

LDST 101: Historical Foundations of Leadership, Fall 2026

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Email: twillia9@richmond.edu **Course Meeting Times:** T/Th 3:00 – 4:15 p.m.

Office Hours: 4:30-5:30 pm Tuesdays and Thursdays, or by appointment.

I. Course Overview

This course examines the interrelated phenomena of leadership, political organization, and social change, drawing on the lens of history. We will examine historical ideas about leadership as well as specific historical examples reflecting the complicated 250-year history of the United States of America.

We begin by considering the foundational intellectual work on ethics and politics of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who developed an extremely influential account of human virtue and well-being as well as robust typology of political regime.

We then examine the life of one of the most influential women in the American founding, Abigail Adams, whose life and thought provides a unique window into the American Revolution and the early American republic.

We next turn to the lives and writings of two southern Black women of the late 19th and early 20th century, Anna Julia Cooper and (Richmond's own) Maggie Lena Walker, each of whom sought racial justice through programs of educational and economic uplift. Both Cooper and Walker were incisive and insightful social analysts of turn-of-the-century American society.

Finally, we will take a detailed look at the remarkable life of tennis star and global humanitarian Arthur Ashe—a Richmond native who had a profound impact on struggles for racial justice in the United States and around the world in the late twentieth century. In many ways, Ashe combined Aristotelian concepts of moral and intellectual virtue with a deep commitment to racial and social justice.

Students will also participate in a required field trip to visit the Shockoe Institute in downtown Richmond to view an exhibit on the struggle to expand human freedom in American history, and at least one on-campus talk from a visiting speaker addressing themes of direct relevance to the course.

II. Learning Outcomes

Historical Inquiry-Specific Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will analyze questions about past events, ideas, and human worlds (political, cultural, social, economic, and/or physical).
2. Students will demonstrate historical thinking by contextualizing and analyzing primary sources and evaluating the nature and limits of historical evidence.
3. Students will apply interpretations and methods employed in the given area of historical study.
4. Students will formulate, advance, and properly document historical arguments, drawing on a combination of primary sources, secondary sources, and other research materials appropriate to the given area of historical study.

Overall Course Learning Outcomes

1. Students will examine classic Aristotelian accounts of virtue, civic virtue and political organization, to gain a better understanding of the conceptual foundations of modern society. Through that study, students will gain an appreciation of both historical and modern debates concerning the organization of society, the nature of political constitutions, and the possibility of ethically defensible political leadership.
2. Students will grapple with the tension between stated democratic ideals in American society and the reality of race-based slavery and subsequent regimes of racial oppression and examine how leaders and leadership processes have struggled to expand democracy at specific moments in American history.
3. Students will consider how dynamics of race, gender, and economic standing impacted the practice of emerging American democracy in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.
4. Students will consider how specific non-traditional leaders in American history exhibited Aristotelian conceptions of ethical life in the process of contributing to significant social and political change.

III. 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—that is, 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
- 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 (unless you have a specific accommodation).
- 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. 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.

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 ideas in the reading outside of class time

Developing Thinking, Reading and Writing Skills (Required Reading!)

The rise of AI technology raises fundamental questions about what it means to be a human being as well as the future of global society. It also raises fundamental questions about the learning process and the nature of higher education.

Whatever the ultimate answers to those questions, this course takes it as given that is a good thing for human beings to be able to think, and think deeply, for themselves. Being able to think deeply means developing the cognitive tools that allow one to critically assess arguments, ideologies, conclusions someone else may offer you. And it means developing the capacity to allow one to respond creatively to new situations one may encounter.

That observation leads to the following conclusion: you will not fully develop either your understanding of this material or your capacity to think about leadership if you do not do the reading.

Reading AI-generated summaries of the assigned materials is not an acceptable way to prepare for class or to engage this material. This class isn't about providing you information to regurgitate. It's about getting you to wrestle with hard questions that often do not have easy answers, questions that have

challenged both humanity's most illustrious thinkers and ordinary people for centuries, and questions that are (or ought to be) central both to how you conduct your life and to how we organize our shared life.

The issue is not whether an AI-generated summary is accurate or inaccurate. It's that relying on a summary inevitably leads one to (a) miss out on at least some details of the thought process that led the author to their conclusion (b) miss crucial nuances of the argument and (c) most importantly, miss out on the opportunity to think alongside the author, both to understand the author's arguments and to critically interrogate them. If you just settle for someone else's summary, not only will you miss (a), (b), and (c); you will also forgo entirely the possibility of (d): the possibility that **you** specifically may have something unique to add to the discussion.

I think we do you, as students, an injustice if we fail to cultivate your ability to move forward conversations about critical unsettled issues of fundamental human significance.

This may sound grandiose, but we also do humanity as a whole an injustice by failing to cultivate that ability: your generation undoubtedly is going to have to wrestle with severe, civilization-threatening challenges that we can perhaps roughly outline but cannot fully forecast in their specifics. If the leaders (and followers) who have responsibility for actually meeting those challenges cannot think for themselves, we are right to fear the worst.

