets us into this damnable war” (Fehrenbach 204). [Senator Wheeler was a New Deal Democrat but was not in favor of Roosevelt’s Court Packing Plan and any foreign involvement, including aid to the British. He was one of FDR’s formidable opponents. Wheeler did, however, vote in favor of war against the Empire of Japan after the Pearl Harbor attack.]

Many congressmen felt very adamant about getting involved in foreign intervention or increasing the powers of the President because many thought the New Deal programs (the effective ones) would suffer if the United States looked outward (Fehrenbach 6). Politics being politics, a congressman has to serve his/her constituency, and if the members of the district, or the state, are affected, rest assured their re-elections would be affected, too. It was a very difficult, strained, and tense relationship with Congress’ “growing cynicism” and the President. Nevertheless, FDR had shifted his administration’s policies into focusing on Europe’s problems and Japanese aggression. He had even made it into his 1940 re-election campaign; no more was the focus at home; it was being shared with foreign involvement. His radio speeches even shifted tone. No longer was he addressing the nation by “consoling” them for the hard times of the Great Depression; he was now bringing to the attention of the American people a growing evil that was spreading in Europe and Asia. (Perhaps it was his intention was to shift the focus away from his failing domestic policies.) His speeches were issued as warnings of an “immoral disease” spreading into our country’s hemisphere. According to Fehrenbach, FDR’s administration viewpoint was the following: “Conditions that had existed in 1914 could not be compared to the world of 1939. The Allies were fighting for the preservation of a democratic world order against a fascist world revolution, not another imperialistic quarrel over boundaries in Europe” (Fehrenbach 35). FDR really tried hard, when it came to foreign affair issues, to avoid any comparisons or parallels to the idealistic Woodrow Wilson. As the two year power struggle over interests between FDR and Congress was happening; the hammer hit hard with the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The Japanese inflicted heavy damages on the United States Armed Forces in Hawaii and shook up the rest of the country. There has always been some controversy over the issue of whether the United States knew of the Japanese operation to attack at Pearl Harbor. I am not going to open the subject for discussion or launch into a conspiracy theory, but studying Roosevelt led me to a couple of doubts. The following left me wondering if FDR, or his administration, had any intentions of using the Pearl Harbor attack as a pretext for war, to get the United States more involved, or to get the country out of the Great Depression. Fehrenbach quoted U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Joseph C. Grew, as saying, “My Peruvian colleague told a member of my staff that he had heard from many sources, including a Japanese source, that the Japanese military forces planned, in the event of trouble with the United States, to attempt a surprise mass attack on Pearl Harbor using all their military facilities” (Fehrenbach 274). The ambassador relayed the message to Washington on January 27, 1941, more than ten months before the attack.

Conclusion

Dictatorships do not only happen on the other side of the world. There was a genuine possibility that it could have happened with FDR that should not be dismissed. Who knows what could have happened if not for his failing health or his death in 1945? What new powers would have been granted to the presidency? What demotions could have happened with Congress or the Supreme Court? And, who knows what changes and/or modifications could have been made to the Constitution? He expanded the roles of government and the president in both domestic and foreign affairs. “Enormous, significant precedents had been set. The expanding concept of the President as the Commander-in-Chief – without sharply defined limits to the powers of this office – forever changed the role of the President from a requester of legislation to an executive who could commit American power abroad” (Fehrenbach 325). He left behind a very powerful Democratic party that controlled the House and the Senate up until the 1990s. He certainly left

behind a strong legacy, and with due respect he can be referred to as one of the greatest presidents of our country. The possibility of abuse of power was there, and the comparison to Napoleon, Hitler, and Palpatine was unavoidable. United States' history bears comparison with others, and to a thousand year old Republic in a galaxy far, far away.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson 1: What can we learn from Star Wars?

