Keith Thomas: “The humanities offer an indispensable antidote to the vices which inevitably afflict a democratic, capitalistic 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. Can the humanities somehow take on the media and effectively challenge sly, evasive politicians? And how do the humanities put a premium on honesty?

Aurelius Augustine: “Justice having been removed, what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms? A gang is a group of persons under the command of a leader, bound by an agreement or covenant that governs the association in which plunder is divided according to a constitution of sorts. . . . For the answer given by a captured pirate to Alexander the Great was amusing but true. When great Alexander asked why the pirate terrorized seafarers, the latter boldly replied, suggesting that his purpose and Alexander’s were identical. When I do what I do with a small vessel, he noted, I am called a pirate. Because you do the same with a mighty navy, you are called an emperor.”

Does the anecdote prove Augustine’s point about government and larceny? If you were Alexander how would you answer the pirate’s equation?

Jerzy Kosinski: “I aim at truth, not facts.”

Don’t you need facts to get to the truth? What are facts? What is the difference between data and facts?

Mark Twain: “It’s no wonder that truth is stranger than fiction. Fiction has to make sense.”

Why all this fuss about truth? When fiction “makes sense” does it convey truth or make the truth any less strange? When you create fiction based on truth—historical fiction, let’s say—do you make the truth any more sensible? To take an example, do you find that fiction based on the careers of political, military, cultural, or business leaders necessarily distorts the truth? What roles do authors and readers play in making fiction “make sense”?

Michel de Montaigne: “He who fears what he shall suffer, already suffers what he fears.”

We may like to think of leaders as fearless, and Montaigne would seem to be saying that fear is debilitating. You’ll soon read Franklin Delano Roosevelt telling followers that they have nothing to fear but fear. Yet, by “suffering” in anticipation the fearful consequences of one’s conduct and policy,
leaders might avoid those consequences. Does that make sense? Might “suffer[ing] what [one] fears” make one a more competent, compassionate leader? Under what circumstances would fear, shame, and suffering be counted among a leader’s assets or virtues?

Martha Nussbaum: “Nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful, docile, technically trained machines rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements.”

Nussbaum thinks that the humanities could and should serve as an antidote. Do you share Nussbaum’s distress? If docile citizens are useful and well-trained, should we object that somehow they are docile and therefore incomplete citizens? Is it fair to compare them with machines? How important is it for leaders to criticize tradition?

Christopher Marlowe: “Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure.”

So does power (“might”) always precede and determine (“make sure”) legitimacy? I suppose that if Marlowe lived into the twenty first century, he’d simply say that it takes clout to get the legal system to work for you, but would that leave any room for or allow any influence to morality?

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 do so not because the answers lay at the foundation of leadership studies. The asking does. The conversations generated by our asking should draw our various premises into the open, problematize some answers we may take for granted, prompt intriguing encounters with problems, with problem-solvers, and with 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 and the humanities, at a university, at this university, and on this planet—three sessions should be sufficient). Then we shall consider whether and why we need leaders and try to find standards 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 during this and the last century. We’ll look at the influence of race, rhetoric and magic that pose challenges for leaders and for those who study them. We’ll sift “moral revolutions” and see to what extent they were leaderless?

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 deduct some points from the final grades of participants often absent and/or unfamiliar with assignments. Five classes will begin with quizzes during which you’ll be asked briefly to reply to a question about the day’s assignment. Your replies will be graded, and your four highest grades will constitute 20% of your final
grade. Two mid-term examinations scheduled for September 23rd and October 26th count for 20% and 25%, respectively. The final exam counts for 35% of your final grade.

The following should now be available at the university bookstore

Robert Penn Warren, ALL THE KING’S MEN
George Bernard Shaw, SAINT JOAN
William Shakespeare, CORIOLANUS (also available on line)
Thomas More, UTOPIA
Niccolò Machiavelli, THE PRINCE (also available on line)
William Chafe, CIVILITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS
Kwame Anthony Appiah, THE HONOR CODE: HOW MORAL REVOLUTIONS HAPPEN

Schedule

8/24   Introduction

8/26   Read Graff’s THE PROBLEM PROBLEM, chapter 2 of Gerald Graff’s Clueless in Academe, on electronic reserve, pp. 43-61. Is suspicion a useful tool in interpretation? When Keith Thomas writes about “asserting complexity,” is he deliberately making problems where there are none? Wouldn’t it seem smarter to search for simplicity and solve problems rather than celebrating complexity—making problems? Let’s simplify and solve. What did Jerzy Kosinski mean in the quote about facts and truth? What did Mark Twain mean in his quote about truth and fiction?

8/31   Read Abbott’s ZEN OF EDUCATION—http://magazine.uchicago.edu/0310/features/zen.shtml. How do Abbot’s efforts to undermine several conventional reasons for attending college strike you? Which, if any, reasons brought you to this campus? What does he mean by “the zen of education”?

