From quotes to questions:

Martha Nussbaum: “When we meet in society, if we have not learned to see both self and other . . . imagining in one another inner faculties of thought and emotion, democracy is bound to fail because democracy is built on respect and concern, and these in turn are built on the ability to see other people as human beings, not simply as objects.”

Nussbaum thinks democracy depends on mutual respect, which depends on our capacities to empathize profoundly. And she holds that only studying the humanities can develop those capacities. Conceivably, she’s right; perhaps the humanities will keep you from objectifying others. But, truth be told, scholars frequently make a case for the humanities by exaggerating the contributions of history, the visual arts, literature, philosophy, and music to personal sensitivity and democratic deliberation. Is Nussbaum exaggerating? What do you expect the humanities to contribute to leadership studies? And what is your reaction to Nussbaum’s further claim that the humanities—more effectively than casual experiences and/or travel and studying social psychology—will enable us to refine what she calls our “narrative imagination,” which she equates with our “ability to think what it may be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself—to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, understand[ing] the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have”? Is that extent of empathy really possible? Through study?

Keith Thomas: “The humanities offer an indispensable antidote to the vices which inevitably afflict a democratic, capitalist society. They counter the dumbing down of the media by asserting the complexity of things . . . and they challenge the evasiveness and mendacity of politicians by placing a premium on intellectual honesty.”

Really? Thomas has a rather ambitious agenda for the humanities. Is it more ambitious than Nussbaum’s effort to promote reciprocal understanding or empathy? Can the humanities somehow take on the media and effectively challenge sly, evasive politicians? How might the humanities put a premium on honesty?

Reinhold Niebuhr: “In political and moral theory ‘realism’ denotes a disposition to take into account all factors in a social and political situation, which offer resistance to established norms, particularly factors of self-interest and power. In the words of one notorious ‘realist,’ Machiavelli, the purpose of the realist is ‘to follow the truth of the matter rather than the imagination of it; for many have pictures of republics and principalities which have never been seen.’ This definition of ‘realism’ implies idealists are subject to illusions about social realities, which indeed they are.”

Are idealists ill-equipped to be effective leaders or change agents because they underestimate resistances? Given their sense of the formidable character of “resistances” and of the pervasiveness of self-interest, might realists be tempted to accept “established norms” that need changing or to grow deaf to legitimate calls for change?
Phil Ochs: “So good to be alive when the eulogy is read. The climax of emotion, the worship of the dead.”

Can we recognize “greatness” in a leader while s/he lives and leads or are all eulogies of current leaders premature? Is there something in us (the worshippers) that compels us to deny our leaders the pleasure of hearing their eulogies or is it just common sense to let time pass before we look for a basis to judge the competence, effectiveness, and virtue of our leaders?

Francis Bacon: “Learning doth make the minds of men gentle, generous . . . and pliant to government.”

Really? “Pliant,” perhaps, but occasionally defiant. What kinds of learning were commended in early modern political philosophy for citizens (or followers)? For leaders? How might Nussbaum or Thomas reply to learned Francis bacon?

Immanuel Kant: “One must take [people] as they are and not as uninformed pedants or good-natured dreamers fancy that they ought to be. But ‘as they are’ ought to read ‘as we have made them.’”

Does Kant’s statement, “as we have made them,” seem too controlling? Does it undermine the notion of human nature? When should leaders listen to people, taking them “as they are” as well as where they want to go? And when should leaders lead people—their constituents—where they may not want to go—or, as Kant might have said, remake them?

Robert Penn Warren: “You don’t ever have to frame anybody, because the truth is always sufficient.”

Is corruption inevitable? Has Penn Warren given his protagonist, political leader and “boss,” Willie Stark, an idea about the sordid character of public service that resembles Niebuhr’s “realism” but is, in truth, unrealistic as well as cynical?

