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Interview

Leadership lessons from Mount Rushmore: an interview with James MacGregor Burns

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PERSONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Question: When and where were you born? How did your family impact your life and career?

James MacGregor Burns: I was born in Mellis, Massachusetts, on August 3, 1918. I had an older and a younger brother. My father was the general vice president for sales of a large milk company located in nearby Charlestown. He was, in a way, the consummate salesman — a very pleasant personality that served him in that post in a company that had small units all through eastern Massachusetts and, indeed, eastern New England. My mother did not have formal paid work until her children were grown up. She was a very strong-minded woman. My parents were divorced when I was about eight and my mother, brothers, and I moved to Burlington, Massachusetts. At that time, it was a small, undeveloped rural town that had no high school. We lived in a remote part of the town near the Massachusetts border.

I think that my parents influenced me in that my father was a great role model for how to approach, deal, compromise, and bargain with people, whereas my mother took very strong moral positions. I guess that some of my belief in moral leadership and convictions stems from her.

Question: Are there any particular experiences in your youth that sparked your interest in leadership?

Burns: I would say not in my early youth. I was really a standard grammar school and high school kid, although in high school I blossomed a lot, becoming editor of the yearbook and that sort of thing. But keep in mind that I was growing up in the age of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and even though my family was very Republican and anti-Roosevelt, I was impressed by FDR's leadership very early in life.

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Question: How did your service as a decorated military historian influence your decision to study political science and, ultimately, political leaders?

Burns: My military service did not particularly influence my later career, as such, but being the so-called combat historian in Saipan, Guam, the Philippines, and Okinawa — doing on-the-ground observational history, occasionally having to participate, and so on — gave me a great sense of leadership in the military. I experienced the highly structured leadership set-up and, also, the way it was so often taken on, not by the officers but by sergeants and enlisted men who showed great leadership qualities in battle.

Question: During your doctoral studies at Harvard, were there any professors who had a profound impact on your thinking? If so, who were they and what was their impact.

Burns: At Harvard I think I was especially impressed by Pendleton Herring who did work in administration, Merle Sainsod, who was a very able political scientist, Carl Frederick, who was a Kantian, and Lewis Harts, who was my supervisor. Lewis was so young that we were really friends, and I was much influenced by him and his writings.

Question: Have any particular philosophers, novelists or poets shaped your worldview and scholarship? If so, who and how?

Burns: There are so many people who have influenced my worldview and scholarship that it would be hard to do them justice. I could mention Erik Erikson and Harold Lasswell in my early days, but in recent days I have read so much in so many different books and articles on leadership that it would be hard to pick out key influences.

Question: We understand you once ran for Congress.

Burns: Yes. I took a real gamble in 1958 by running as a Democrat for a seat in Congress that had gone Democratic only once since the Civil War, and that was in the 1890's. I am quite sure that I would have defeated the Republican incumbent, but when he resigned during the Eisenhower administration scandals, a more formidable opponent came into the race. Given the new attractiveness of the race for Democrats, a candidate entered the Democratic primary from a large city and, unfortunately, let his supporters attack me as an atheistic Communist, etc. This was still the age of McCarthyism. This raised the tough leadership question of how you handle such an attack — I did it by directly denying and defying it, and I won the primary. But much of the feeling that had been aroused in the primary spilled over into the general election. Still, I lost to a good man, Silvio Conte, who went on to keep the congressional district Republican for another decade or two. One practical problem for potential leaders is that of a highly partisan district that gives the incumbent a huge advantage; of course, most of our Congressional districts today are not party-competitive. Finally, for a potential leader who really believes in certain policies and goals, the Congressional primary can be a very destructive way of choosing candidates because of the opportunities both for demagoguery and a focus on trivial differences.

Question. Is there anything about political science as a background for studying leadership — besides the individuals used as subjects — that distinguishes it from psychology, sociology, organizational behavior or other disciplines?

Burns: Political science today has become quite quantitative, for one thing, and that distinguishes it from some of those other disciplines, although some of them are quite quantitative, too. Political science is particularly concerned with the role of power — more so, I think, than the other disciplines. But, my main reaction to the question is that political

science needs to work with these others, particularly psychology and sociology as well as history, in order to broaden the study of leadership.

YOUR LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Question: Of all the books you have written, you have referred to Leadership (1978) as your most intellectually important book. Has your thinking on the nature of leadership evolved since its publication? If you could revise the book, what would be the principal changes?

