

A Heartbeat Away: Popular Culture's Role in Teaching Presidential Succession

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ABSTRACT

The role of popular culture in civic education is important. Many television viewers learn about the American political process through various dramatized depictions. The 25th Amendment has often received much attention from Hollywood, as it provides writers, directors, and producers a tool with which to further dramatize presidential succession. Through the television shows *West Wing*, *Designated Survivor*, *Commander in Chief*, *Madam Secretary*, and *Political Animals*, viewers are exposed to storylines revolving around the 25th Amendment. By viewing these dramatized versions of presidential succession, viewers are better able to understand the process and political science instructors are better able to elucidate the process in the classroom.

Keywords: Presidential Succession, 25th Amendment, Popular Culture, *West Wing*, *Designated Survivor*, *Commander in Chief*, *Political Animals*, *Madam Secretary*

The role of popular culture in civic education is an important one. In fact, as Foy (2010) writes, “many people first learn about important governmental offices, such as the presidency, Congress, the courts, and the public bureaucracy, and organizations such as interest groups and political parties not from a textbook or political science class, but from a TV show, a movie, or a song” (p. 3). While popular culture does not guarantee a thorough civic education, it can provide some guidance to the general public about the role of certain governmental institutions. The presidency largely attracts attention in popular culture because of the vast power the president wields and the influence he has on the world stage. Writers, directors, and producers are given the freedom to explore the power of the presidency through dramatized—often excessively so—scenarios. Television shows focused on the presidency often involve a storyline focused on the 25th Amendment (the amendment that describes how, and under what circumstances, a president is to be replaced should he or she be unable to fulfill his or her term of office) as a way to dramatize presidential succession. The 25th Amendment provides answers to questions surrounding presidential succession, including instances outside of death and resignation. While the 25th Amendment has been used sparingly in actual administrations since its ratification in 1967, it appears as a major plot point in several television shows devoted to exploring the presidency.

Throughout United States history, nine presidents have failed to finish their full term in office. Four of these were due to natural causes (William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Warren G. Harding, and Franklin D. Roosevelt), four were assassinated (Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy), and Richard Nixon resigned the presidency rather than face impeachment. In each of these cases, the Vice President took over the presidency and finished his term. This line of succession has been codified in various laws and most recently the 25th Amendment, but this line of presidential succession was not always clear. Nixon was the only president who did not complete his term in office after the passage of the 25th Amendment. However, the 25th Amendment has been invoked six times, including Gerald Ford’s succession to the presidency after Nixon’s resignation.

While failing to finish a term of office is uncommon, the portrayal of it in popular culture happens quite regularly. In fact, most television shows involving the presidency regularly portray and play with presidential succession. My goal in this paper is to explore the role of popular culture in teaching viewers about presidential succession. I draw on examples from *The West Wing*, *Madam Secretary*, *Designated Survivor*, *Commander in Chief*, and *Political Animals*. I argue that these popular culture references help Americans learn about the process of presidential succession, as popular culture provides a great avenue for learning about a political phenomenon we have little experience with or may have never actually witnessed (Van Belle, 2018).

THE FOUNDERS’ INTENT & THE HISTORY OF PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

The Constitution initially specified that when a president was unable to fulfill his term of office, the Vice President would take over his responsibilities. In the case in which both the President and Vice President were unable to fulfill the duties of the presidency, Congress had the ability to declare which official would take over the presidency until a president could be elected. Thus, initially, the Constitution only specified the Vice President in the line of succession to the presidency, which has been further clarified by both the 20th and 25th Amendments. However, these amendments were not ratified until 1933 and 1967, respectively. Until then, there were several cases in which the Vice President had died in office: George Clinton (served under Thomas Jefferson and James Madison), Elbridge Gerry (under James Madison), William R. King (under Franklin Pierce), Henry Wilson (under Ulysses S. Grant), Thomas Hendricks (under Grover Cleveland), Garret Hobart (under William McKinley), and James Sherman (under William Howard Taft).