9/2    Read SCHOOLING ACROSS THE COLOR LINE: PROGRESSIVES AND THE EDUCATION OF BLACKS IN THE NEW SOUTH, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2668224, RINGING UP A SCHOOL: MCLEOD BETHUNE’S IMPACT ON DAYTONA, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30148760, and pp. 3-10 in William Chafe’s Civilities and Civil Rights. Evaluate the leadership of progressive educators in Michael Dennis’s SCHOOLING and Mary McLeod Bethune’s leadership as reported in Audrey McCluskey’s essay (RINGING). Something that seems progressive to some might seem pernicious to others? Would that observation apply to any of the practices and policies discussed in your assigned reading?

9/7    Read Civilities and Civil Rights, part 1.

9/9    Read Civilities and Civil Rights, part 2.

9/14   Read Robert Penn Warren’s All the King’s Men, chapters 1 and 2.

9/16   Google “Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s inaugural addresses”; read the first and second, that is, the addresses that launched his first and second terms as president. Then go to youtube. Look for and view Barak Obama’s and Al Sharpton’s speeches to the 2004 Democratic convention—as well as “Huey Long: Share the Wealth” (the 3 minute 49 second version). Would you argue that Obama’s and Roosevelt’s speeches were “presidential,” whereas Long’s and Sharpton’s were not? Were you drawn to Long’s and Sharpton’s oratory? Why? Were you put off? Why? If not as presidential, how would you what you’ve read and heard from all four?
Read All the King’s Men, chapters 3, 4, and 5.

9/23 --- MID-TERM EXAM --- 9/23

Read Thomas More’s Utopia, book 1. Why does Hythloday advise would-be public servants to keep their distance from others who aspire to counsel leaders and from the leaders themselves? Does he have a point? How does the character named More in the narrative respond? Would you side with Hythloday or with More?

Read Utopia, book 2. Why do you think More created this utopian society? Was it meant as a blueprint for the perfect social order? Was it a joke? Return to Christopher Marlowe’s quote, and see whether this society without kings and laws appeals to you. And tell me what comes to replace kings. What substitutes for laws and lawyers in Utopia?

Read Machiavelli’s Prince. Is it fair to say that, for Machiavelli, the ends justify the prince’s meanness? Is Machiavelli mean or merely realistic? Which of the historical figures whom he cites as models seems to be his favorite? Of which figure is he most critical?

More on Machiavelli and Machiavelli on More. What would each have thought of the other’s assessment of early modern leadership and public service?

Read Shakespeare’s Coriolanus. The play is controversial. It’s hard to get a fix on the virtues and shortcomings of the “characters.” Today, let’s take the crowd, the tribunes (Brutus and Sicinius), and Menenius, and discuss your impressions of their readiness for leadership.

More on Coriolanus. Today, we’ll discuss the virtues and shortcomings of Coriolanus, and put Shakespeare’s drama in the context of early modern political philosophy and history.

Read George Bernard Shaw’s Saint Joan, the first six scenes.

Read the “Epilogue” in Saint Joan and Shaw’s “Preface” to the play. Shaw uses the epilogue and preface to suggest that St Joan’s “genius” and “saintliness” would not be well received in the 1920s, in his times, despite her canonization at the start of that decade. Why does he think (a) that the modern, scientific world is no less imaginative than Joan’s fifteenth century yet (b) that moderns who live then and there would be unreceptive to Joan’s returning?

10/26 --- MID-TERM EXAM --- 10/26


Read Appiah’s The Honor Code, chapters 1, 3, and 4.
11/4 Read Appiah’s *The Honor Code*, chapter 5. Appiah suggests that, if you want to lead a “moral revolution,” you (simply) need to (re)organize the current “systems of esteem.” What does he mean? How might that strategy address the problems identified by Martha Nussbaum in one of the syllabus’ opening quotes? For Appiah what are the differences between “appraisal respect” and “recognition respect,” and which would be more useful to you if planned to lead a “moral revolution”? Describe that revolution and explain why it’s needed?

11/9 Read the excerpts from the interview with Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v006/6.1putnam.html. Decisions seldom are made in democracies without input from the commoners, and when we introduce “government by the people,” the concept of “social capital” tends to attach itself to the problems that surface when we let populations have their say. What is social capital? Why does Putnam think leaders should be worried when league bowling in a democracy becomes unpopular?


11/16 Read Niven’s *OTHER SIDE OF OPTIMISM*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1520062. What is on the other side of optimism? How does it lead to politically risky behavior? Is it all that risky?

11/18 Read Kurfurst’s *TERM-LIMIT LOGIC*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3235277. What distinguishes term-limit populism from term-limit republicanism? Does either appeal to you? What, if anything, is wrong with term-limit libertarianism? How does term-limit progressivism stack up alongside (maybe against) the progressivism we encountered near the beginning of our class during our discussions of desegregation? Should amateurism in politics be encouraged or avoided?

11/30 Finish *All the King’s Men*. Would you claim that the novel ends happily? Would you say that it ends instructively? If so, what is the lesson or instruction? How would you reply to interpreters who think Jack came around to learn the same lessons that Cass Mastern did in what seemed a digression? If you were explaining to a friend why Jack, Cass, and Willie turned up in a class on leadership and the humanities, what would you say? Give me the three key words that you’d probably repeat. My three: limitation, humility, compassion. Finally, return to the quotes at the start of the syllabus, and pick two or three you’d include in your explanation.

12/2 No assignment (haven’t we been thru enuff?)