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. 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?

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?

Robert Penn Warren: “. . . Because [Adam Stanton] is a romantic, he has a picture of the world in his head, and when the world doesn’t conform in any respect to the picture, he wants to throw the world away, even if it means throwing out the baby with the bath.”

Are romantics ill-equipped to be effective leaders? What qualities/virtues might a romantic who fits this description bring to leadership challenges, qualities or virtues that realists might lack?
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?

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?

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.

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 I sometimes call for volunteer contributions to conversations but usually summon specific
individuals based on a lottery system. At the start of five classes, you’ll be asked to compose short answers to a question about that day’s assignment. Your responses will be graded, and your four highest grades will constitute 20% of your final grade. Two mid-term examinations scheduled for February 7 and March 16 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
Niccolo Machiavelli, THE PRINCE (also available on line)

William Chafe, CIVILITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Schedule

1/10 Introduction

1/12 Read Graff’s THE PROBLEM PROBLEM and TWO CHEERS FOR THE ARGUMENT CULTURE, on electronic reserve.

1/17 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, of those reasons brought you to this campus? What does he mean by “the zen of education”?


1/24 Read Thomas More’s UTOPIA, book 1. Did you find Hythloday’s reasons for avoiding public service persuasive?

1/26 Read More’s UTOPIA, book 2. Which feature of the “ideal” society described here did you find most attractive? Most unattractive? Do you think More was trying to design a blueprint for a perfectly just society? Or would you suggest other reasons for his writing?

1/31 Read Machiavelli’s PRINCE. It has been said that Machiavelli adores power and “worships” war, that--for Machiavelli--politicians’ ends justify their meanness? Do you agree? Is Machiavelli mean or merely realistic? Select three characters Machiavelli uses as examples of virtues or vices, characters you find indispensable in reporting Machiavelli’s views; tell me why you think each is indispensable.

2/2 No assignment--prepare to finish Machiavelli and formulate questions for the first mid-term exam.

2/7 Mid-term Examination

2/9 Read the Augustine quote on the first page of the syllabus. Do you think Augustine’s protagonist was fair when he compared large governments to gangs of thieves? Why? Why not?
2/14 Read Robert Penn Warren’s ALL THE KING’S MEN, chapters 1 and 2. In the novel, characters change considerably. You should be able to see some changes in the first two chapters, but you’ll certainly be better able to distinguish further changes if you record your preliminary impressions. Please do so; select adjectives that apply to Sadie, Burden, and Willie. We’ll compare Machiavelli, Willie, and—later—Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In what ways could the first two be paired?

2/16 Read ALL THE KING’S MEN, chapters 3 and 4. What is gained (and lost) by having Jack Burden narrate Willie Stark’s story? Would you agree with the scholar (Joseph Lane) who observed that “Stark accepts the irrelevance of dignity”?


2/23 Head to Youtube, search first for “Al Sharpton dem convention speech 2004,” listen, search for “Obama dem convention speech 2004,” listen, then google to search for and print out scripts for each. Read the speeches, and bring the scripts to class, underlining or highlighting what you thought were the most effective moments.

2/28 Read the intro and 1st 2 chapters of Chafe’s CIVILITIES and Michael Dennis, SCHOOLING ACROSS THE COLOR LINE: PROGRESSIVES AND THE EDUCATION OF BLACKS IN THE NEW SOUTH--on-line, http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-2984%28199821%2967%3A2%3C142%3ASATCLP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-L. Arguably, what Chafe calls “the politics of moderation” applies to the leadership strategies used to advance the prospects of African Americans in the decades described by Michael Dennis. Make or refute that argument.

3/2 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.

B r e a k

3/14 Finish ALL THE KING’S MEN. Could Adam Stanton be compared with Thomas More’s Hythloday? Would you say that Robert Penn Warren, is generally sympathetic with Willie—and approves Willie’s tactics—and/or appreciates the values articulated, if not always practiced, by the people associated with Burden’s landing?

3/16 Mid-term Examination

3/21 Read Shaw’s play, SAINT JOAN. In the script, King Charles seems to have Joan pegged precisely: “It always comes down to the same thing. She is right and everyone else is wrong.” Does playwright Shaw see that as her strength or weakness? How does Joan’s confidence (stubbornness?) compare with the confidence displayed by Willie, Sharpton, and Adam Stanton?

3/23 Read Shaw’s PREFACE to the play. Does Shaw’s comparison between Joan’s magic and that of the modern age seem forced or valid? Does he think Joan was guilty? Of what?
Read the excerpts from the interview with Robert Putnam, author of BOWLING ALONE, on line at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v006/6.1putnam.html. In St. Joan, decisions are made without input from the commoners, but, theoretically, that is seldom the case in a democracy. When we introduce “government by the people,” the concept of “social capital” tends to materialize and attach itself to the problems posed by letting populations have their say. What is social capital? Why does Putnam think leaders should be worried when league bowling becomes unpopular?

3/30 Read Shakespeare’s CORIOLANUS, act 1.

4/4 Complete CORIOLANUS.

4/6 Read Max Weber’s essays, SOCIOLOGY OF CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY, pp. 245-52 in FROM MAX WEBER, edited by Gerth and Mills, library reserve.

4/11 Go to http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/nov/16/fiction.society to Read Timothy Garton Ash’s TRUTH IS ANOTHER COUNTRY, and read Felipe Fernández-Armesto, LEADERSHIP IN THE HISTORY OF EXPLORATION, electronic reserve.


4/20 No assignment.