Should something have happened to these Presidents while their Vice Presidencies were vacant, the Constitution specified that Congress would have had the power to decide who became president until the

next president could be elected. However, Schlesinger (1974) points to the vagueness of this provision and the fact that there is little certainty that the Founders originally intended for the Vice President to inherit the presidency were the President unable to fulfill his term. In fact, the Founders feared a dynastic presidency and with the President getting to pick his Vice President, it is akin to a President choosing his successor and thus creating a political dynasty (Republicus, 1788).

In addition, the early discussions surrounding the Electoral College seem to support the idea that the vice presidency was not designed to inherit the presidency. Each elector was expected to cast two ballots for president and could not vote for two candidates from the same state (Hamilton, 1788; Dewey, 1962; Neale, 2017). The winner of the vote would become President, while the second place finisher would become Vice President. According to Schlesinger (1974) the reason for the double vote was to ensure local or state preferences did not overrun the vote and so that the United States was left with a president that advocated for, and represented, national interests. Hugh Williamson, a North Carolina member of the drafting committee, stated, "such an office as vice-president was not wanted. He was introduced only for the sake of valuable mode of election which required two to be chosen at the same time" (quoted in Schlesinger, 1974, p. 489). Thus, it seems as though the Founders never really intended for the Vice President to replace the President should he be unable to fulfill his duties.

THE 25TH AMENDMENT

In 1967, the 25th Amendment was ratified by the requisite 38 states. While previous legislation made the line of succession clear, this amendment codifies that succession in the Constitution as well as answers to several other concerns that arose after the 1947 Presidential Succession Act was passed. Specifically, the 25th Amendment (U.S. Const. amend. XXV. Sec. 1-4) contains four sections:

1. When the President is removed from office, by impeachment, death, or resignation, the Vice President becomes President.
2. If the vice presidency becomes vacant, the President will nominate a Vice President who must receive a majority vote in both houses of Congress in order to assume office.
3. The President may temporarily transfer power to the Vice President via written communication to both the Speaker of the House and president pro tempore of the Senate. Upon ability to resume office, the President should submit another written document to both offices in order to regain the office.
4. The Vice Presidency and a majority of the President's cabinet can declare the President unable to perform his duties, in which case the Vice President assumes the presidency. The President has the ability to submit written communication to the Speaker of the House and president pro tempore that no such inability exists, but the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet have four days to report to Congress whether or not they agree the President is ready to re-assume power. Congress then has 48 hours to convene (if not in session) and a total of 21 days to decide the matter. If two-thirds of both Houses votes the president is unable to discharge his duties, the Vice President once again assumes the presidency.

Since its ratification, the first section has only been invoked once: when Richard Nixon resigned, Gerald Ford was administered the presidential oath of office (McDermott, 2007). Section two has been invoked twice since ratification: once after Spiro Agnew, Nixon's Vice President, resigned amid scandal, and second, after Gerald Ford vacated the vice presidency to become President after Nixon resigned (Goldstein, 2000, 2010). Prior to the ratification of the 25th Amendment, however, the vice presidency was left vacant quite regularly. In fact, it was vacant 18 times, which amounted to roughly 37 years, or one-fifth of our nation's history (Gilbert, 1998). Section three has been invoked three times since ratification: Reagan invoked section three (in 1985) when he was under general anesthesia to get colon polyps removed and George W. Bush invoked it twice

(in 2002 and 2007) when he received routine colonoscopies (Feerick, 2014). There are other instances when section 3 could have been invoked, but was not (McDermott, 2007 points to Reagan's prostate surgery in 1987; Feerick, 2014 points to the attempted assassination of Reagan). Regardless, invocations of the first three sections of the 25th Amendment have remained fairly uncontroversial since the amendment's ratification.

Of the four sections of the 25th Amendment, section four has been the most controversial, despite the fact that it has never been invoked. One reason this section has proven controversial is due to the vagueness of impairment. When is a president too impaired to perform his or her duties? Could invoking section 4 lead to a coup-like takeover of power?