Burns: Since writing *Leadership*, I have done a lot of rethinking and am presently working on a new book on leadership that will use the previous one as a jumping-off place, not repeating its ideas. I have become even more impressed by the role of values in the study and exercise of leadership; more impressed by the role of conflict, which tends to be downplayed in much of the literature by people who are more interested in consensus; and more interested in creativity, in leaders as creative persons. But I retain my basic interest in the psychological work that has been done on wants and needs by people like Maslow and Kohlberg, both of whom I reference in the 1978 book. Indeed, I feel that some of the more recent works on leadership do not sufficiently exploit the pioneer work done by thinkers such as Maslow.

Question: You have defined leadership as “the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers.” (1978, p. 425) Would you like to reframe or elaborate on this definition?

Burns: I really cannot elaborate much on that definition without doing a long lecture on leadership. I think that the definition really does sum up the crucial elements that interest me, for example, the notions of competition and conflict, leaders and followers, the reciprocal process, mobilization — all of those are part of my work on leadership. I think the definition should stand as is.

Question: You refer to transforming leadership as moral leadership. How does this differ from ethical leadership? Does the private behavior of leaders affect their ability to exert moral leadership? Is it appropriate to separate their public and private lives?

Burns: I am glad you asked this question because I make a major distinction between moral leadership and ethical leadership and, indeed, between those two and what I call virtuous leadership. Taking ethical first, to me it means serving as a role model and practitioner of ethical behavior, especially in the professions, business, community, and perhaps even in marriage. The ethical leader observes standards that are well known: you do not cheat, you are honest, you show professional responsibility in whatever field you are in, and so on. If you are a scholar, you show that you do not steal from other people's works and that you give people credit for what you do use. The legal profession is, of course, completely saturated in ethical standards, or tries to be, as are others.

To my mind, that kind of ethical leadership — that is, people standing for ethical behavior and, hence, serving as ethical leaders — is quite different from what I call moral leadership, which is leadership that lives up to the highest values of the country. Moral leadership does not so much relate to personal behavior as to where one stands on the

Enlightenment values that are represented, in America, by documents such as the *Bill of Rights*, Roosevelt's *Four Freedoms*, and Roosevelt's so-called *Economic Bill of Rights*. The spread of these values has culminated worldwide in an incredibly impressive document (that not many people seem to know much about), the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. It has been signed by many nations — although, of course, they do not always observe it — and it sets the moral standard.

As for virtues, to me these are the Biblical virtues, or the Boy Scout virtues, of not abusing other people, being kind, and all the rest. Usually, today, virtue is discussed in relation to sexual behavior, being unfaithful to one's wife and that sort of thing. To my mind, these virtues are important and fundamental to life but they are quite different from the ethical and moral levels of conduct. This means that a leader can be moral, holding crucial values, and yet violate canons of virtue. We have seen this in recent cases of political leadership.

Question: You use the term heroic leadership to refer to "not simply a quality or entity possessed by someone [but] a type of relationship between leader and led." (1978, p. 244). How is this different from the notion that charismatic leadership is an attributional phenomenon?

Burns: I think that the nature of charismatic leadership -- and heroic leadership, which is one form of it — is one of the central problems in the field of leadership studies today. There is a great emphasis on the study and practice of charismatic leadership, both by itself and in relation to transformational or transforming leadership. I feel that it is an unknown and perhaps unknowable area. Here, we are operating in very cloudy areas of hero worship and psychological reactions to leaders, and the leaders' reactions to the psychological reactions of the followers. While it is obviously an important aspect of leadership, I do not think we have really got a grip on this subject because of its many complexities. So, I tend to make my theory of transforming leadership include those elements of charismatic leadership that seem to me to be the most relevant. Obviously, there is an irrational or emotional or intuitive aspect to leadership that goes beyond rational calculation but pinning that down has turned out, in my view, to be very difficult. Still, in my current work, I am certainly paying a lot of attention to the systematic and often very brilliant work others have done in the study of charismatic leadership.

Question: Is leadership a quality of a person, a condition of the environment, or a characteristic of the relationship between the leader and the led? Is there a causal sequence to the connections implied by your formulations?

Burns: I hate to take the easy way out but the answer is, I think, that leadership is all three. The causality of leadership is, to me, the most crucial question and I think we can find answers to it in history, political science, economics, philosophy, sociology, and the other disciplines.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Question: What does it take to be a great organizational leader today?

