Leadership Studies 101: Leadership and the Humanities

Dr. Thad Williamson, Spring 2019

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Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond

Wednesdays. 3:00-5:40.

Office hours: Fridays, 2-3 p.m. or by appointment

Class Overview

The aim of this class is to explore fundamental questions related to both leadership as a social process and leadership as a social relationship. A particular focus of the class will be the connection between large-scale social structures (i.e. political states) and the ethical character of individual citizens and citizen-leaders. We will examine these questions through an interdisciplinary lens, focused on the contradiction between democratic ideals and racism in American history from the Declaration of Independence to the present. We will pay particular attention to leadership implications (personal and institutional) drawn from consideration of the biographies of three exemplary citizen-activists (Frederick Douglas, Ella Baker, and Arthur Ashe), as well as a compelling literary account of race in mid-twentieth century American life, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. We will also draw on important work from two contemporary political theorists with an interest in policy and practice, Danielle Allen and Nan Keohane, concerning the nature of leadership in institutional contexts (Keohane) and the meaning of the American political project as expressed through the Declaration of Independence (Allen). These biographies and texts raise fundamental questions of political theory related to the justification of political rule and the proper design of political institutions; and will lead us to consider in some detail the design of American political institutions, key social forces influencing their operation, and the role citizen-leaders have played in promoting civic equality within an often hostile context of racism and inequality.

What is Leadership? What is Leadership Studies?

Leadership is inherently a collective activity; it implies a relationship between multiple people. In its simplest form, for leaders to exist, there also must be followers. So it is incoherent to speak of leaders or leadership without at the same time considering followers. In its most general form, we can think of leadership studies as encompassing the complete study of human societies and their evolution. How do human collectivities form, evolve, make decisions, interact with one another? In short, how do societies function? In principle, any question of sociology, anthropology, history, organized religion, political science, economics, social psychology, or any other aspect of human society, can be understood or described as a leadership studies question.

This is the case whether we are speaking of the simplest possible relationship (two people) or the most complex possible (the organization of the current global economy). Note also that the term “leadership” and the field “leadership studies” both presume that human beings are inescapably
social creatures, and that we create, define, and make meaning in our lives in relationships with others. There are many ways to show this point, here are four obvious ones:

- The fact that individual human beings in the world come into existence through sexual reproduction, and that the birth and development of a human child requires the nurturance of parents, which in turn implies the existence of families or family-like organizations. Simply put, to survive, we must to a considerable degree live together.
- The fact that the very grammar of our minds, our ability to think complex thoughts, depends on the existence of language, a common human system for communication that evolved collectively over many, many years and of which we are all the common beneficiary.
- The fact that in modern societies today, we are all inextricably tied up in complex systems of social cooperation that provide order and set the context for our lives: these systems include the basic institutions of society, and in particular law and government. We are all tied up with one another, whether we like it or not.
- The fact that we are also members of one or more particular communities (political, religious, social, ethnic) whose existence precedes our individual lives and that likely will endure past our own individual lifespan, and that many people draw their most concrete plans of life and define themselves in relationship to these communities.

This emphasis on the inherently social nature of human beings and the notion that leadership inherently involves collectivities is at first glance in some tension with one of the dominant political ideals of modern Western societies: that of individual liberty, and the image of human beings as autonomous law-givers with strong individual rights that society cannot intrude upon. This tension is the topic of an enormous body of modern political philosophy. Here we simply observe that there is no contradiction between recognizing the irreducibly social nature of human life and placing high value on individual liberty and individual conscience. Indeed, social progress and societal advance are sometimes made precisely by individuals or groups of individual who challenge societal convention. Providing space for individual liberty can thus be seen as one of the mechanisms by which groups or collectivities promote progress.

Often in leadership studies, we focus not on leadership in its most generalizable form but rather discuss “leadership” in a more specific sense: the role of deliberate human agency in bringing about change. One way to define “leadership” in this sense is as follows: “making something happen that wouldn’t have happened otherwise.” Here is the thought process behind this definition of leadership: often as human beings in complex societies we find ourselves embedded in institutions, cultural norms and practices not of our own choosing, institutions which seem to move by the force of their own gravity. The attempt to alter how these practices operate—for instance to try to change a law, or a cultural norm, or how property is distributed, or how schools are organized—requires deliberate human volition.