These concerns are raised in response to the possibility of a president being diagnosed with a mentally degenerative disease, an assassination attempt, a stroke, or experiencing some sort of head trauma (McDermott, 2007). Originally, concerns were raised in the aftermath of Ronald Reagan's assassination attempt. After Reagan was shot, he underwent surgery requiring general anesthesia but never transferred the powers of the presidency to George H.W. Bush. This raised concerns regarding who was in charge of governmental decisions during that time period. In fact, Reagan's Secretary of State, Alexander M. Haig Jr., responded to one such question by saying,

Constitutionally, gentlemen, you have the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State in that order and should the President decide he wants to transfer the helm to the Vice President, he will do so. He has not done that. As of now, I am in control here, in the White House, pending return of the Vice President (Gilbert and Bucy, 2014, 5).

Haig was incorrect in his report on presidential succession; before the Secretary of State takes over the presidency, the Speaker of the House and president pro tempore of the Senate are in line to assume power.

Further, while Reagan's surgery lasted only a matter of hours, he was hospitalized for the 13 days following. While he was recuperating, Reagan was on medication that could have impaired his decision-making skills (Feerick, 2014). George H.W. Bush led cabinet meetings and conducted presidential duties as needed while Reagan was hospitalized, but the country was still given the impression that Reagan, not Bush, was governing the country (Feerick, 2014; McDermott, 2007). In fact, for roughly one month after Reagan's surgery, Bush led cabinet meetings (NY Times, April 25, 1981, I); and it was not until almost two months after his surgery that Reagan worked a full day (NY Times, June 4, 1981, B15). Nonetheless, despite all of the evidence that Bush should have been made acting President while Reagan recovered from the assassination attempt, the 25th Amendment was never invoked.

Many attempts have been made at clarifying the intent behind section four. President Jimmy Carter actually weighed in on this subject via an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Carter writes that the responsibility of declaring a President unfit to serve should be left to medical doctors rather than the Vice President, cabinet members, and the president's personal physicians—all of whom have a personal conflict of interest (Carter, 1994). It would be better, Carter (1994) suggests, to use an independent team of medical doctors to make such a judgement. In response to these concerns, a Working Group was established at the Carter Center in Atlanta, GA to examine and make recommendations about how to best carry out section 4. Several recommendations were made, but the main recommendation about a Medical Group weighing in on presidential inability was overwhelmingly voted down, with 83 percent in opposition, citing concerns over separation of powers, political motives, and undermining public accountability (Gilbert, 2000, 2003, 2011).

THE PORTRAYAL OF THE 25TH AMENDMENT IN POPULAR CULTURE

Popular Culture provides us with several interesting depictions of presidential succession. *Commander in Chief*, a short-lived drama starring Geena Davis as Vice President-turned-President Mackenzie Allen, begins with Vice President Allen being pulled from a children's school concert in Paris, France to be told that President Theodore Roosevelt Bridges experienced a stroke after suffering a brain hemorrhage (Lurie, 2005). As President Bridges lies in a hospital bed, he asks Allen to resign the vice presidency so that the Speaker of the House Nathan Templeton can become acting President while Bridges recovers. He informs Allen that Templeton better fulfills his vision for the presidency, given that they are both Republicans, while Allen is an Independent and was selected as Vice President only to help Bridges appeal to female voters. Further complicating Allen's ascension to the presidency is her gender—she would become the first female President in U.S. history if she did not resign (for a thorough treatment of Allen's gender and its implications see Goren, 2013; Hoffman, 2013; Michlin, 2012; Vaughn and Michaelson, 2013). As Allen considers resignation, the President dies and she is sworn into office, per section one of the 25th Amendment. This television show demonstrates that no matter what the President's wishes may be, the 25th Amendment is followed. Even the President does not have the power to overrule the Constitutionally mandated line of succession. President Allen makes this assertion in Episode 7, "First Scandal," when she states, "He had no authority to ask that of me... The People elected me to this position, and only the People and their representatives can ask me to step down" (Wallace, 2005).