Burns: I do not pretend to be an authority, or even deeply informed, on organizational leadership aside from reading some of the work that has been done in this area. This work is especially impressive because of the huge amount of research that has gone into it; it offers tremendous possibilities for doing comparative research.

Question: You wrote, “To the extent that bureaucracy is in practice the simple application of authority from the top down, it is not leadership. To the extent that it exemplifies conflict, power, values, and change in accordance with leader–follower needs, it embodies leadership.” (1978, p. 298). Can transforming leadership be practiced in a bureaucracy or rigidly hierarchical organization? How does this argue for or against the alternative organizational structures that are emerging in the modern economy?

Burns: I would stand by this 1978 statement and would expect that transforming leadership cannot easily be practiced in a bureaucracy or rigidly hierarchical organization unless there is a strong internal movement or tremendous pressure from outside. I think that the development of organizational leadership — to the extent that it wishes to also be transformational leadership in theory or practice -- argues against alternative organizational structures emerging in the modern economy. On the other hand, one can argue that the study of transformational or transforming leadership might offer some lessons to highly entrepreneurial persons, even in bureaucratic environments, implying that they could shake up or tremendously alter the bureaucratic environment.

*Question: In *The Crosswinds of Freedom*, you wrote that the great leaders who founded this country were “well-bred, well-fed, well-read, well-led, and well-wed ” (1989). Does this imply that individuals must be trained at an early age to assume leadership roles? If so, is this at odds with the American ethic that one can become anything one wants to become?*

Burns: Thank you for mentioning my favorite little quote. The framers of the Constitution had a very special educational background, many of them being influenced and trained by tutors in what we might call ideal class contexts, the class often being one-on-one. But their leadership training involved more than this; it also went back to the families in which they grew up, the communities in which they lived and, especially, the dominant value system that was in their time taking the form of Enlightenment values. I do not think that the circumstances of this very special era and very special group of men relate much to the question of whether today one can become anything one wants to become. In contrast to those olden times, we have opened up the educational system to a vast number of people, though, of course, not always successfully. I think that today with all the help that able students receive from their families, colleges, grants, and peers, most Americans — but by no means all — can become anything they want to become; this turns also on many factors of a social, political and psychological nature.

Question: What do you see as the most significant challenges facing business leaders today? What can we in academia and the consulting business do to support them?

Burns: Again, I am not the most appropriate person to answer this question but I do think that business leaders could learn a lot from the academic or analytical study of leadership in general as well as from specific writings about their own particular industries. I think that the best way we can support them and that they can support us is to have interchanges between academics and business thinkers.

Question: What lessons does the life and work of Franklin D. Roosevelt hold for business executives?

Burns: Business leaders could learn from FDR’s great political success that political leadership and business leadership may be very different in analytical content and practice. FDR took a fling or two in business, very unsuccessfully. Interestingly, some of his business

ventures were very imaginative but did not pay off, whereas many of his political innovations worked well. I think that business leaders could learn something from FDR about what a government must do in a depression and about the need for government services and agencies that help sustain business initiatives and security. Business leaders also might learn from the FDR experience that sheer hostility to everyone who believes in political reform will, in the long run, hurt business as well as the community. Some people argue that Roosevelt “saved capitalism.” I would say that a lot of people saved capitalism but that Roosevelt certainly kept the country from moving in a highly socialistic or populist direction, for good or for ill. In general, it seems to me that business is much more tolerant of activity now. This is in part, of course, because it benefits from much of that governmental activity but also because business seems to recognize that its own endeavors will not be very successful except in the context of both government support and regulation.

LEADERSHIP EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Question: Can leadership be learned? Put differently, is leadership born or bred; that is, is there value in teaching leadership and, if so, what can we do to facilitate the development of leadership potential? Are there particular knowledge or skills that can be transmitted?

Burns: Can leadership be learned? Yes, it can be. Is leadership bred? No, it is not bred in the genes, as far as we know, but it is bred in the sense of being brought up in a family that is educated, publicly oriented and has the right values for moral leadership in this century. The best training for moral leadership, and leadership in general, is a liberal arts education that emphasizes the key disciplines including philosophy and, perhaps, theology as a basis for moral leadership.

While it is difficult to educate people for leadership — though it is absolutely necessary — it is less difficult to educate them for what I will call leaderships (plural); that is, for exercising leadership in a particular context such as business, education, politics, or the arts. There is a huge literature in this area and a lot of it is quite good. Training in these specific areas — or leaderships — probably takes the form of training people for what we call transactional leadership, that is; everyday give-and-take bargaining and negotiating relationships among people in that particular leadership context. This can be taught because it involves lots of specific skills and special knowledge of the field.