I recognize that the expectation to actually read texts goes somewhat against the grain and may be perceived as burdensome. Burdensomeness is not an objection, however. Learning should be, at times, burdensome. Figuring out how you want to live your life and contribute to society is often burdensome. Actually living that life is often burdensome. And "leadership" itself is extremely burdensome.

The least you can do to prepare yourselves for potential, burdensome leadership roles is to actually read these assigned texts.

The good thing about college in a liberal arts setting is it provides you time and space to wrestle with deep, burdensome questions that may not have immediate answers. I hope you will take advantage of that space. But in case it is difficult at first, below are some tips that may help.

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 you to do a lot of reading.

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 best 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 over two thousand years ago have to say that is of enduring value to us today? Aristotle can't answer that question—it is our job as students to answer that question ourselves.

Note: Above I have provided several strong intrinsic reasons why you should do your best to do the course reading. An additional reason is that when everyone in the class does the reading, discussions are much more engaging, interesting, and less likely to revolve excessively around the instructor or a small number of students. For that reason, there will regularly be unannounced, reading accountability checks in class, taking different forms, that will impact student participation assessments.

IV. Student Assessment

Grade Composition

Two in-class essays	50%	October 15 and December 3
Final exam:	30%	December 16
Attendance and Participation	20%	Every class period

General Grading Standards

- “A” work is well-written, well-argued, and thoroughly conversant with the source material, containing no major inaccuracies or contradictions, and illustrating subtlety and nuance of argument. “A” papers consist of interesting, substantial thoughts well-packaged in technically proficient writing.
- “B” work attempts to forward an argument and shows good familiarity with and understanding of the source material. There are generally two genres of “B” work: papers that have some of the qualities of an “A” paper, but also contain serious flaws; and papers that contain no serious flaws, but also lack originality or depth of perceptiveness, or simply fail to be persuasive.
- “C” work makes an attempt to complete the assignment but contains substantial flaws, either of writing quality, inadequate comprehension of the material, unsupported arguments, and/or logically contradictory or implausible arguments.
- “D” and “F” work refers to papers that are seriously inadequate and fail to meet the basic requirements of the assignment.

Attendance Policy and Participation

All students are expected to attend every class and to arrive prepared, with appropriate class materials on hand, and prepared to engage with the material. Often that engagement will take the form of active listening, to the instructor or to other students, as well as notetaking. But there will also be scope for verbal participation. Periodic, thoughtful participation is encouraged and expected from all students.

Laptops should not be used in class (unless you have accommodation to do so). Laptops and other electronic devices tend to distract from the conversation at hand.

Unexcused absences will lead to a 1% reduction in your final course grade. So please don’t miss class, barring illness or a valid university-approved conflict (i.e. travel for varsity sports).

Field Trip, Visiting Lectures, Research Assignment

All students are **required** to participate in the October 8 field trip to The Shockoe Institute. *You are not allowed to miss this trip to go to fall break early.* If you have an excused absence (i.e. travel for varsity sports), I will work with you to find an alternative date to visit the Shockoe Institute.

Students are also required to attend *one* of three guest lectures noted on the syllabus, and submit a one paragraph summary within 48 hours after the event.

For class on October 29, all students are required to research, read, and analyze either one full speech or essay by Maggie Lena Walker or two shorter speeches or writings. More directions to come!

V. Jepson School of Leadership Studies Common 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/

Weinstein Learning Center

The Center integrates, amplifies, and co-locates Speech Studio, Writing Studio, Quantitative and Programming Support, Content Tutoring, Academic Coaching, English Language and Culture, and Technology Studio services. The WLC aims to provide next-level academic support, transforming our students' development in integrated and innovative ways and complementing our robust curricular and co-curricular offerings. <https://wlc.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." <https://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/policies/honor/Honor-Code.pdf>

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. All students are expected to contribute to the shared goal of creating an inclusive learning environment by being both respectful of all other students and self-aware when engaging in classroom discussions.

Course Policy on Offensive Language

This class in its course of study addresses or references numerous difficult and painful topics, including racism, sexual violence, and oppression and violence more generally. Some assigned texts (including multimedia materials shown in class) may use or mention specific derogatory terms widely regarded as offensive, unacceptable, and inconsistent with inclusive academic learning. It will be our class policy not to repeat these terms in class verbally in our discussions; if there is need to reference these terms as part of a conversation, we will follow the convention of using the first letter of a given word to do so.

VI. Additional Course-Specific Policies

Artificial Intelligence

Use of Artificial Intelligence software, websites, devices and so forth is strictly prohibited in work for this course. This is a blanket prohibition on use of AI in (a) undertaking any assignments for this class (b) doing the assigned reading for the course (c) preparing notes for in-class essays (d) using AI-generated summaries of assigned readings for any purpose.

