Preface

As the new century dawned, the nonpartisan organization Freedom House supplemented its annual survey of the status of democracy and freedom in the world with a special report reflecting back upon the century just completed. The report concluded: ‘The findings here are significant. They show a dramatic expansion of democratic governance over the course of the century.’ Indeed, ‘in a very real sense, the twentieth century has become the “Democratic Century”’.¹

The momentum toward democracy appears to have continued into the twenty-first century, albeit not without some attendant controversy. This reality poses some of the most fundamental challenges for state making and the operation of the polity ever witnessed in human history. Longstanding democratic regimes such as the United States and Great Britain confront disconnection between their ideals and their realities, and must deal alike with sweeping egalitarianism, claims of social and economic inequities, increasing diversity and allegedly inefficient and unresponsive political structures. Emerging democracies face these and perhaps greater challenges. These were well articulated at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond (Virginia), which recently hosted a lecture series entitled ‘Transitions to Democracy’. In its supporting materials, it was noted that ‘the Cold War has ended, apartheid has crumbled, and once-entrenched dictators have departed. The old regimes, however, have not simply turned into democracies overnight. We see instead the hopeful beginnings of long and uncertain transitions to new political arrangements. These may one day call themselves democracies,’ the Jepson program continued, ‘but they are likely to be different in important ways from each other and from most Americans’ fixed ideas of what “democracy” looks like.’²

We face, then, a period every bit as important and significant as that now-hallowed time in the late eighteenth century when the great minds of the day contemplated an appropriate response to the emergence of popular sovereignty. And, indeed, while certainly not ‘the end of history’, the present challenges can be seen as a part of, and perhaps the culmination of, centuries of grappling with the conception of rule by the people. The Jepson School lecture series posed the relevant questions: ‘What possible outcomes lie ahead? What factors affect the reconstruction of institutions, the reallocation of resources, and the rethinking of social values and priorities that complicate transitions to democracy [and, I might add, reforms of existing democracies]?’ And, perhaps most important, ‘How might these considerations lead to a more useful understanding of democracy itself?’³

These are not superficial questions, and our responses must aspire to an intellectual rigor worthy of them. The ensuing analysis is not light reading nor is it intended to be. However, this book is intended to be an initial step toward an informed dialogue among those most concerned with the creation and reform of effective democratic polities (which
means this book is for everyone). It does not claim to encompass all of the critical issues posed by the demands of democracy, but instead chooses to address perhaps the most important one: leadership in a democracy. Nor does this work pretend, even within this narrow sphere, to be the last word; rather, it hopes to become among the sources to which the people and their leaders can turn with profit when seeking a constructive dialogue about the means and ends of democracy.

While a more substantive discussion begins in the Prologue, below, it is useful here to sketch out the content and approach of this text. The focus of our ensuing discussions is not democracy per se, but rather the central dynamic within democratic polities, a dynamic we will label leadership. There will be little of the structural approach traditional to political science, other than to acknowledge with political scientists Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl that ‘democracy does not consist of a single set of institutions. There are many types of democracy, and their diverse practices produce a similarly varied set of effects.’ It is to be anticipated that the foundational principles discussed herein will be adapted as needed to the specific demands of various polities.

The focus herein will be upon leadership in democratic regimes. Although the construct will receive more intensive treatment in the text proper, it is important to indicate here the value of the concept as the organizing construct of our discussion of democracy. The reason is that leadership, as the term will be used in this text, is the essential dynamic of democratic functioning. Indeed, as historian Edmund S. Morgan has perceived, leadership only becomes important in the context of such democratic functioning. At the conclusion of a long analysis of the rise of popular sovereignty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Morgan wrote: ‘The word “leader” is old, but “leadership” was a term that no one seems to have felt a need for as long as the qualities it designates remained an adjunct of social superiority. The decline of deference and the emergence of leadership signaled the beginnings not only of a new rhetoric but of a new mode of social relations and a new way of determining who should stand among the few to govern the many.’