In this section of LDST 101, we’re going to raise these questions as well as others that you’ll find in the schedule portion of the syllabus. We will raise those questions—but not because the answers lay at the foundation of leadership studies. I believe that the asking does. The asking along with the conversation generated by our inquiries should draw our various premises into the open, problematize some answers we might take for granted, prompt intriguing encounters with problems, problem-solvers, and a number of issues we might otherwise have left unexplored. We’ll spend a few sessions contemplating why we’re here (in a class on leadership foundations, at a university, at this university, and on this planet—certainly several sessions should be sufficient). Then we consider whether and why we need leaders, and we try to find standards with which to measure the effectiveness and integrity of leaders. We’ll talk with some “old masters”—Machiavelli, Thomas More, Shakespeare. We’ll visit with folks, in fact and fiction, sifting problems and formulating public policy more recently. We’ll look at the influence of rhetoric, the issues surrounding race and religion that pose challenges for leaders in and of a pluralistic society, and we’ll conclude by registering and evaluating the ways term limits might affect leadership in a democratic society.

But before you agree that this might be a good way to spend parts of your semester and strap yourselves into this challenge, attend to the next section on . . .
Requirements and Grades

Lively, informed encounters with our questions, obviously, require your lively and informed participation in class discussions, but I’ve never found a satisfactory way to “grade” class participation, save to snatch back some points from the final grades of participants often absent and/or unfamiliar with assignments. Know that sometimes call for volunteer contributions to conversations but usually summon specific individuals based on a lottery system. At the start of seven classes, you’ll be asked to compose short answers to a question about the assigned reading or film. Your responses will be graded, and your five highest grades will constitute 25% of your final grade. Two mid-term examinations and our final exam account for the remaining 75% of your final grade.

The following should now be available at the university bookstore

Robert Penn Warren, ALL THE KING’S MEN

Ian Buruma, TAMING THE GODS

William Shakespeare, CORIOLANUS (also available on line)

Thomas More, UTOPIA

Niccolo Machiavelli, THE PRINCE (also available on line)

William Chafe, CIVILITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

J.M. Coetzee, DISGRACE

Schedule

8/23 Introduction

8/25 Read Andy Abbott’s ZEN OF EDUCATION— http://magazine.uchicago.edu/0310/features/zen.shtml

8/30 Read Gerald Graff’s THE PROBLEM PROBLEM and TWO CHEERS FOR THE ARGUMENT CULTURE (both chapters are on electronic reserve; hereafter ER). Begin reading Robert Penn Warren’s ALL THE KING’S MEN; note the assignment for September 8th.

9/1 Read Weber’s SOCIOLGY OF CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY (ER) and excerpts from the interview with Robert Putnam, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v006/6.1putnam.html - BOWLING ALONE: AMERICA’S DECLINING SOCIAL CAPITAL. What is social capital and why is it declining? Putnam is persuaded that civic leaders ought to worry when league bowling decreases. Why?

9/6 Finish the first chapter of ALL THE KING’S MEN. The encounter between Judge Irwin and the boss (Willie) takes place late in the latter’s career but is staged very early in the novel. Why? What do we learn about each man from their conversation?

9/8 Finish the second chapter of ALL THE KING’S MEN.


9/15 Head for “youtube.” Search for “2004 Democratic National Convention Obama’s speech” and “2004 Democratic National Convention Sharpton’s speech.” Listen to both, twice. How does each speaker use race to build social capital?

9/22 Finish reading Chafe’s CIVILITIES. You’ll find the word “benevolence” surfaces quite often, but you’ll see that it’s associated with words and policies that seem, if not malevolent, at least pernicious. See whether you can formulate and justify policies that would have reduced “resistance to significant racial breakthroughs” and could even now lay the foundations for a pluralistic and equitable society.

9/27 Midterm examination

9/29 See the film A DRY WHITE SEASON, on reserve. SEASON is a dramatic contrast to the more popular, feel-good film, INVICTUS, so prepare yourself for brutal repression on the scale of another South African film, DISTRICT 9. Contrast the early optimism and growing distress of Ben du Toit (Donald Sutherland), the film’s protagonist with the pessimism—yet persistence—of Magistrate McKenzie (Marlon Brando). Revive the word “benevolence” and imagine how the word could be attached both to leaders’ efforts to defend a policy of separation-segregation-apartheid and to leaders’ efforts to undermine the same.

