

Leadership and the Humanities 101

Jepson School of Leadership Studies, Fall 2021

Dr. Thad Williamson

Twillia9@richmond.edu

Jepson Hall 134

Office hours: Monday 2-4 pm or by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course situates the study of leadership within the context of the United States' history of racial oppression and systemic racism. We examine both the ideologies (including theories of leadership) which have been used to justify white supremacy in the U.S. over the past four centuries, and efforts to dismantle white supremacy and establish inclusive democracy over the same time period. This semester, we rely primarily on the tools of the humanities to guide this investigation: biographical and autobiographical narrative, intellectual history, political and economic history, and literature. We also consider questions specific to leadership studies, including methods of organizing and social change, varied conceptions of hierarchy and organization within social movements, the intersection of race and gender in struggles for racial justice, how leaders communicate both within their groups and to wider audiences, and more. We also consider the lives of exemplary Black leaders Frederick Douglass, Maggie L. Walker, Ella Baker, and John Lewis in considerable depth, with attention to social background, education, character development, intellectual development, and how these in turn impacted their capacity to contribute to racial justice struggles in a variety of capacities and roles over time and their specific capacity to proactively and creatively influence specific events, communities, and historical developments. Our aim is to understand in-depth the range of strategies, tactics, practices and ideas that leaders have deployed at different stage of American history to challenge white supremacy and advance the economic, legal, political and civic status of Black Americans.

In the final section of the course, as a bridge to the Spring Justice course with which this section is paired, we consider contemporary public policy issues in light of the persistence of systemic racial inequality in the U.S. and the long history of struggle to build a more inclusive American democracy.

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 up 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 individuals 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 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 one of its most urgent current challenges. Hence our focus this semester will be on tracing this struggle over time through the lenses of history, political theory, and literature.

General 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 phones must be turned off and put away before entering the classroom, and must stay off until you leave the classroom. Laptops are permissible exclusively for the purpose of taking notes, but if you use a laptop you should maintain eye contact with the instructor and must not have other windows open on your desktop.
- 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 it's 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 a 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 19th century about the human condition have to say that is of enduring value to *us* today? Frederick Douglass can't answer that question—it is our job as students to engage that question ourselves.

Jepson School of Leadership Studies Common Course Policies

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

Addressing Microaggressions on Campus

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups. Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world). A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.

With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults. Additional resources available to students include *Spiders Against Bias*, the *Bias Response Team*, and a workshop series this semester titled *Not So Slight: Combatting mAcroaggressions*.

Sensitive and Offensive Material Warning and Class Policy

In this course we are reading historical and literary documents concerning some of the most painful aspects of the American experience, including but not limited to racism, sexism, and violence. It will be our class policy not to use or repeat profanity, racial epithets, or other patently offensive terms, even when they are used in texts or textual passages we are discussing.

Access to Professor and Communication Outside of Class

In general, I am available to discuss any matter related to this course, and if you have a concern of any kind you are encouraged to reach out to me. I also am happy to listen and where possible assist with other issues related to your education at the University of Richmond. Office hours are normally Monday 2-4 p.m. (when these must be adjusted I will let you know in advance); I am also available by appointment. You may also reach out to me by email at any time to either make an appointment or ask a question. During the semester I will respond to emails as quickly as I can during the business day (8:30 a.m. to 5

p.m.) and seek to respond to all emails within 24 hours, Monday-Friday. Emails sent over the weekend may not be responded to until Monday. If in any circumstance I have not responded to your email after 48 hours (Monday-Friday) please send a follow-up reminder (sometimes emails get lost or accidentally overlooked). When writing an email to any member of the university faculty or staff, use a professional style and tone in the initial communication including complete sentences and correct grammar. Follow-up responses on the same thread can be shorter, as appropriate.

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 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.

Specific Course Requirements

1. Attendance at each class, active class participation. **10% Course Grade**
2. Weekly "Four Things" Blackboard posts: four bullet point observations (two to four sentences) of particularly important, interesting, surprising, disturbing facts, arguments, or conclusions in the assigned reading for each week. *These should be posted by 10 a.m. each Wednesday.* **10% Course Grade**
3. Two short analytical papers (4-6 pages), due September 27 and November 8. **15% course grade (each)**
4. Mid-term exam, in class October 13 **15% course grade**
5. Group presentation on contemporary issue, November 29/December 1 **15% course grade**
6. Final exam, December 10 **20% course grade**

Unexcused absences are not permitted. The first unexcused absence will result in a formal warning and a deduction from your class participation grade. Subsequent absences will result in escalating deductions from your final course grade: a 1% deduction for absence #2, a 2% deduction for absence #3, and so on.