This is not to say that deliberate human volition is the sole cause of social change, and still less to say that deliberate human volition always or even usually produces the desired effects. But when we see a person or number of people trying to make something new happen, or do things a
different way, it is common to call that person (or those persons) “leaders.” What is meant by
that common use of the term is that the person or people “see” (or believe they see) a way to alter
or improve the functioning of the community (or society), and that they engage in action
designed to bring the desired changes into practice.

We have thus far discussed leadership as a collective social process, and introduced the notion
that “leaders” are those who initiate or bring about change. Note carefully: leadership in this
definition does not necessarily imply the existence of a hierarchy or providing leaders with
authority or control over others. For instance, in an egalitarian marriage, the couple may still act
collectively to advance shared ends, and at different times one partner or the other might exercise
initiative (and hence leadership) without entering into a permanent relationship of dominance.
One partner takes the lead at one time, the other partner at another. Equally important, the action
component of leadership need not require any domination or coercion. It’s a nice day outside,
and one partner proposes to the other they have a picnic; the other says that’s a great idea; and
they go on to plan a picnic together cooperatively and without coercion. Leadership has taken
place through the power of suggestion alone.

An open question—indeed one of the most important open questions in leadership studies—is to
what extent larger-scaled leadership processes can or might conform to this ideal of voluntary,
non-coercive cooperative behavior. In point of fact, colloquially the term “leadership” often has
a second, quite distinct definition: “leadership” in this sense involves organizing a group or
institution so that one or more people have authority over others. This authority may be merely
the right to initiate proposals, or it may involve the right to tell others what to do and to impose
penalties for non-compliance (firing a worker if one is a company boss, imprisoning a
lawbreaker if one is a magistrate). This is also a valid use of the term leadership, but it’s
important to know that leaders in this sense—those who hold special authority in the group—
may not in fact be agents of meaningful change. In practice, these two aspects of leadership—
initiating change and wielding authority—are often fused together in a countless variety of ways.

Most of the interesting cases of large scale leadership-as-change involve at some point an
engagement with authority, or an attempt to gain authority. Because we find ourselves in a
complex society governed by law and other institutions, to make meaningful change we must
engage with those institutions, one way or another. Likewise, persons who hold positions of
authority can play a key role in promoting or frustrating change. Sometimes persons in authority
unexpectedly become change agents in response to special circumstances. Much of the substance
of leadership studies is exploring the complex relationship between leadership as change and
leadership as authority. How do people develop, assemble, and use power to make things
happen? And how can leaders be held accountable (to the whole community, to ethical standards,
or to both) for the use, misuse, or non-use of such power?

We will be exploring this set of questions with a focus on the contradiction between stated values
of liberty, equality and democracy in the United States and the actual practice of slavery and
subsequent racialized oppression, from the 18th century to the present day. We will focus in
particular on the agency and leadership of African-American individuals and communities in
driving local, national and global change in the direction of inclusive democracy. As this
material shows, progress has been hard won and has involved directly challenging multiple forms of power at enormous personal and collective risk; and progress has rarely been unambiguous in its direction or secure in its attainment. Yet, this struggle to create an inclusive democracy as promised by the nation’s founding documents is both the essential American story and its most urgent current challenge. Hence our focus this semester will be on tracing this struggle over time through the lenses of history, political theory, and literature.

**Course Expectations**

To succeed in this course, you will need to meet several core expectations. These are not optional and not negotiable.

- You must attend every class (arriving on time—i.e. two minutes early).
- You must prepare for class by doing the assigned reading in a thoughtful manner, prior to class.
- You must be attentive in class.
- You must make an effort to participate in class discussions.
- You must complete the written assignments on time.

In addition, it is also highly advisable that you:

- Visit the professor periodically in office hours, especially when you have questions.
- Take good notes both while reading and in class.
- Review those notes after each class session.
- Write down questions as you are reading you would like to raise in class.
- Spend time with your classmates talking about the ideas in the reading outside of class time.

Finally, there are a few key classroom comportment rules we will observe:

- All electronic devices (phones, laptops, etc.) must be turned off and put away before entering the classroom, and must stay off until you leave the classroom.
- You should go to the bathroom prior to class and not get up in the middle of class to go, barring a genuine emergency.
- Don’t bring food into the classroom, but beverages are acceptable provided you dispose of them appropriately after class.
- Pay both the professor and your classmates the respect of listening to what they have to say. The way to indicate you are listening is through periodic eye contact.

