

Remembering Major American Statesmanship Models in Time of Leadership Challenges

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Abstract: *From July 4, 1776, the very day when New England (the present USA) declared their independence to our present times, forty-six presidents have ruled the country. Next to the presidents considered as supreme magistrates, other Americans have proven to be eligible for statesmanship because they led their movements, people and organizations with rare talent underpinned by values. Yet, from the arrival of the first European settlers in the New World (the American continent) and specifically in New England, several forms of barbarism loomed up. On the long list, some barbaric treatments of the human made history with the eradication of the Native American tribes, the institutionalization of slavery, the American Civil War, and more recently, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, to list a few. Inspired by John A. Gueguen, Jr.'s (1981) "Statesmanship and the Crisis of Political Leadership in America," this study offers a guided tour in the museum of the American lore full of life lessons of leadership and statesmanship. In a world of frenetic presidential and other political ambitions that involve holding high public offices, revisiting leader-statesmen's careers imposes as a must.*

Keywords: American leadership, American statesmanship, democracy, leader-statesman, USA

1. Introduction

Merriam-Webster (2024) offers three definitions of leader and two definitions of statesman. The second definition of leader suggests a person who has commanding authority or influence. The second definition of statesman is a wise, skillful and respected political leader. Both terms, leader and statesman, have a common denominator that is guiding or conducting. For Gueguen (1981), statesmanship means a combination of natural and acquired knowledge and ability which makes a public person an eminent student and practitioner of the art of political leadership. Then, we do not look at voting records or at the consistency of public utterances in order to detect statesmanship qualities.

Leadership and statesmanship are among today's toughest challenges. What it takes to be a good leader is not just well-chosen words, fancy clothes or hollow promises. A good leader must have patriotism and humaneness, among other qualities. The difference between the leader and the statesman is that a leader administers affairs and the statesman transforms the affairs he leads positively (Gueguen, 1981). The proverb that goes as, "No man is a prophet in his own country," applies best to statesmen. The leader's or statesman's achievements are not notable until long afterwards. This was the case of King and Malcolm X in their quest for freedom and justice for all Americans.

This study falls within the framework of leadership and statesmanship crises in the world today, but in the USA especially. Evoking the major American leadership and statesmanship models that spanned the period from 1955 to 1968 has a social and political relevancy as political crises are increasingly becoming a nagging concern today. One example finds its relevancy here with the two impeachments of 45th US President Donald Trump (2017-2021). Accused of

abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, the House of Representatives adopted two articles of impeachment against Trump on December 18, 2019. But he was acquitted on both articles of impeachment on February 5, 2020 (Wikipedia, 2024a).

The second time Trump faced impeachment was on January 13, 2021, by the House of Representatives for incitement of insurrection. His trial started on February 9, 2021, and concluded with his acquittal on February 13, 2021 (Wikipedia, 2024b). Portrayed as a wealthy, vulgar, controversial and racist figure, Trump has a large following. This study endeavors to evidence that the world as never before needs leader-statesmen. I will propose life lessons of American leadership and statesmanship as models by showcasing nine qualities every democratic statesman should have: conviction, prudence, courage, foresight, unity, knowledge, insight, faith and humility as Gueguen (1981) stipulates.

2. Conviction

A leader-statesman must have a firm conviction. So he is not afraid to risk his own career, safety and even life. In the history of the USA, there is one page that tells a sad story about the four US presidents killed for their firm convictions. These presidents could have chosen to bow to their political opponents' whims, but they opted for the hardest way. The way of truth and righteousness. Within less than a century, ninety-eight years precisely, the USA had mourned four times the assassination of their democratically elected presidents. The table below gives detailed information on the presidency positions, terms, names, dates and places of assassination, assassins' names and reasons for assassination of those presidents.

