LDST 390  
Dead Leaders Society  

Dr. Wren  
Fall Term, 2008

Course location: Jepson Hall 102  
Class meeting time: TTH 9:45-11:00  
Contact information: Telephone 287-6098; e-mail twren@richmond.edu

Office hours: TTH 3:30-5:00  
Office location: Jepson 241

Course Synopsis

This course will be a joint exploration by students and instructor of the lives and times of important leaders of the past. The purpose is to gain insight into leadership, to learn how to evaluate leaders, and to gain expertise in better understanding the complex role that the surrounding context plays in the leadership relation. While the title of the course implies that our focus will be upon leaders, to look solely to individuals and their actions is too simplistic. Instead, we will engage in a series of historical case studies. In each, we will attempt to identify the leadership challenge, and look at the values and activities of individuals in response to the mix of opportunities and constraints provided by fellow stakeholders and contemporary culture as well as the long-term social, economic, political, and intellectual forces. The objective, in other words, will be to create a “leadership scenario” in which real historical figures attempted to meet real leadership challenges. In so doing, students will gain mastery in the application of a conceptual model for the evaluation of participants in the leadership process and become more proficient in the challenge of analyzing the complex swirl of people, events, and societal forces that surround any leadership relation. In practice, this means that during the course of the term the members of the class will themselves develop their own set of criteria for evaluating leadership, and be required to study and diagnose a series of complex historical leadership scenarios. The ultimate objective is of more than historical interest: the goal is to help students apply these skills to better understand and respond to current leadership challenges.

Texts


In addition, on occasion there will be supplemental readings assigned, which will be placed on electronic reserve.

**Of History and Biography**

This course will draw upon a historical approach to the study of leadership through the use of biography. It is useful to introduce each briefly.

*Historical analysis*

The discipline of history has the potential to make an enormous contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon of leadership. The field of leadership studies has long been dominated by the social sciences, which attempt to simplify complex reality by isolating and identifying variables that explain as many observations as possible and to then develop propositions that can be generalized. For all their virtues in terms of methodological rigor and the resulting models and theoretical formulations that have yielded so many insights, other, more humanistic, approaches—such as the study of history—can supplement such research by illuminating other aspects of leadership. Historical research allows us to investigate leadership in all its messiness: the swirling and dynamic interplay of constantly changing forces and occurrences, all impacting—and being impacted by—those most unpredictable of actors, human beings. In short, the study of history poses questions and investigates issues that reveal the complexity of leadership.

Because biographies tend to focus on the individual more than the surrounding historical context (see below), it is helpful to keep in mind the following questions as we encounter each work:

1. What is the leadership challenge?
2. How did long-term political, economic, social, and intellectual currents create and frame that leadership challenge?
3. Who are the stakeholders?
4. How do the long-term political, economic, social, and intellectual currents affect them?
5. How do those same long-term forces create opportunities and constraints for the actions and activities of the leader under study?
6. How well did he/she respond to those opportunities and constraints?

---

\(^1\) This book is not available in the bookstore, but can be found on Amazon.com at a cost no more than that of our other paperbacks. Students will be responsible for acquiring this volume.
Biographical analysis

There is much to say in support of the use of biographical studies to help us to better understand leadership. For one thing, it allows the reader to encounter the leadership challenges of an era in a way that traditional narrative history can never achieve; that is, in the best biographies, the reader becomes a fellow sojourner, a “virtual participant” in the events of the day. In the process, the reader of historical biography encounters the playing out of a leadership scenario in a very detailed way: the biography becomes a “case study” of leadership. Moreover, because biography, by definition, focuses so intently on the chosen leader, one can gain insights into motive and intention that are often glossed over in traditional historical analysis. A carefully written biography can give us some insight into how and why certain key individuals acted as they did. Finally, as we will explore in more detail below, historical biographies can serve as the basis for productive leadership analysis.

At the same time, there are also inherent risks and potential weaknesses in relying upon biographies. It is difficult to write a biography without becoming biased (usually, but not always, in favor of the subject). Thus there is the fear that what one gets in a biography is not a balanced portrait of the individual’s role. Also, biography can be too narrow in scope, in that it may minimize the contextual factors and the roles played by other actors. One solution to all this is to carefully select biographies that, for the most part, avoid such pitfalls. At the same time, it is helpful to pose the following questions of all our readings:

1. What is it that rendered this person worthy of a biography?
2. What is the biographer looking for [i.e., what is her/his “angle”]?
3. How does the biography help us as a historical case study?
4. What can we learn about leadership?