Objectives: (TEKS 113.33.c25) The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources such as a film. How can a student apply observations from a film that historians use to interpret the past? By using the *Star Wars* saga as a primary source, the student may interpret the surface, or top-layer, of the films' story – politics and government. (113.35.c1) The student understands the political ideas and forms of government in history by identifying the characteristics of classical forms of government, such as a classical republic, liberal democracy, authoritarianism, despotism, and totalitarianism.

Materials: Film Review Sheet (see Appendix A); Episodes I – VI of *Star Wars* for a homework and/or research assignment; an alternative for the instructor with greater expertise of the *Star Wars* storyline – *Star Wars: A Musical Journey* DVD. The latter may be used as a condensed classwork assignment, review of underlying topics, or as an introduction to a research project.

Procedures/Activities: Distribute a Film Review Sheet to each student; the document will require the student to record observations from the film. A thorough Film Review Sheet will include a historical background and observations of the following: culture, economy, fashion, language, and technology. Initiating a class discussion will be a great class activity at the end of each film. The students share their observations with the rest of class and will most certainly “spark” a broad range of topics of discussion and film examples, especially in the categories of culture, economy, and language. The instructor must be prepared to receive lower-level observations to analytical, in-depth meanings that a student can make. As the teacher, we can “tie the loose-ends” and connect the films to the lesson plan of how a government can “re-organize” or transform politically.

Discussion/Vocabulary: 1. Compare and contrast a *republic* and an *empire*. What are some key components that make each system vital? The teacher may make references to Ancient Rome. 2. Identify what a *crisis* is? 3. Introduce the concept of a *lugal*, a “big man,” from the ancient Sumerians. How ancient leaders in history gained power during a time of crisis and how these *appointed* leaders held on to their *powers* as an *executive*? (In Ancient Mesopotamia, there was constant warfare over border disputes and water resources.)

Evaluation/Assessment: An essay assignment comparing the political transformation of the Republic to the First Galactic Empire in *Star Wars* and Rome's declining Republic in the first century B.C. to the Age of Augustus representing the rise of the Roman Empire. Another essay topic is focused on the character of Palpatine. How did his demeanor, or character, change as he gained prominence in the Senate? The latter assignment would need to highlight the crisis of the galaxy and emergency executive powers granted to him. Another writing and research assignment is for the student to explore the “bread and circus” of *Star Wars* and Ancient Rome. Some topics to consider are the gladiatorial games, chariot races, and “pod” races. Other films to consider are *Gladiator* (2000) and *Ben-Hur* (1959).

Lesson 2: FDR and Executive Powers

Objectives: (TEKS 113.32.c.16) The student studies the changing relationships among the three branches of the American federal government by evaluating the impact of events. (113.35.c.2)

The student analyzes the principles and ideas that underlie the U.S. Constitution, such as the limitations of power.

Materials: *The American Spirit, Volume II since 1865* reader. Also, excerpts of Episodes I – III of the *Star Wars* films or scenes 1 – 5 of the “condensed” version of the saga– *Star Wars: A Musical Journey* DVD for deeper, comparison discussion.

Procedures/Discussion: Students should read the FDR sections of their readers. They can carry a class discussion interpreting the political cartoons highlighting FDR’s New Deal and his Court Packing Plan. Students can also analyze the primary sources regarding FDR’s radio speeches and foreign involvement. In regards to FDR’s legacy, the class discussion can include the following: Who were opposed to FDR’s New Deal programs? Who were the prominent leaders of Congress? Which political party had the majority in the House of Representatives? In the Senate? For an in-depth discussion, how does FDR compare to the *Star Wars* character of Palpatine?

Evaluation/Assessment: A creative project assignment in which the students create their own “1930s style” poster promoting a New Deal program and/or agency. Research will be mandatory to study the posters, language, and art of the past. In another assignment, the student can draw their own political cartoons regarding one of the topics during FDR’s term in office.

Lesson 3: U.S. Constitution vs. Executive Branch

Objectives: (TEKS 113.35.c.8) The student reviews American beliefs and principles that are reflected in the U.S. Constitution by evaluating constitutional provisions for limiting the role of government including checks and balances and separation of powers. (113.35.c.9) The student understands the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution by analyzing the bicameral structure of Congress, constitutional powers of the president, growth of presidential power, and the major responsibilities of the federal government for domestic and foreign policy.