Our study of leadership, then, is nothing less than an exploration of this ‘new mode of social relations’; in particular, the relationship of rulers and rulers and the people as they seek to achieve societal goals reveals the central dilemma of democracy. As Schmitter and Karl point out, regimes committed to popular sovereignty still require ‘rulers, persons who occupy specialized authority roles and can give legitimate commands to others. What distinguishes democratic rulers from nondemocratic ones are the norms that condition how the former come to power and the practices that hold them accountable for their actions.’ This requires, in turn, a consideration of the place and role of ‘citizens’, who are, according to Schmitter and Karl, ‘the most distinctive elements in democracies’.

Our examination of this new mode of social relations we are calling the leadership relation brings in its train unexpected complexities. Sociologist Matthew Trachman notes that although equality is generally considered to be the nodal point of modern democracies, ‘yet paradoxically, leadership is an inherently unequal relationship…. Given the fact that democratic cultures are egalitarian and yet leadership relations are inegalitarian,’ he continued, ‘we should not be surprised to find that modern democrats are resolutely ambivalent about leadership.’ In fact, wrote Trachman, ‘it is this ambivalence … that gives form to the relationship of leadership to democracy.'
In sum, this focus upon leadership goes to the very heart of a democratic society's functioning. It can reveal insights that are otherwise overlooked or masked by attention to less vital aspects of democracy. Indeed, as Trachman suggests, ‘those of us who are studying leadership are studying one of the most important discursive developments of the modern democratic age’.8

The first task of this book, and it is a task it attempts to take seriously, is an intellectual one. If we are to confront the challenges of modern democracy in a productive fashion, we need to be straight on our underlying principles. We need, in political scientist Michael Sandel’s phrase, a ‘public philosophy’ of leadership in a democracy. Sandel elaborates: ‘By public philosophy,’ he wrote, ‘I mean the political theory implicit in our practice, the assumptions about citizenship and freedom that inform our public life.’ This will not be as simple as it might first appear. As Sandel explained, ‘A public philosophy is an elusive thing, for it is constantly before our eyes. It forms the often unreflective background to our political discourse and pursuits.’ In fact, ‘in ordinary times, the public philosophy can easily escape the notice of those who live by it’.9 Sociologist Matthew Trachman echoed this point in terms of modern conceptions of leadership in a democracy. He found that, much like the rest of the surrounding culture, notions of leadership go ‘largely unnoticed’; they are ‘simply taken for granted’. For Trachman, there is a need to ‘awaken ourselves to culture’s conventions’, particularly when it comes to the leadership relation.10

More specifically, it can be argued that, for all of democracy’s seeming ubiquity, those who partake in it, as well as those who study it, have not articulated a public philosophy that makes sense of the ‘new mode of social relations’ that accompanies it. Worse, it can be argued that there is no such coherent philosophy, articulated or not. Political scientist and leadership scholar James MacGregor Burns has made the point well. In pre-democratic times, he argued, a ‘hierarchical world (the world of the father, the priest, the lord, the king, the Pope) … was grounded in the doctrine of authority’. But, ‘beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,’ he continued, ‘the doctrine of authority began to be undermined by the bulwark of equality’. Surely, thought Burns, this was a salutary development, but it was unaccompanied by a parallel intellectual justification for the new relationships between rulers and ruled that came in its train. As Burns put it, ‘while authority had been overthrown, nothing had come to replace it. … No new, democratized and radicalized doctrine arose to salvage the authentic and relevant in authority and link these strengths to a doctrine of leadership … with the power and sweep of the old doctrine of authority but now emphasizing followers and leaders.’ In consequence, Burns explicitly put forth ‘a call for the creation of a doctrine of leadership that could function in the democratic world in the way that the doctrine of authority functioned in the monarchic world’.11

This is a clarion call from one of the most astute observers of the modern scene. One of the objectives of this book is to initiate a response to Burns’s invitation. It aspires to facilitate the creation of a philosophy of leadership in a democracy, and in so doing to raise the level and efficacy of modern debates concerning the challenges of democracy. Its first task will be to identify certain key fundamental premises and assumptions that underlie past and current interpretations of the leadership relation. Arguments about democracy and leadership are rooted in such foundational matters.