An Analytical Framework for Proceeding

In addition to a general introduction of the role of history and biography in leadership studies, this course will center on analysis. Scholar Irving Spitzberg once suggested how “the uses of history” might contribute to a fuller understanding of leadership. Specifically, Spitzberg noted that “the challenge is to test some theoretical explanations about the nature of leadership across historical periods and examples.” That is to say, we will use our study of our “Dead Leaders” and their actions as a way of gleaning insights into the leadership process itself. The class will identify at the outset some promising potential analytical themes that can help us to frame our discussions. Several possibilities are set out below. Each will be elaborated in the first weeks of class with supplemental readings. Please note also that one of your responsibilities this term is for you, the students, to come up with your own themes as you see them emerging from our readings and discussions.

Leadership as adaptive work
One likely candidate for use as an analytical template for our discussions is Harvard scholar Ronald Heifetz’s concept of leadership as “adaptive work,” which he defines as “the activity of mobilizing a social system to face tough problems, or to adapt to challenge.” This theoretical construct will be applied to each leadership scenario encountered in the course. This course, then, serves in part as a “leadership laboratory” in which the Heifetz model can be tested and evaluated. In the process, we should gain a better appreciation of how the study of history can add enlightenment to current understandings of leadership.

The nature of authority and power, and how leaders are held accountable

“Power” is thought by many to be the engine that drives the leadership process. But that engine has in its train a number of complex issues, all pertinent to our understanding of leadership. What do we mean by “power”? What are its sources? How is it linked with authority? How is power held accountable? All these questions and more are woven through the accounts of the leaders we will study.

The role of values in leadership

Contrary to the efforts of some in the social sciences to consider leadership as value-neutral, values are an intrinsic part of the leadership relation and, indeed, are often its driving force. Leaders often serve the interests of their constituents by appealing to common and enduring values, and attempt to reconcile conflicts and contradictions among value sets. Or, when the leader is a change agent, he/she may articulate an entirely new set of values and seek to gain adherence to them.

As we study the values of our chosen leaders, we cannot help but be normative in our analysis. But we must take care to separate our analysis into two segments. Our initial values inquiry must assess the beliefs, rhetoric, and actions of our subjects in terms of their own historical and cultural milieu. That is to say, we cannot and should not judge historical actors, in the first instance, anyway, by standards of our own time and place. Instead, we must seek to analyze them in terms of their own times and places. However, if we are careful to differentiate our analysis, we can subsequently draw upon the insights of our historical case studies to reflect upon our own value sets and, in the process, hopefully to begin to internalize an internal apparatus for engaging values in our own lives.

The leader as change agent

Related to the above discussion is another theme that will consistently arise in our studies this term: the leader as change agent. Our case studies will allow us ample opportunity to investigate the dynamics of change and the role leaders can play in this process.

Leadership as transformative
Also related to the themes of values and change is another concept that has occupied modern leadership studies: the concept of transformation. This is a sticky wicket that embraces all of the previous themes and more, and will require careful attention to definition, analysis, and normative reflection. As is the case with the other potential analytical frameworks we will employ, we will explore this construct more through supplemental readings early in the course.

Student-generated themes and analytical frameworks

One of the objectives of this course is for the students themselves to use our readings and discussions as basis for deriving other themes and frameworks that will help us to understand both the historical cases under study and the leadership relation more generally. Class time will always include the opportunity for and an invitation to explore such insights.

Course Requirements

(1) student research paper. Our efforts this term will culminate with an individual research project that draws from the learning of the course and applies it to a leader of the student’s choosing. Each student will select a leader (dead or not dead, in consultation with the instructor), and research and write a paper that (a) places him/her in his/her historical context; (b) summarizes his/her activities, and, most importantly, (c) analyzes the chosen leader in ways consistent with our endeavors this term. The paper should identify the leadership challenge and evaluate the leader’s response to it. The paper should draw from one or more of the analytical themes outlined above, as well as from others developed in class, and/or, possibly, some other theme that seems particularly appropriate to your chosen subject. The paper should be approximately 15-20 pages in length, and written in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style. A preliminary proposal for the subject and proposed analysis will be required. (35%)