10/4 Read Rajen Harshe’s UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION TOWARDS POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4400165 and identify the divide-and-rule strategies used by regimes that preceded the transition. Speculate, along with the author, “how . . . the system of apartheid [is likely to] haunt South African society despite the abolition of apartheid laws”? And reflect on challenges that slavery, Reconstruction, and racism in the United States poses for leaders of this society? Are they/we doomed to be similarly “haunted”?

10/6 Start reading Coetzee’s DISGRACE, but no class today in preparation for . . .

AUTUMN BREAK

10/13 Complete DISGRACE in preparation for today’s class. Arguably, Coetzee has a response to the question about “haunting” that, with Harshe’s help, we asked earlier this month. The response is an allegory, featuring the helplessness of a compromised portion of the South African population and a collection of predators. The result is a novel that, according to one reviewer, “will leave most readers squirming with discomfort and denial.” How did it leave you?

10/18 Let’s discuss transactional, transformative, and “poetic” leadership. Ponder THE DEATH OF THE BALL TURRET GUNNER by Randall Jarrell:

From my mother’s sleep I fell into the state,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

10/20 Read Machiavelli’s PRINCE. Far from falling into the state or flopping anywhere, Machiavelli’s prince is or ought to be in complete control. He is what we’d call today a political consultant, telling leaders how to avoid and, if necessary, resolve “disputes and contentions.” Of course, social discord sometimes works to a leader’s advantage. When? How is that possible? A literary historian, Alberto
Ascoli, has called THE PRINCE “a scandal that western political thought has been gazing at in horror” since it was first circulated in the early sixteenth century. **Were you horrified? And/or would you endorse Robert Penn Warren's remark in KING'S MEN that “the cold-faced Florentine [namely, Machiavelli] is the founding father of our modern world”?**

10/25 Read the first book of Thomas More’s UTOPIA.

10/27 Read the second book of UTOPIA. **Did you find the regime and routines described by More’s character, Hythloday, attractive? Repulsive? Practical? Comparable--more or less--to more modern efforts to achieve social harmony?**

10/31 Watch the Paul Scofield version of Robert Bolt’s MAN FOR ALL SEASONS on reserve in the media section of the library and read the first act of Shakespeare’s CORIOLANUS.

11/3 Finish CORIOLANUS. The protagonist exhibits contempt for the common people. **Why? Compare his attitude to “the crowd,” the citizens, with the attitudes of Menenius, Brutus, and Sicinius? Recall our discussions of charisma and social capital, and compose a three or four-sentence summary of the play using those terms and several others snatched from the script (for example, “gown of humility”; “soaring insolence”; “what is the city but the people?”) to convey your impressions of both the plot and the early modern playgoers’ likely responses to what they saw and heard.**

11/8 Be ready to discuss ALL THE KING’S MEN. **What, if anything, might we learn about leadership by comparing Penn Warren’s Jack Burdan with Thomas More’s Hythloday and/or comparing Willie with Coriolanus?**

11/10 mid-term examination (?)

11/15 Read Mark Edmundson’s TEACHING THE TRUTHS. Go to UR’s library page, click on “journals” and search for RARITAN. Click on the summer issue, 2003, volume 23, and you’ll find Edmundson’s TRUTHS, pp. 1-21.

11/17 Read the introduction to and first chapter of Ian Buruma’s TAMING THE GODS.

11/22 Finish Buruma. **Do leaders have a responsibility to create the conditions for and to preserve a pluralistic society? We’ve tackled this issue when it surfaced in our discussions of race and ethnicity; what changes if we substitute “religion” for race? How do leaders’ roles and responsibilities change when intense religious devotion seems to lead to political extremism? What are leaders to do when “the pull of religious ideology . . . has everything to do with political rage”? Is Edmundson asking for trouble when he invites religious conviction into the classroom of public universities? Is it better to build “a wall of separation” between religious conviction and political commitment? Is it possible?**


12/1 Read the chapter from George Will’s RESTORATION (chapter 2) on reserve. **What is “deliberative democracy”? To what extent is it undemocratic? To what extent is it desirable?**