Commander in Chief also explores section two of the 25th Amendment in Episode 7. Given that Allen has become President, she is entitled to appoint a Vice President. To fill that vacancy, Allen selects retired Army General Warren Keaton. Keaton was Allen's opponent in the previous election, being the vice presidential choice of the Democratic candidate. Given that former President Teddy Bridges was a Republican, Allen receives some pushback by appointing a Democratic Vice President. Viewers are reminded that Allen has the authority—via the 25th Amendment—to appoint whomever she believes is best qualified for the vice presidency, though the nominee must face a confirmation hearing in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This episode presents us with a view of the House hearing, with President Allen telling him to "kick some tail" like he did in the Senate before his hearing begins (Wallace, 2005). Thus, we are led to believe Keaton has already been confirmed by the Senate and only the House has yet to vote on his appointment. Keaton is confirmed via a 386-46 vote in the House and becomes Vice President. The episode teaches its audience how section two is invoked and how replacing the vice president works.

Finally, *Commander in Chief* depicts section three of the Amendment as well. In Episode 16, "The Elephant in the Room," President Allen falls ill with appendicitis which requires emergency surgery (Roth, 2006). Since she will be under general anesthesia, she has her chief of staff prepare the paperwork to swear in the President pro tempore of the Senate as acting President while she is unconscious. Her chief of staff questions this decision, given the Speaker of the House is next in line for the presidency since her Vice President resigned to tend to his cancer-stricken wife. She mentions that she assumes Speaker Templeton would not want to resign his post for only a few hours in the White House while she is under anesthesia. Templeton would need to resign from the House of Representatives because an individual cannot be a member of the legislative and executive branches of government simultaneously. The President pro tempore would also need to resign his position in the Senate, but his (un)willingness to do so is not discussed in the episode, leaving us to believe he is indeed willing to resign his Senate seat to serve as acting President. However, Templeton decides he is willing to resign his position in the House, as he has ambitions to run for the presidency in the upcoming election. With Templeton willing to serve as acting President, both he and the President sign written statements to that effect and he is administered the presidential oath of office. After Allen is out of surgery, her chief of staff informs Templeton that the president is awake and resuming the presidency,

highlighting exactly how section 3 is supposed to be executed.

In 2016, *Designated Survivor* premiered on ABC and ran for only two seasons, but is currently on Netflix, which produced a third, and final, season. The entire premise of the show was that the Capitol building was destroyed during the President's State of the Union address, leaving the designated survivor in charge. Tom Kirkman, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, becomes president, as he was the individual tasked with staying in the bunker during the State of the Union address. This became standard practice during the Cold War, as concerns about nuclear war were heightened. The year in which this originated is unclear, as the Senate's Historical Office has only kept track of designated survivors since 1984, prior to which the identities were often not made public (Senate Historical Office, n.d.). By using a designated survivor, there is no ambiguity about who is in charge post-apocalyptic destruction—there is one person in the line of succession that will be quickly sworn into office and assume the powers of the presidency.

Designated Survivor portrays this aspect well and also covers section two of the 25th Amendment regarding appointment of the Vice President when there is a vacancy in that office. In Season 1 Episode 10, Kirkman appointed Peter MacLeish to the vice presidency (MacLeish being the only surviving congressional member of the president's party in the Capitol bombing). He was confirmed by both the House and Senate with majority votes in both houses, just as section two mandates (Toye, 2016). Additionally, during MacLeish's swearing-in President Kirkman is shot, therefore MacLeish becomes acting President. In Season 1 Episode 11, entitled "Warriors," the show makes it very clear that in order for MacLeish to take power, the President must inform the Speaker of the House and the President pro tempore of the Senate via a written and signed statement—exactly the procedure outlined in section three of the 25th Amendment (Surjik, 2017). We see the process of vice presidential appointment once again in Season 2, Episode 14, entitled "In the Dark" when President Kirkman nominates Ellenor Darby to fill the vacancy left after MacLeish was assassinated in Season 1 Episode 12 (Listo, 2017; Banker, 2018). In this case, we do not hear about the entire nomination and confirmation process, likely because the show covered the process in Season 1.