(2) leading class. Following our consideration of each text, one class period will be set aside for small teams of students to lead a discussion of the leadership implications of the materials just covered. In consultation with the instructor, these class periods can be in the form of a traditional discussion, or they can involve more creative exercises, so long as the result is substantive engagement with the relevant issues. (10%)

(3) midterm examination. The purpose of the midterm examination is to allow you to pause and pull together the various strands of thought we have been pursuing. The process of review and, hopefully, the act of responding to the examination itself are intended to help you to consolidate your learning in the course. (25%)

(4) final examination. The purpose of the final exam is to cause you to reflect upon the larger issues of the course. It also is intended to help you refine your own individual conceptualization of leadership. It will be comprehensive. (30%)
(5) **class attendance and participation.** The essential approach of this course is best captured in the phrase “shared learning experience.” The implication is that instructor and students will be fellow sojourners in the search for insights into leadership. This means that it is imperative that you complete the assigned readings prior to each class. You will be expected to attend class, and to enlighten us with your insights. Attendance will be recorded. Unless you have a legitimate reason for being absent (which must be communicated to the instructor prior to class), any absences will lower your final grade.

**Course Schedule and Assignments**

**Week 1**

_Preliminaries_

Aug. 26  Introduction to the Course  
No assignment

Aug. 28  Introduction to the Analytical Framework I

_On reserve:_

_Leadership as adaptive work_  
Ronald Heifetz, “On a Razor’s Edge,” in Wren, et al.,  
*New Perspectives on Leadership*, 425-449

_The role of power and authority_  
Michael Harvey, “Power,” in Goethals and Sorenson,  
*The Quest for a General Theory of Leadership*, 74-91

_The role of values in leadership_  
*New Perspectives on Leadership*, 219-237

**Week 2**

Sept. 2  Introduction to the Analytical Framework II

_On reserve:_

_The leader as change agent_  
Gill Robinson Hickman and Richard A. Couto,  
“Causality, Change, and Leadership,” in Goethals
and Sorenson, *The Quest for a General Theory of Leadership*, 152-184

*Leadership as transformative*


*Student-generated themes*

*Abraham Lincoln*

Sept. 4  
**Lincoln I**  
Carwardine, ix-90

**Week 3**

Sept. 9  
**Lincoln II**  
Carwardine, 91-190

Sept. 11  
**Lincoln III**  
Carwardine, 191-316

Carwardine lecture Sept. 12, 7:00 p.m.

**Week 4**

Sept. 16  
**Lincoln IV**  
Carwardine, 316-326

TEAM ABLE leads class

*Jane Addams*

Sept. 18  
**Addams I**  
Elshtain, xxi-87

**Week 5**

Sept. 23  
**Addams II**  
Elshtain, 89-180

Sept. 25  
**Addams III**
Elshtain, 181-250

**Week 6**

Sept. 30  Addams IV  
          Elshtain 251-254

**TEAM BAKER leads class**

_Ella Baker_

Oct. 2  Baker I  
        Ransby, 1-104

**Week 7**

Oct. 7  Baker II  
        Ransby, 105-238

Oct. 9  Baker III  
        Ransby, 239-356

**Week 8**

Oct. 14  FALL BREAK

Oct. 16  Baker IV  
         Ransby, 357-374

**TEAM CHARLIE leads class**

**Week 9**

Oct. 21  MIDTERM EXAMINATION

_Edward R. Murrow_

Oct. 23  Murrow I  
        Persico, ix-124

**Week 10**

Oct. 28  Murrow II  
        Persico, 125-242
Paper prospectus due

Oct. 30
Murrow III
Persico, 243-369

Week 11

Nov. 4
Murrow IV
Persico, 370-490

Nov. 6
Murrow V
Persico 491-499

TEAM DOG leads class

Week 12

Modern Presidents

Nov. 11
Nixon
Gergen, 17-104

Nov. 13
NO CLASS

Work on paper

Week 13

Nov. 18
Ford
Gergen, 105-148

Nov. 20
Reagan
Gergen, 149-247

Week 14

Nov. 25
Clinton
Gergen, 249-342

Nov. 27
THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15

Dec. 2
Discussion of Presidents
Gergen, 11-15, 343-352
TEAM ECHO leads class

Dec. 4  TBD

Paper Due 5:00 p.m. Friday, Dec. 5

* * * FINAL EXAMINATION MONDAY DEC. 15, 9 A.M.-12 NOON * * *