Plan of Study

Week 1. August 23 & 25

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. For August 23: Read Chapters 1-8; For August 25: Read Chapters 9- Conclusion, including Appendices.

Weeks 2-3. August 30 & September 1, September 6 & September 8.

Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, Parts 1, 2, and 3 (Cotton Mather, Thomas Jefferson, William Lloyd Garrison). For August 30: Read Chapters 1-6. For September 1, read Chapters 7-9. For September 6, read Chapters 10-14; for September 8, read Chapters 15-18.

Weeks 4-5. September 13 & 15, September 20 & 22

Colson Whitehead, *Underground Railroad* (novel). For September 13: Read pp. 1-84; for September 15, read pp. 85-142; for September 20, read pp. 143-232; for September 22, read pp. 233-313.

Short Paper #1, Due Monday Sept. 27, 9 am

Weeks 6-8. September 27 & 29, October 4 & 6, October 11 & 13

David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. For September 27, read pp. xiii-18, pp. 67-115; for September 29 read pp. 116-202; for October 4, read pp. 203-309; for October 6, read pp. 310-384; for October 11, read pp. 385-463; for October 13, read pp. 745-765.

Mid-Term Exam: In class, October 13. (Essay portion, open book.)

Week 9. October 18 & October 20

Shenette Garrett-Scott: *Banking on Freedom: Black Women in U.S. Finance Before the New Deal* (Maggie L. Walker). For October 18, read pp. 1-12, 41-111; for October 20, read pp. 112-197.

Weeks 10-11. October 25 & October 27, November 1 & November 3

Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*. For October 25, read pp. 1-104; for October 27, read pp. 105-147 and pp.170-208 ; for November 1, read pp. 209-298; for November 3, read pp. 299-373.

Short Paper #2: Due Monday November 8, 9 a.m.

Week 12. November 8 & November 10.

John Lewis, *March* (complete graphic novel trilogy) For November 8, read Volume 1 and 2; for November 10, read Volume 3.

Weeks 13-14. November 15 & November 17, November 22, November 29 & December 1

Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*. For November 15, read pp. 3-102; for November 17, read pp. 103-192; for November 22, read pp. 193-290.

Student Group Presentations, November 29 & December 1.

FINAL EXAM, FRIDAY DECEMBER 10, 9 AM.

Additional Academic Resources

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

Academic Skills Center (asc.richmond.edu): Academic coaches assist students in assessing and developing their academic and life-skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, etc.). Peer tutors offer assistance in specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.) and will be available for appointments in-person and virtually. Peer tutors are listed on the ASC website. **Email** [Roger Mancastroppa \(rmancast@richmond.edu\)](mailto:Rmancast@richmond.edu) and [Hope Walton \(hwalton@richmond.edu\)](mailto:Hwalton@richmond.edu) **for coaching appointments in academic and life skills.**

Boatwright Library Research Librarians: (library.richmond.edu/help/ask/ or 289-8876): Research librarians help students with all steps of their research, from identifying or narrowing a topic, to locating, accessing, evaluating, and citing information resources. Librarians support students in their classes across the curriculum and provide individual appointments, class library instruction, tutorials, and [research guides](http://libguides.richmond.edu) (libguides.richmond.edu). Students can [contact an individual librarian](http://library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html) (library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html) or ASK a librarian for help via email (library@richmond.edu), text (804-277-9ASK), or [chat](http://library.richmond.edu/chat.html) (library.richmond.edu/chat.html).

Career Services: (careerservices.richmond.edu or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.richmond.edu or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, skills-building classes, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

Disability Services (disability.richmond.edu) The Office of Disability Services works to ensure that qualified students with a disability (whether incoming or current) are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable students to participate fully in activities, programs, services and benefits provided to all students. Please let your professors know as soon as possible if you have an accommodation that requires academic coordination and planning.

Speech Center (speech.richmond.edu or 287-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations. Remote practice sessions can be arranged; we look forward to meeting your public speaking needs.

Writing Center (writing.richmond.edu or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.