The West Wing had a major story arc at the end of its fourth season and beginning of its fifth season that revolved around section 3 being invoked. In Episode 22 of Season 4, entitled "Commencement," the President's daughter, Zoe Bartlet, graduated from Georgetown with her Bachelor's degree (Graves, 2003a). Later that evening, she attended a graduation party at which her boyfriend spiked her drink with ecstasy. Her secret service detail became anxious when she did not return from the restroom and upon investigation found an agent who had been killed, along with Zoe's panic button. In the following episode, entitled "Twenty-Five," the storyline revolves around Zoe Bartlet's kidnapping and the various reasons that could have caused it, along with the potential courses of action to take in response to it (Misiano, 2003a). President Josiah "Jed" Bartlet decides to invoke section three of the 25th Amendment because he is unable to separate the office of the presidency from his emotional reaction to his daughter's kidnapping. Complicating this is the fact that there is a vacancy in the Vice Presidency, as President Bartlet's Vice President, John Hoynes, resigned amid an infidelity scandal. Because of this vacancy, the Speaker of the House, Glenallen Walken, is next in line for the presidency. Unfortunately for Bartlet, the Speaker happens to be a Republican while Bartlet is a Democrat. This difference in partisanship does not deter Bartlet from resigning, given his perceived inability to perform his job to the best of his abilities. So, Season Four comes to a close with Bartlet signing a letter temporarily transferring power to Walken who is sworn in after he resigns the Speakership. Season Five begins with a two-part episode in which we see Zoe's kidnapping resolved (Graves, 2003b; Misiano, 2003b). She is found alive and upon her return, President Bartlet returns to the Oval Office to sign a second letter reassuming the presidency.

This story arc in *The West Wing* highlights a number of interesting aspects of section three of the 25th Amendment. In addition to the transfer of power, it also highlights the fact that presidential succession does

not require same-party control of the White House. Same-party control is advocated for by Sindler (1987), who argues that the voters chose a member of a specific party when they cast their ballots and a member of that party should succeed them if the need arises; without such a guarantee, there would be a violation of popular sovereignty, as it would actually reverse the decision of the electorate. In the case of *The West Wing*, the voters chose a Democrat and the acting President was a Republican—a party with a completely different governing strategy. Throughout this storyline, the President’s staff openly discussed the downsides of handing power to political opponents, but most of them agreed with the deputy Communications Director Will Bailey when he said, “the President temporarily handing over power to his political enemy? I think it’s a fairly stunning act of patriotism and a fairly ordinary act of fatherhood” (Misiano, 2003a, Season 4, Episode 3). Nonetheless, the discussion of same-party succession is an interesting one considering political parties were not anticipated, nor advocated for, by the Founding Fathers. This was not a concern until 1947 with the passage of the second Presidential Succession Act. President Truman was troubled by the fact that unelected officials would inherit the presidency before someone who was elected and thus encouraged Congress to place the Speaker of the House and President pro tempore ahead of the cabinet members, which Congress ultimately agreed to. Thus, *The West Wing* does well in teaching its audience how section three works, along with the potential significance of the partisan differences between the president and who might ascend to the presidency via section three.