Table 1: The four US Presidents assassinated

<i>Presidency positions and terms</i>	<i>Names</i>	<i>Dates and places of assassination</i>	<i>Assassins' names</i>	<i>Reasons for assassination</i>
16 th President (March 4, 1861 - April 15, 1865)	Abraham Lincoln	April 14, 1865 in Washington, D.C.	John Wilkes Booth	Political division
20 th President (March 4, 1881 - September 19, 1881)	James A. Garfield	July 2, 1881 in Washington, D.C.	Charles J. Guiteau	Political discontent and personal delusions
25 th President (March 4, 1897 - September 14, 1901)	William McKinley	September 6, 1901 in New York	Leon Czolgosz	Political extremism
35 th President (January 20, 1961 - November 22, 1963)	John F. Kennedy	November 22, 1963 in Texas	Lee Harvey Oswald	Political disillusionment

Source: Mamchii (2024)

Lincoln came to power at a time of a great need of humanitarian, social and economic change. Most Americans wanted to end slavery, to establish a more just society and to strengthen their economy as the transition from goods by hand to using machines. A large number of Americans did not share Lincoln's stance on slavery and the union. But in Lincoln's opinion:

We [the Americans] are now far into the fifth year, since a policy was initiated, with the avowed object, and confident promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached, and passed. A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved, I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.

Lincoln (1858)

President James A. Garfield refused to give Guiteau, his assassin, a government position though he supported him during the 1880 presidential campaign. Garfield would not satisfy his supporters' desire because Guiteau lacked the necessary qualifications. Garfield had taught his fellow Americans that in leadership merit matters the most. Putting the wrong man in the wrong place causes more damages. President William McKinley promoted economic growth and expanded the American influence overseas. As for President John F. Kennedy, he established the Peace Corps, fought for the USA to enter the space race, and fought against poverty and discrimination (Mamchii, 2024).

Conviction is the most important quality of a leader or a statesman. as King (1963) put it, "If a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live." However, conviction must go with prudence because too much passion in conviction leads to reckless actions.

3. Prudence

A leader-statesman knows when to act, what to say, what to avoid, when to react and to strike. Here I will take one example from Martin Luther King, Jr., the undisputed moral leader of the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 to 1968. Because of his moderation, open-mindedness and flexibility,

other Americans who did not agree with him libeled him as a coward. But as the moral arm of the movement, he felt it wiser to measure everything with intelligence. One episode of the protests he led deserves consideration. When continuing the march for freedom initiated by James Meredith, who was shot and injured, on June 6, 1966, King noticed that the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee activists such as Stokely Carmichael, Floyd McKissick and Willie Ricks used the slogan "Black Power" in public, which sparked widening splits in their ranks (King, 1968, p. 30).

These young activists advocated an all-black movement and even avoided singing the stanza on Blacks and Whites together in "We Shall Overcome". It was King's contention that a leader has to be concerned about the problem of semantics. Each word has a denotative meaning, its explicit and recognized sense, and a connotative meaning, its suggestive sense. He suggested Carmichael should have used "black consciousness" or "black equality" as slogans instead, and kept working toward economic and political power (King, 1968, p. 31). In addition to be prudent with his actions, King had to be courageous to challenge his co-workers' attitudes even though he knew this could cost him a great deal.

4. Courage

A leader-statesman should be energetic, aggressive and tough. No issue must be awesome for him to tackle. The presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt is an instructive example. Having campaigned against Herbert Hoover in the 1932 presidential election, Roosevelt remained a mystery for most of his closest associates (Roosevelt, 1933). But with the challenges ahead, and which he would be facing with courage, his associates and the whole nation were to discover a man of grit, candor and high stature. Roosevelt's induction into the presidency coincided with the ravaging damages of the Great Depression that started in 1929 and lasted until about 1939 (Pells and Romer, 2024).

Although it originated in the United States, the Great Depression caused drastic declines in output, severe unemployment, and acute deflation in almost every country of the world. Its social and cultural effects were no less staggering, especially in the United States, where the Great Depression represented the harshest adversity faced by Americans since the Civil War (Pells and Romer, 2024). The following is a portray of how violent the blow of the economic crisis fell on every aspect of American life:

In such a spirit on my part and on yours we face our common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only

material things. Values have shrunken to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone. More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return. Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment.

(Roosevelt, 1933)

This is an extract from Roosevelt's inaugural address of March 4, 1933. The most quoted words of this address are: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Bold and inspiring, these words constituted a message of repression of the Great Depression.