Materials: U.S. History textbook, *The American Spirit, Volume II: Since 1865* reader for primary sources, and outside sources of the War Powers Resolution of 1973.

Procedures/Discussion: The teacher must provide some outside material in regards to Abraham Lincoln’s extended war powers. His suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus was one of Lincoln’s first wartime orders as commander in chief during the Civil War (McPherson 57). What precedents did he establish that FDR picked up on during his administration as another war president? Ultimately, this should be a class discussion on the War Powers Resolution of 1973. What prompted such legislation by Congress? What roles did Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon have to do it? Were the Korean and Vietnam Wars the “last straw” for Congress? What are some of its ramifications?

Activity: Another film, outside of *Star Wars*, is *Thirteen Days* (2000). It is an excellent film highlighting JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Consider the following movie quote by Bruce Greenwood playing President Kennedy: “I am commander-in-chief and I say when we go to war!” President Kennedy faced some of the most difficult and crucial decisions during the Cold War.

Evaluation/Assessment: A writing / research assignment on one of the Cold War Presidents and his role as president and commander-in-chief.

Lesson 4: Star Wars and Modern History

Objectives: (TEKS 113.33.c.9) The student understands the impact of totalitarianism in the 20th century by identifying the rise of Nazism/Fascism in Germany and Italy. (113.32.c.13) The student compares the economic development between World War I and World War II; the topic is

enhanced to include the decline in worldwide trade that led to political instability in Europe. (113.32.c.19) The student identifies the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society and describing the qualities of an effective leader.

Materials: U.S. History textbook, *The American Spirit, Volume II: Since 1865* reader for primary sources. Also, excerpts of Episodes I – VI of the *Star Wars* films or the “condensed” version of the saga– *Star Wars: A Musical Journey* DVD for deeper, comparison discussion.

Procedures/Activity: A group activity in which the class is separated into three groups. The first group will represent the French Empire during the Napoleonic era, the second group will represent Germany during the Third Reich, and the third group will represent the United States during the Great Depression and World War II. Each group will create a timeline of each nation’s important events during their respective eras.

Discussion: What were some common themes, or events, explored in each group? What are some of the parallels found in World History and the story/plot of *Star Wars*? Are there any real comparisons to a historical figure in world history to any of the characters in *Star Wars*?

Evaluation/Assessment: A review session followed by a comprehensive World History test.

APPENDIX A – FILM REVIEW SHEET

Name: _____ Date: _____
 Course: _____ Period: _____
 Title of Film: _____ Year of Film: _____
 Setting of Film
 (historical background): _____

OBSERVATIONS

1. Culture	2. Economy	3. Fashion	4. Language	5. Technology

Personal Critique of Film:

CREATED BY: RAUL J. SALDIVAR

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On behalf of our outstanding faculty, staff, and administrators, I wish to invite you to join us at the Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Professions-Qatar. I am very proud of the academic excellence that we provide every student from the 5th to the 12th grade. In the tradition of Dr. Michael E. DeBakey, renowned heart surgeon and innovator, our school offers a 21st century American curriculum. Communications. Current students at DeBakey High School for Health Prof and any other US high school can earn college scholarships as early as 9th grade through RaiseMe – start earning today! Fast facts about DeBakey High School for Health Prof (Houston, TX). Address. 3100 Shenandoah St Houston, TX 77021. For the school in Qatar see DeBakey High School for Health Professions at Qatar. DeBakey High School for Health Professions Location 3100 Shenandoah, Houston, Texas. It is the only HISD magnet high school for health professions. The school was named after Michael E. DeBakey, a famous heart surgeon. DeBakey does not automatically take in students from the surrounding neighborhood; the surrounding neighborhood is zoned to Yates High School.[2]. Contents. 1 History. 2 Health science. 3 School uniforms. 4 Student body.