Despite the fact that we have not seen section four of the 25th Amendment invoked, *Madam Secretary* explores a scenario in which it could plausibly be used (Reinisch, 2018). The television show focuses on Secretary of State Elizabeth McCord, and her role in President Conrad Dalton’s administration. In Episode 12 of Season 4, McCord notices that President Dalton is not acting like himself and is becoming easily agitated. In fact, Dalton threatens military strikes against Russia in response to a sonic attack on a United States embassy in Bulgaria. Russia denies the attack and Dalton’s advisors cannot produce clear evidence that Russia was indeed behind the attack. Nonetheless, Dalton wants to order military attacks immediately. The National Security Council director refuses to comply with the order and Dalton promptly fires him. Ultimately, his advisors, including McCord, convince him to delay for 24 hours. In that 24 hours, Dalton is presented with evidence that Russia did not conduct the sonic attack, but still wants the U.S. to conduct missile strikes. McCord assembles the entire cabinet and argues that Dalton is unwell and should be removed from power until he is better prepared for the presidency. It is clear that the cabinet is conflicted on the idea, with one of them stating “don’t we owe it to Conrad to protect him and his reputation? Other administrations have shielded their presidents in the past. Maybe it’s our turn to step up. Do our jobs while limiting his public appearances” (Reinisch, 2018, Season 4, Episode 12). Secretary McCord responds by saying, “I want to protect him too. But a shadow government of un-elected cabinet members running the show while keeping the president under wraps is no way to govern a democracy” (Reinisch, 2018, Season 4, Episode 12). Ultimately, the cabinet votes to remove Dalton from power and make the Vice President acting President until Dalton undergoes medical testing and has recuperated. Upon testing, Dalton learns he has a malignant brain tumor pressing on his frontal lobe. After surgery and a full recovery, Dalton is once again made President.

Since section four has never actually been invoked in real history, its portrayal in *Madam Secretary* is our best example of how it could be done. The show’s creator, Barbara Hall, gave an interview in which she said that her goal with the episode was to create drama, give a civics lesson, and “show people what the process was” (CNN, 2018). *Madam Secretary* actually shows the process quite well. The removal of the president from power should not be an easy decision for the cabinet to make. In the removal of Dalton from power, it was clear that the cabinet was struggling with the decision. They also clearly discussed the rules behind invoking section four: the Vice President and a majority of the cabinet members must be in favor of temporarily removing the president from power. In addition, this episode correctly covers the fact that the president can return to the presidency upon recuperation from the cause of the president’s inability to perform his duties. Finally, the

episode highlights this via the use of the cabinet's suspicion that the president is suffering from some sort of medical condition. McDermott (2007) argues that this is a scenario that those who drafted the Amendment had in mind when writing this section. As the President was unwell, the cabinet took it upon itself to remove the president from power until he was able to show that he was fully recovered. Overall, *Madam Secretary* does a thorough job of teaching its viewers how section four of the 25th Amendment should be used.

In addition to *Madam Secretary*, the television mini-series *Political Animals* (which aired on USA in 2012) also gives us a glimpse into a scenario in which section four could be invoked. The mini-series centers on Elaine Barrish, a failed Democratic presidential nominee, former Illinois Governor, and Secretary of State, who plans to resign her cabinet position in order to run against the sitting President in the upcoming Democratic nominating contest. In the finale, we learn that Air Force One crashes off the coast of France with the President on board and his fate uncertain (Petrarca, 2012). The Vice President meets with the White House counsel to discuss his options for assuming the presidency and he ultimately summons the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to the oval office to administer the oath of office. Before he does, however, Secretary Barrish organizes the cabinet to invoke section four of the 25th Amendment, arguing that because uncertainty exists about whether or not the President is alive, this is the proper course to take. Should the President be found alive and the Vice President were administered the oath, the country would then be presented with the constitutional question of which man is the rightful occupant of the presidency. Barrish meets with the Vice President and convinces him to invoke section four rather than take the oath of office until the President's fate is determined, presenting him with a letter signed by all members of the cabinet authorizing him to become acting President. Viewers are then shown the Vice President informing both the Speaker of the House and President pro tempore of his invocation of section four—the proper protocol outlined in the 25th Amendment.

The intent behind section four is to provide a way for the Vice President to become acting President should something happen to prevent the President from relinquishing power on his own (e.g. he is unconscious, suffering from a debilitating illness, or in the case of *Political Animals*, presumed to be dead due to a tragic accident). This episode of *Political Animals* properly instructs audiences as to how section four should be invoked and the protocol surrounding it.

