Preface

This volume seeks to define two terms—“culture” and “leadership”—which at once defy definition and yet form a central part of what we consider our social identity. In this volume, we understand “culture” as both popular and high-brow, intellectual and artistic, creative and critical. Works of culture include plays, poems, novels and songs, all of which engage critically with contemporary social and political concerns. “Leadership,” as a term, is more difficult. In this volume, it includes a sense of innovation, of progress, of revolution and of cultural—artistic, social, political—change.

Our driving question—“What is cultural leadership?”—asks not only what it means for someone to be a leader of culture, but also how culture itself can engage in leadership. In the process of answering this question, we found ourselves drawn to individuals whose lives and work exemplifies both of these aspects. In *Cultural Icons and Cultural Leadership*, we asked our contributors to offer portraits of artists, authors and revolutionaries engaged with the social, political and religious atmospheres of their times, “cultural icons” whose work at once reflects and challenges their cultural milieu.

Some of these icons—all of whose names are easily recognizable by scholars and non-scholars alike—are more radical, some more orthodox, some subversive, some overt. All, to varying degrees, challenged the norms of their art and sought to change the paradigms of their society. It is our hope that through this collection, we will be able to present tableaux of cultural leadership in action, thereby shedding light on the significance of both the artist and the work of art to the study of leadership and the practice of social change.

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