You are generally not required to conduct outside research in the course beyond the assigned texts, but if you would like to undertake additional background research on some of the authors and topics we are discussing, this is permitted provided you do the assigned reading. Reading AI-generated summaries in the course of any such research is acceptable (insofar as it is practically unavoidable when using Google tools or other software platforms with embedded AI components), but again, such summaries cannot be used or referenced in completing any assignment for the course.

Students *are* encouraged to learn how to use AI appropriately as part of your overall university education. But learning norms of appropriate use is beyond the scope of this course, so students are asked and expected to follow the guidelines noted here.

Further Guidelines for Constructive Classroom Discussion

Professor Peter Levine (Tufts University) helpfully provides these criteria for constructive classroom engagement in a university setting. Strive to develop these habits of positive engagement.

- Being responsive to other students. (Responsiveness needn't always be immediate, verbal, or occur within the class discussion itself.)
- Building on others' contributions, and sometimes making links among different people's contributions or between what they have said and the text.
- Demonstrating genuine respect for the others, where respect does not require agreement. (In fact, sometimes respect requires explicit disagreement because you take the other person's ideas seriously.)
- Focusing on the topic and the texts, which does not preclude drawing unexpected connections beyond them.
- Taking risks, trying out ideas that you don't necessarily endorse, and asking questions that might be perceived as naive or uninformed.
- Seeking truth or clarity or insight (instead of other objectives).
- Exercising freedom of speech along with a degree of tact and concern for the other people.
- Demonstrating responsibility for the other students' learning in what you say (and occasionally by a decision not to speak).

Course of Study

Week 1. August 25 and 27

Thad Williamson, “What is Leadership? What is Leadership Studies?”; Aristotle, *Ethics* (Book 1.1-12) (August 25); Class Syllabus; Aristotle, *Ethics*, Books 3.6 -5.1, 7.1 (August 27)

Week 2. September 1 and September 3

Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book 10.7-9; Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1 (September 1)
Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 2 (September 3)

Week 3. September 8 and September 10

Aristotle, *Politics* Book 3 and Book 4.1-4 (September 8); Declaration of Independence, Constitution of the Iroquois Nations, Constitution of the United States including Amendments (September 10)

Week 4. September 15 and September 17

Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams: A Life*, Chapters 1-6 (September 15) and 7-11 (September 17)

Week 5. September 22 and September 24

Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams*, Chapters 12-17 (September 22) and 18-22 (September 24)

Week 6. September 29 and October 1

Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams*, Chapters 23-28 (September 29) and 29-34 (October 1)

Week 7. October 6 and October 8

In-class Essay #1 (October 6); Field Trip to Shockoe Institute (October 8)

Week 8. October 15

Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South, by a Black Woman of the South* (1892), pp. xxi-xxvii and pp. 3-44.

Week 9. October 20 and 22

Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, p. 45-78 (October 20) and pp. 78-92, 121-151 (October 22)

Week 10. October 27 and October 29

Anna Julia Cooper, “Colored Women as Wage Earners (1898)”, pp. 492-498; “The Social Settlement (1913)”, pp. 228-234, “Educational Programs (1930)”, pp. 190-204, “Aunt Charlotte (poem, 1906-10)”, pp. 501-2. (October 27)

Maggie Lena Walker, writings or speeches (October 29). Independent research assignment.

Week 11. November 3 and November 5

Raymond Arsenault, *Arthur Ashe: A Life* (Prologue, Chapter 1-3 for November 3, Chapters 4-7 for November 5)

Week 12. November 10 and November 12

Raymond Arsenault, *Arthur Ashe* (Chapters 8-11 for November 10, Chapters 12-15 for November 12)

Week 13. November 17 and November 19

Raymond Arsenault, *Arthur Ashe* (Chapters 16-19 for November 17, Chapters 20-23 for November 19).

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14. December 1 and December 3

Raymond Arsenault, *Arthur Ashe* (Chapters 24-26 and Epilogue, December 1).

In-class essay #2, December 3

Week 15. December 8

Thad Williamson, “A General Model of Good Leadership in Executive Contexts” (2024)

Thad Williamson, “Beyond Red and Blue: What College Students Need to Learn if American Democracy is to Survive and Thrive” (2019)

September 15: Guest Lecture Option #1: Beyond Invisibility: Changing the Way We See Native America, Stephanie Fryberg and Matika Wilbur 5:30 pm, Admissions Center.

September 23: Guest Lecture Option #2: Frederick Douglass Sizes Up Abraham Lincoln: A Debate About the American Promise, Lucas Morel, 5 pm Business School (Ukrop Auditorium)

October 26: Guest Lecture Option #3: Living with Rivers: A Tale of Cherokee Stewardship and a Fight with the Federal Government, Gregory Smithers, 5:30 pm, Jepson Alumni Center

Comprehensive Final Exam: Wednesday December 16, 2 p.m. All students must take the Final Exam in person at the scheduled time; no exceptions.