THE PEDAGOGICAL USEFULNESS OF POPULAR CULTURE

The popular culture narratives discussed should prove valuable in any political science classroom when focusing on presidential succession. The presidency is often of interest to students, because it is one of the most visible components of the American political system. Yet, despite the visibility of the presidency, presidential succession—outside of electoral succession—is largely shrouded in mystery. Aside from four presidential assassinations, four presidential deaths, and one resignation, the American public has not been exposed to the sudden vacancy of the presidency. And even in cases in which the presidency was vacated outside of normal electoral mechanisms, there has been a protocol to follow stating the Vice President would accede to the presidency until the next election is held.

Consequently, popular culture has opted to play with storylines in which the presidency is vacated and a successor is needed to fill the office. Thus, it is evident that the American public's understanding of presidential succession may be largely shaped by popular culture. Outside of a political science classroom or these works of popular culture, there are few avenues through which the public is exposed to the Constitutional order of presidential succession.

Popular culture can thus help fill in the gaps when it comes to the mechanics of the 25th Amendment. Importantly, the narratives highlighted here have largely succeeded in portraying these mechanics. From the five television shows discussed here, all four sections of the 25th Amendment have received attention.

While some Americans may remember Nixon's resignation or Kennedy's assassination (both of which have also received significant attention from popular culture artifacts), those that do not have likely not witnessed presidential succession outside of normal electoral mechanisms. Due to this, popular culture can be a useful tool employed in the political science classroom. By using an episode of *Madam Secretary* or a small story arc from *The West Wing*, political science instructors can provide students with a dramatized learning experience to go with an assigned reading and discussion.

There is much pedagogical value to be gained from the use of popular culture in the classroom in general. Using various popular culture artifacts may help stimulate students in the classroom and increase appreciation of the content they are learning (Tierney, 2007). Clapton (2015) also makes the point that using popular culture examples in the classroom helps students better relate to the material and helps provide concrete examples for more abstract ideas or theories. This is precisely why popular culture proves useful in discussions of presidential succession. Traditional college students today do not recall Nixon's resignation in 1974 nor Kennedy's assassination in 1963. By using the depictions of presidential succession in the popular culture narratives discussed here, students are able to ground their conceptions of presidential succession in something they are able to actually see.

CONCLUSION

Popular culture provides an interesting look into presidential succession, including examples of all four sections of the 25th Amendment. Failure to fulfill a full term of office is actually quite rare for a president, yet almost all television shows revolving around U.S. politics have included a storyline in which a president is unable to complete a term or faces some constitutional challenge to his or her position. This is likely due to the dramatic nature of presidential succession, which brings in viewers, and increases ratings. Nonetheless, these storylines on television help Americans understand how presidential succession works and can help political scientists teach students about the mechanics of the process. Using popular culture can help students visualize what they have discussed in the classroom and provide examples of aspects to presidential succession students may not have witnessed firsthand, or in the case of the section four of the 25th Amendment, something that has never been invoked.

While the 25th Amendment does not regularly get discussed in the media, and section four has never actually been used, both have received a fair amount of attention during the Trump presidency, given the mention of the 25th Amendment in an anonymous editorial published in the *New York Times* in September 2018. The author, originally anonymized and described as a senior official in the Trump administration and later identified as Miles Taylor (a Department of Homeland Security official), declared, "there were early whispers within the cabinet of invoking the 25th Amendment, which would start a complex process for removing the president. But no one wanted to precipitate a constitutional crisis" (Anonymous, 2018). While it is questionable to assert that invoking the 25th Amendment would cause a constitutional crisis, it would be certain to cause a large (and likely spirited) discussion throughout the country.

Due to the few times it has been used, many undergraduate students of political science are unfamiliar with the process by which the 25th Amendment is invoked. They read about these cases in textbooks and discuss it in the classroom. By relying on popular culture, we are able to provide examples (albeit fictional) of presidential succession via a variety of ways. There are popular culture examples of all four sections of the 25th Amendment, including article four, something our country has never witnessed. To that end, popular culture can be an incredibly useful tool in teaching presidential succession.

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