**Developing Thinking, Reading and Writing Skills**

**Learning to Read for College**

Reading must be the fundamental default activity of all college students. When you are not doing anything else, you should be reading. This class will require that you do a lot of reading. In your
first year of college as a whole, it’s likely you will be asked to read more serious, demanding books than you’ve read in your entire life to this point.

We live in a culture that has devalued deep reading and thinking. Why then read books, as opposed to just a series of short articles or excerpts? Because books are still the best technology we have for allowing a sophisticated train of thought—or body of knowledge—to be communicated from one human mind to another. A book allows the author to explore an event, person, or question in sustained depth, to present a sustained argument supported by evidence, to make connections between different events or phenomena, or to explore all sides of a disputed question thoroughly. Or a book may simply expand or stimulate our imaginations, our moral consciences, our sense of what is possible in human life. To read an interesting, important, or imagination-expanding book is one of life’s great pleasures—but it is a pleasure it takes effort to cultivate. Think of reading a book as engaging your mind with someone else’s mind in an extended, in-depth conversation. If your reading takes the form of a thoughtful, internal conversation with the author, when it comes time to write your papers—your actual chance to “talk back” to the author and his or her ideas—you won’t be struggling to generate material from scratch; instead you will simply be transcribing and refining the conversation you’ve already had in your brain. Good writing is fundamentally a result of good thinking, and good thinking comes about via the practice and habit of being in conversation with good thinkers—such as the authors we will be reading this semester.

But how then to read thoughtfully? First, cut out the distractions. Turn off social media, the Internet, and anything else that might tempt you to turn your mind away from what you are reading. Find a quiet space where you can concentrate fully on the text. Second, set yourself an attainable goal for how long you will concentrate fully on reading the text. Whether its thirty minutes, an hour, or two hours, set a goal, and stick to that goal, with the aim of increasing it over time. If you can learn how to sit in the library or somewhere for three consecutive hours, reading for 45-50 minutes at time, then taking 10-15 minute breaks each hour, you will over the course of the week get a lot done—and more importantly, have a lot of fruitful conversations with great thinkers and writers. Third, take notes as you go—either in the text margins, or in a notebook. This is helpful in keeping track of the author’s train of thought, and will help you remember arguments and key points when you go back to review or re-read. Fourth, when you are done reading a section, write down a few key points the author made, or alternatively some questions you have about the author’s arguments. Fifth, as you are reading, think not just about the face value arguments of the text, but also about the author’s intended audience and purpose. Why and for whom was this book written? Being able to answer that question often is very helpful in understanding the text as a whole. Sixth—and this is the most advanced skill, and one that will take time to master—think critically about what you are reading. Even the most brilliant texts, texts that have impeccable internal logic and that will make you smarter simply by reading them, have limitations of perspective and purpose. What does a text written in the 18th century about the human condition have to say that is of enduring value to us today? Thomas Jefferson can’t answer that question—it is our job as students to answer that question ourselves.
Awarding of Credit
To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.
registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Disability Accommodations
Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.
disability.richmond.edu/

Honor System
The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”
studentdevelop.m.ent.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html

Religious Observance
Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.
registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html

Note on Class Evaluations
Student course evaluations will be completed in-class on the last day of the semester. Bring a laptop to the final day of class. All students are requested to complete the evaluation. Your participation is helpful in improving pedagogy and effective learning in the Jepson School.

General grading standards:

- A range grades are given for truly outstanding written work that not only meets the basic requirements of the given assignment but also demonstrates exceptional insight, clarity, and depth of thought. For instance, an A-range paper will not simply forward a coherent argument, but also anticipate and attempt to answer likely objections to the argument, and/or acknowledge points at which one’s argument might be vulnerable. Such papers will also be very well-organized and well-written, and gracefully presented.
- B range grades are given for good and very good written work which amply meets all the basic requirements of the given assignment and reflects substantial effort and engagement with the material. Such work is generally well-written and well-organized, shows good understanding of the course material, and avoids major substantive or logical errors. B is a good grade for any 5 assignment in this course, and B+ is a very good grade.
- C range grades are given for work which attempts to fulfill the requirements of the assignment but which falls short in some substantial way, with respect to organization, writing quality, understanding of the material, or argumentative logic.
- D and F grades are reserved for work which comes nowhere close to meeting the requirements of the assignment.
Course Requirements