This brings us to the chosen title for this book, which is intended to reflect its approach. The title is Inventing Leadership, which quite consciously recalls Edmund S. Morgan’s
history of popular sovereignty cited above, whose title is *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (a decade earlier Garry Wills had produced a volume entitled *Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence*). The use of the concept of ‘inventing’ constructs such as ‘the people’, a conception of ‘America’, or, in this case, ‘leadership’, is similar in each case. Morgan explains it in terms of the creation of a ‘fiction’, that is, of an idealized belief in some societal structure, construct or relationship. Such fictions are necessary if society is to function, because they generate support for the polity. In Morgan’s telling of it (for example), there was first the fiction of the divine right of kings. No one could prove the veracity of this concept, but only through the acceptance of the fiction were the monarchs able to rule successfully. He also argued that the notion of ‘the people’ is a fiction, incapable of precise definition but nonetheless necessary in order to support regimes grounded in popular sovereignty. So too is ‘leadership’ a fiction, a socially constructed concept of the appropriate relations between rulers and the people. It is perhaps an even more amorphous construct than ‘the people’, but it is equally important that the members of the polity ‘buy in’ to its characteristics if democracy is to flourish.

And therein lies the rub. As Burns has pointed out, there is no agreement as to the essence of this relationship between the few (the rulers) and the many (the constituent population), the fiction we here label leadership. Because there has been no clarity in this essential fiction of a democracy, we are at sea, with no clear ‘public philosophy’.

This book will seek to redress this failing by providing the reader with a historically-informed analysis of the construct of leadership. Its fundamental approach is captured by Kenneth Ruscio, author of another volume in this estimable Edward Elgar series. According to Ruscio, ‘contemporary critiques of democracy, no matter how insightful, pay almost no attention to the political philosophical foundations of leadership’. Like Ruscio’s, this work ‘is an attempt to fill that void, but it does so by adopting the very different strategy of stepping back from today’s events, not by immersing ourselves into them. If it sheds light on the current state of democracy, it will be because it has removed itself from the present to examine the complex and confusing legacy handed down from a number of influential, insightful, and imaginative thinkers.’ In sum, Ruscio asserts, and I concur, that ‘ideas do matter…. The intricacies of the arguments of our intellectual [forebears] has been lost along the way.’ That is to say, ‘the literature on political leadership in democracies rarely draws from political philosophy in any systematic or explicit manner’. What is needed, and what the following analysis seeks to provide, is the ‘historical development of democratic thought, the analytical constructs it provides, and the competing perspectives it brings to ongoing debates’ about leadership in a democracy.13

This volume will analyze the problems of leadership in a democracy in a substantive and textured way. It will draw together insights from classical philosophers, historical case studies, and the work of modern historians, political scientists, leadership scholars and practitioners. The analysis will unfold at several levels. First, the study will be grounded in history. It is impossible to understand properly a concept as complex as leadership in a modern democracy without a thorough examination of its historic roots. This work will trace the emergence of the construct of leadership, and the many tensions inherent in democratic functioning that have been present from its beginnings.
Second, this study will move beyond historical description and engage in the analysis of the principal responses to the challenges of leadership in a democracy. Indeed, there has been no simple, monolithic answer to the inherent tensions of democracy. Instead, a plethora of systems, ideas, proposals and ideologies have filled – and muddled – the field. One of the tasks of this study is to identify and explore some of the principal solutions that have been proposed. Moreover, because these various approaches to democracy stem from differing assumptions, values, and even ideologies, it is also necessary to isolate the contrasting ‘first principles’ that underlie past and current debates over leadership in a democracy. This will be linked to a frank evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Only with such background understanding can one hope to address profitably the challenges of leadership in our postmodern democracies.