President Roosevelt's New Deal was the eloquent response against the Great Depression. Within the first one hundred days that followed his election, the New Deal program provided temporary jobs, employment on construction projects, and youth work in the national forests. The Works Progress Administration agency gave some 8.5 million people jobs. Its construction projects produced more than 650,000 miles of roads, 125,000 public buildings, 75,000 bridges, and 8,000 parks (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

Also under its aegis were the Federal Art Project, Federal Writers' Project, and Federal Theatre Project. The Civilian Conservation Corps agency provided national conservation work primarily for young unmarried men. The projects included planting trees, building flood barriers, fighting forest fires, and maintaining forest roads and trails (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). In his 1933 inaugural address, Roosevelt gives lessons of both leadership and statesmanship, how to lead and how a leader must be. Roosevelt (1933) also pleads for a leadership of frankness, vigor, discipline and direction. He assumes that it is a false belief that public office and high political position are to be valued only by the standards of pride, place and personal profit. During the Great Depression, Roosevelt (1933) had noticed that values had shrunken to fantastic levels. For him, it was a falsity to believe that material wealth is the standard of success. Roosevelt succeeded in his New Deal program because before exercising power, he had the foresight to devise a plan that would immediately bring about economic relief and industrial reforms.

5. Foresight

A leader-statesman rises above circumstances, spots problems when they are still far off and easier to divert. In his inaugural address of January 20, 1961, Kennedy (1961) foresaw many issues ahead. The particularity of this address is its call for unity not only to Americans but also to all other citizens of the world, both the rich and the poor. For him, if Americans were united, there was little they could not do in a host of cooperative ventures. But if they were divided, there was little they could do, for they dared not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder. He thought both sides, the Democrats and the Republicans, should have explored what

problems united them instead of belaboring those problems which divided them (Kennedy, 1961).

Kennedy (1961) also called for a struggle against "the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself," through a "grand and global alliance" and with a "historic effort". Kennedy's foresight undergirded by unity is a sincere plea for self-sacrifice for the well-being of one's own people. The following statements by the end of his address are illustrative examples:

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

(Kennedy, 1961).

6. Unity

A leader-statesman has a long range of interests of the whole people he leads. Unity is perhaps the most difficult quality to find in leadership in the past and today. All American presidents have found it almost impossible to make unity true. From the 1st US President George Washington to the current 46th US President Joseph Biden, the issue that has spanned time is the race issue. The USA has been tackling this for centuries with Native Americans and African Americans in the heart of it. In King's (1968) words, "Ultimately a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus (p. 65)." Molding consensus is not an easy task because it claims sacrifices sometimes.

For the 16th US President Abraham Lincoln, the American Civil War became an inevitable evil for the good of uniting both the North and the South. For the 44th US President Barack Obama, "*E pluribus unum*," out of many, one, became the motto of his presidential campaign in mid of wars that were tearing the nation apart. Obama (2004) viewed his country as a "single American family". In his own words, he even epitomizes the diversity of America through his parents' origins:

My presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father, my grandfather, was a cook, a domestic servant. [...] While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs and farms through most of the Depression.

Obama (2004)

In addition to his charisma and eloquence, Obama's experience and knowledge helped him to become the president of the USA. Both his academic knowledge as a jurist and his world knowledge as a community organizer in Chicago played a tremendous role in his election. In addition, Obama federalized the American youths around King's dream:

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. [...] I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

(King, 1986a, p. 104)

7. Knowledge

A leader-statesman has experience through education and travel. This is a diverse combination of moral and political life, American and world history, political biography, and American and foreign culture. These four features respectively involve understanding and compassion, understanding history in context, knowing the lives and writings of great hand-picked statesmen as role models, knowledge of national characters, and public philosophies and traditions (Gueguen, 1981). A good leader must know his people as a father knows his children, their needs, their habits, their hobbies, their likes and dislikes, their weakness and strength.

History has proven that the more the president knows his people, the more he naturally attracts love and sympathy. Here, it is useful to evoke the examples of Roosevelt with his fireside talks, that of Kennedy with the television, and, more recently, Obama and social media. All these three presidents' knowledge of the Americans have one common denominator: communication with the tools that have come into vogue.