1. Attendance, preparation, and participation in every class period, including two planned off-campus excursions. **This means timely completion of assigned readings.**
2. On-time completion of four papers: One ungraded two-page assignment and three eight page assignments. **Please submit all papers in hard copy and by email.** Prompts and instructions for papers will be distributed one week before deadlines. **To be prepared to write a strong paper, do the reading.**
3. Weekly True/False reading quiz (begins Week 2)
4. Attend three required events related to this class: Jepson Forum events with Zeynep Tufecki (February 13) and Melody Barnes (April 10), both at 7 p.m; and “Race, Nation, and Conflict” keynote address by Ibram X. Kendi (March 1), at 3:30 p.m. **Write a one-two page response to each event discussing the connection between each speech and topics discussed in the course. Response papers are due the Wednesdays following each event.**
5. Final exam (includes take-home, open book essay portion to be completed prior to test time of May 3rd 7 p.m., as well as in-class closed book section).

Grading Rubric

1. Attendance, preparation, participation: 15%
2. Cumulative reading quiz grades and event responses: 15%
3. Eight-page paper assignments (45%; 15% each)
4. Final exam: 25%

**Required Texts Available at Bookstore**

Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration*

Nan Keohane, *Thinking about Leadership*

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*

Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Raymond Arsenault, *Arthur Ashe: A Life*

Additional material to be distributed as PDFs
PLAN OF STUDY

I. Leadership in an American Context: The Political Theory of the Declaration of Independence

January 16
Nan Keohane, Thinking About Leadership, Introduction and Chapter One
The Declaration of Independence
Danielle Allen, Our Declaration, Parts 1 and 2

January 23
Danielle Allen, Our Declaration, Parts 3, 4, and 5
Nan Keohane, Thinking About Leadership Chapters Two and Five
Assignment #1: Two-page short paper on Declaration of Independence due, Monday January 28 5 p.m. in hard copy (Jepson 134) and email.

January 30
Danielle Allen, Our Declaration, Parts 6, 7 and 8
Thad Williamson, “Political Traditions: Conservatism, Liberalism, Civic Republicanism”
Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

II. Revolution, Reconstruction, Retrenchment: Leadership for Democracy v. White Supremacy in the 19th Century

February 6
David Blight, Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom, Chapters 1-14 (up to p. 280)
Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

February 13
Blight, Frederick Douglass, Chapters 15-23 (up to p. 520)
Frederick Douglass, “Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln”
Jepson Forum Event, February 13, 7 p.m. Zeynep Tufekci. Camp Concert Hall.

February 20
Blight, Frederick Douglass, Chapters 24-31 and Epilogue (pp. 521-765)
Assignment #2: Eight-page paper on Our Declaration and Frederick Douglass due February 22nd, 6 p.m.
III. Between Dreams and Nightmares: Twentieth-Century Visions of Democratic Leadership in Ralph Ellison and Ella Baker

February 27
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Chapters 1-12

*1919 and Its Legacies Keynote Lecture, March 1, 3:30 p.m., Ibram X. Kendi, Jepson Alumni Center.*

March 6

March 13
SPRING BREAK

March 20
Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, Chapters 1-6
Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership*, Chapter 3

March 27
Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, Chapters 7-12
Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership*, Chapter 4
Williamson, “Political Traditions: Left Political Movements and the Politics of Social Justice.”

Assignment #3. Eight-page paper on Invisible Man and Ella Baker due March 29, 6 p.m.

IV. Character, Courage and Leadership: How Richmond Made Arthur Ashe and Arthur Ashe Re-Made the World

April 3
Raymond Arsenault, *Arthur Ashe: A Life*, Chapters 1-10

April 10
Arsenault, *Arthur Ashe*, Chapters 11-18

*Jepson Forum Event, April 10, 7 p.m., Melody C. Barnes, Jepson Alumni Center*

April 17
Arsenault, *Arthur Ashe*, Chapters 19-26 and Epilogue
Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership*, Chapter 5

Assignment #4. Eight-page paper on Arthur Ashe due April 19, 6 p.m.
April 24

Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: the Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, Part Five (on Angela Davis) (to be distributed as PDF)

Melody C. Barnes and Thad Williamson, “Becoming the American Community We Should Be But Never Have Been” (to be distributed as PDF)

*Take-Home Portion of Final Exam (Essays) to be Handed Out Last Day of Class, April 24. This part of the exam (70% of final) should be printed and handed in at the start of the scheduled in-class exam, Friday May 3rd at 7 p.m. The in-class exam (30% of final) is closed book and will consist of True/False questions and short answers, and will take no more than one hour to complete. Both parts of the exam will cover the entire class, including the final week’s readings and required class events. A review guide will be distributed the final day of class.*