Specifically, the organization of this volume has a logic to it that is important to understand. In Part One, ‘Inventing the Leader’, we will trace the emerging conception of the leader in the Western intellectual tradition. Drawing upon classical texts by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Machiavelli and Harrington, we will construct the enduring image (‘fiction’) of the ideal leader in both unitary states and republics. Part Two, ‘Inventing the People’, traces the antithesis of the emerging dialectic, drawing heavily upon the work of historians Edmund S. Morgan and Gordon S. Wood, and political scientist James A. Morone. Part Three will address the attempts at synthesis, and is appropriately entitled ‘Inventing Leadership’. Because there has been no consensus concerning this new relationship between rulers and ruled, we must instead trace out the most insightful and influential attempts at defining this new relation. We thus begin with a consideration of two early efforts to come to terms with the relationship between the few and the many, those by James Madison and Alexis de Tocqueville. The dominant approaches of the modern era are addressed in chapters on liberalism (with a focus on John Locke, John Stuart Mill, John Rawls and Robert Nozick), and communitarianism (Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel and a host of modern commentators such as Benjamin Barber, Alasdair MacIntyre, Robert Nisbet, Michael Sandel and Michael Walzer).

It is important to note that the first three Parts of this volume noted above are not merely descriptive, but analytical. The Prologue (below) sets forth a protocol of questions labeled the ‘template of leadership’, which is designed to draw out the key assumptions about leaders, the people, and the relationship between them. When applied to the various writings parsed out in this volume, it both clarifies the complexities of what is a muddled intellectual tradition and facilitates comparisons and contrasts. The template also allows individuals to isolate and identify their own ‘implicit theories of leadership’ – that is, their own assumptions and premises about the leadership relation – and thereby to raise the level of debate from polemic to reasoned analysis.

All this sets the stage for Part Four of this book – ‘Reinventing Leadership’. This concluding section is unabashedly normative, drawing upon the insights of the past as well as modern leadership scholars, game theorists, recent developments in the field of conflict resolution and the like, to fashion proposed reforms to our democratic polities. Indeed, this volume will culminate with a series of specific proposals for reform, based upon explicitly stated values and first principles. The reform package will include suggestions for changes in democratic theory, the rethinking of social values, the reallocation of resources and the reconstruction of institutions to create a just and workable democracy. Most important, it will suggest how the social relation that we call leadership can play a catalytic and
determining role. What rescues it from the scrapheap of modern democratic polemics is that it consciously attempts to model how the approach of this volume can lead to a more productive discourse on democracy. That is to say, it expressly provides responses to the queries posed by the template of leadership, and thus lays bare for all to see the rationale underpinning the proposed reforms (my own ‘implicit theory of leadership’). This does not, of course, guarantee agreement – indeed, the proposals contained herein will, at various points, enrage those on both the left and the right – but, because the assumptions are clear, the ensuing debate will likely be over substance.

There are, of course, no easy solutions, nor solutions that will be readily accepted by all. At the very least, however, the reader of this book should come away with a perception of the difficulties inherent in the implementation of a viable regime grounded in the power of the people. This should be coupled with an appreciation of the role that leadership plays in the functioning of a democracy. More importantly, this book aspires to bring debate over the operations of leadership and democracy from the realm of impassioned polemics to the substantive rationality of the discussion of first principles and their impact upon the operation of the polity. Once the intellectual underpinnings and premises of our respective views of democracy and leadership are out in the open, the diverging premises of many of our debates will be laid bare. Even those who disagree with the conclusions of this monograph will be the better for having confronted its arguments. Perhaps most important of all, this work may cause its audience – scholars, students, public intellectuals and others interested in a working democracy – to use its contents as a call to arms regarding the reform of leadership in a democracy.

The enduring value of this volume, then, will not be the specific policy proposals of Part Four, but its framing of democratic discourse in leadership terms, its attempts to raise the level of democratic debate by placing it within its historical context, and its creation of a framework through which we can engage one another in productive debate concerning the challenges of democracy.

We stand on the threshold of a critical era; let us hope our efforts to understand leadership will facilitate our efforts to make a better and more just world.

NOTES

3. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 24.
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