From 1933 to 1944 Roosevelt provided a source of hope and security through his "Fireside Chats," a series of radio broadcasts that were initially meant to gain support for his New Deal policies. In those "chats" Roosevelt, who understood the importance of radio as a medium, used common language to construct the radio addresses as an informal conversation between himself and an American public greatly in need of reassurance (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

John F. Kennedy is widely considered the first television president, but he was not the first one to appear on TV. Franklin Roosevelt was the first president to appear on television, and Truman was the first, in 1947, to make a televised presidential address. But it was Kennedy who mastered the medium, starting with his famous televised debate with Richard Nixon in 1960, and continuing with the televised news conferences and interviews that characterized his presidency (Bogost, 2017). President Obama has been called the "first social-media president." It is both a true and a misleading characterization. On the one hand, the Obama White House was indeed the first presidency to make use of services like *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Snapchat*, and *Instagram* (Bogost, 2017). These three presidents were fashionable because their insights helped them find out the way the world was turning to.

8. Insight

A leader-statesman must have rapid and sound judgement, and accurate conclusions. Being able to take a firm but

reasonable decision resolves future problems that are likely to shake the foundations of the nation. Above, some examples already satisfy as an answer to the insight question. Roosevelt's New Deal is a relevant example. However, insight must not invite extreme measures. During World War II, as the Axis and Allied Powers were killing each other leaving tens of millions of casualties in their wake, 33rd US President Harry S. Truman, with the help of scientist Oppenheimer, wrongly thought it wise to use the atomic bomb.

In 1948, Truman said, "The president cannot duck hard problems; he cannot pass the buck. I made the decision after discussions with the ablest men in our government and after long and prayerful consideration. I decided that the bomb should be used to end the war quickly and save countless lives, Japanese as well as American" (McEvoy, 2023). Later, the launching of the atomic bomb raised so many troubles that it made Truman and Oppenheimer be at loggerheads. According to the book *Robert Oppenheimer: A Life Inside the Center* by Ray Monk, accounts differ as to the exact words spoken when both met in person, but the meeting came to an abrupt end (McEvoy, 2023).

The October 25, 1945, meeting exemplified the contrasting feelings both men had regarding the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the future of atomic weaponry. Oppenheimer famously claimed to have "blood on his hands," during his meeting with Truman, a comment that infuriated the president. Truman responded afterwards, "Blood on his hands; damn it, he hasn't half as much blood on his hands as I have. You just don't go around bellyaching about it." He called Oppenheimer a "cry-baby scientist" and said, "I don't want to see that son of a bitch in this office ever again." (McEvoy, 2023).

Thousands of bombs had been used during WWII to stop the Axis Power, but Truman's insight to end the war using the atomic bomb was a turning point in the industrial military complex. Was it worth it? Because of the extent of the devastation and chaos, including the fact that much of the two cities' infrastructure was wiped out, exact death tolls from the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain unknown. However, it is estimated roughly 70,000 to 135,000 people died in Hiroshima and 60,000 to 80,000 people died in Nagasaki, both from acute exposure to the blasts and from long-term side effects of radiation (History.com Editors, 2023).

Truman's insight must have been guided by his faith in a better world, a world of God, a world of mercy. Even though this may seem paradoxical, Truman had good intentions. Maybe, as the US President who had to bear the heavy cross of leadership in a time of a world war, he had not taken time enough to measure in a level-headed way all the consequences of Little Boy and Fat Boy, the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This raises the philosophy question of ends and means. For King (1986b), "In the long run, we must see that the end represents the means in process and the ideal in the making. In other words, we cannot believe, or we cannot go with the idea that the end justifies the means because the end is preexistent in the means."

9. Faith

A leader-statesman believes in God. God is his enlightenment and guidance. He inspires him genuine patriotism and faith in a brighter future. The Puritans founded the America we know today. Rigorously attached to God’s recommendations, the Puritans, with John Winthrop at their head, believed that New England (USA now) was “a city upon a hill”. Each of the 45 men who served as US president took an oath of office, as required by the US Constitution, before starting their terms. The 35-word oath reads thus: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States” (Adkins, 2023).

Every president, starting with George Washington in 1789, has made the same pledge, a symbol of a peaceful transfer of power.

During the swearing-in ceremony, the president-elect typically places the left hand on the Bible, raises the right hand, and recites the oath as directed by the chief justice of the United States. But not every president has used the Bible due to exceptional circumstances (Adkins, 2023). God reveals Himself to us through many different names in the Bible: Father, the Beginning and End, the God Who Gave You Birth, the God Most High, the Everlasting God, etc. Below is a table that proposes six presidents’ references to God in their inaugural addresses.

Table 1: Six US Presidents’ solemn references to God in their Inaugural Addresses

Presidents	Solemn references to God
Franklin D. Roosevelt March 4, 1933	“In this dedication of a nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us. May He guide me in the days to come.”
Harry S. Truman January 20, 1949	“With God’s help, the future of mankind will be assured in a world of justice, harmony, and peace.”
John F. Kennedy January 20, 1961	“With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”
William J. Clinton January 20, 1993	“And now, each in our way, and with God’s help, we must answer the call. Thank you, and God bless you all.”
George W. Bush January 20, 2001	“God bless you all, and God bless America.”
Joseph B. Biden, Jr. January 20, 2021	“May God bless America and may God protect our troops.”
Source: Roosevelt (1933); Truman (1949); Kennedy (1961); Clinton (1993); Bush (2001) and Biden (2021).	

America is becoming increasingly atheistic. The American aloofness in God’s matters is making it a society unconcerned about the wellbeing of mankind, the preservation of life, and the protection against wars and crimes. But its presidents’ allegiances to God as the Sole Protector revitalizes American forebears’ credo in “a city upon a hill”. In their references to God, all these presidents link God with guidance, protection, peace, and especially blessing. Their references to God become oaths of allegiance. Though they stand on the highest pedestal in the world ruling the most powerful country on earth, they take a solemn vow of total submission to a Higher Power. This is a lesson of humaneness and humility.

10. Humility

A leader-statesman is humble out of true self-knowledge. He is aware of the limitation of the human and learns from his mistakes. He recognizes his potential for statesmanship and thus provide for continuity of leadership by serving them as a model of inspiration and teacher of statecraft. The example of 39th President Jimmy Carter is illuminating. Being America’s longest living president so far, Carter’s presidency does not often seduce Americans due to his failures in foreign and domestic issues. But on the humanitarian place, Carter is a legend.

Carter retired to his native Plains, Georgia, in a four-bedroom house, which many US presidents usually do not do. Two years after leaving office, he founded the Carter Center in Atlanta in 1982. The non-profit center has helped eradicate disease, support human rights causes, provide conflict

resolution, and support charitable work around the world. President Carter has been the face of the organization, building or repairing more than 4,300 homes on 6 continents. President Carter seldom accepted speaking fee. And if he did receive a fee, he would donate the proceeds to his charitable foundation. He is the only president to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize for work done after leaving office (Sutton, 2023).

11. Conclusion

In this paper, I have mentioned names of leaders the majority of which held the presidency office with talent and competence. They all deserve the consideration people bestow on them. According to Gueguen (1981), next to the nine qualities a leader should have to become a statesman come six assets that help leaders to become successful:

- First, being attractive inspires respect, admiration and charisma;
- Second, having a long tradition of public service in one’s family facilitates one’s entry into public life;
- Third, being gifted with oratorical ability enables easy command and mobilization of people;
- Four, having a companionable wife or supportive children makes the public office lighter to bear on one’s shoulders;
- Five, being simple and modest minimize personal problems and help one avoid the envy of others;
- Six, being physically handicapped increases determination to go as far as possible.

Each one of the leader-statesman I have mentioned in this study has one or two, or more, of these assets. This means

sometimes the circumstances are such that one become lucky to reach the highest office and successful in leading appropriately those who cast their votes for him, or those who decided he could lead them and be their shepherd.

This paper draws its inspiration from Gueguen's (1981) seminal work on "Statesmanship and the Crisis of Political Leadership in America". Gueguen's (1981) work on the subject is an untold masterpiece. In this context, this paper has proposed a paradigm shift in terms of electing high officials or simple leaders of any society for any organization and for any purpose. White (1961) assumes that the presidential election is the most awesome transfer of power in the world. The presidential office is the power to marshal and mobilize, the power to send men to kill or be killed, the power to tax and destroy, the power to create and the responsibility to do so, the power to guide and the responsibility to heal, all committed into the hands of one man (White, 1961, p. 3-4).

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