But, when we get back to the question of training for moral, or even political, leadership the situation is much more complicated. Clearly, we can train political skills, but since a young person interested in politics may not know what political arena or context he or she will be involved in — for example, an urban area with urban problems or a rural area with other problems — teaching specific skills becomes more complicated. I think we can teach a lot of the simpler political or campaign arts such as publicity, dealing with media, running polls and the like. But, again, things become more complex in terms of training for moral leadership. The latter demands special qualities of compassion, knowledge and strong values. For preparation, again, I would place my bet on a really good interdisciplinary liberal arts education.

Question: What, if anything, can we as educators — who encounter students in their early or mid-adulthood — do to help them develop the capacity for moral leadership?

Burns: I do not know, as I suggest above, that there is any easy way to teach moral leadership; it depends so much on the idiosyncrasies and personal character of people interested in leadership that generalizations are difficult. I think that an education in the Western Enlightenment, and the spread of its ideals around the globe, would be a good formal background. Among the Western democratic peoples of today, it is the basis of the creed or ideology embracing the values that are laid out, for example, in the American *Declaration of Independence*, the *Bill of Rights*, and other great political utterances. The same holds true in many Western countries and, now, in nations of the East, such as Japan, and throughout the world.

This question also raises the issue of what we writers on leadership should stress, to the extent that we reach a wider readership and leadership scholars themselves. There was a debate for some years as to whether leadership was a term that should be reserved for behavior that was essentially moral in terms of basic Enlightenment values. There has been increasing agreement among leadership scholars, I think, that leadership, as a term, should be reserved for behavior that is at least ethical and, in my view, moral in relation to the very broad values mentioned above. The more we emphasize the moral aspect of leadership in our writing, the more chance there is, at least to a small degree, that leadership will be viewed as not just power wielding but as an expression of our highest values.

Question: Your most widely quoted thought is that "leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth." (1978, p. 2). What specifically should modern scholarship be doing to better understand this crucial, yet elusive, phenomenon?

Burns: I think we have a wide-ranging debate on this subject among a large number of leadership scholars who are pursuing independent work on their own but are keeping in touch with other scholars through some excellent journals, writings and articles. I do not know if there will ever be a final breakthrough in the study of leadership, with its complicated elements and nuances, but I think we are making progress in pinning down what you call this "elusive phenomenon." Perhaps the problem will be less a matter of making new discoveries or developing new concepts than of trying to achieve greater agreement among leadership scholars who presently have a lot of differences. However, I think these differences are very useful as well as inevitable and can make all of us into more creative scholars.

Question: What do you see as the most exciting and potentially fruitful avenues of leadership research today and why?

Burns: Excuse my bias, but I think that the most exciting and potentially fruitful avenue of leadership research today lies in the study of transformational or transforming leadership. I use both terms because transformational leadership is the general term developed by Bernard Bass, which I have used, but transforming leadership is the term I use to emphasize the reciprocal relationship between leader and follower. Bernard Bass, of course, has written extensively about this subject in his *Handbook* and other scholarly publications; he and his associates have applied much of their theory to practical, human situations.

I think that the most exciting aspect of the study of transformational leadership, again, relates to the role of moral leadership in transformation. But, the simple reason I am interested in transformational leadership is that, to me, the great test of leadership is to bring about what I like to call real, intended, comprehensive, and billable change. We live in a world of change

but much of it is rudderless, not anchored in basic values but simply responding to the pecuniary needs of hosts of investors and developers. So, I would say that a better understanding of the causes of planned change would be the most exciting and rewarding goal of the further study of leadership.

Question: Who do you think we will remember 50 years from now as great leadership theorists?

Burns: I think that Bernard Bass and his associates will be remembered 50 years from now as great leadership theorists or, if they feel that “theory” might sound a bit grandiose, as great leadership conceptualists. To go beyond that would involve me in mentioning scores and scores of impressive thinkers on leadership and would be invidious, especially to those who were left out.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Question: Looking back, what gives you the most satisfaction and pride in your career?

Burns: There are many things that give me satisfaction in my career. Even though I was very unhappy, like most GIs, in the Army, once I was overseas, had a definite job and was able to do military history closeup, I took great satisfaction in it. Then, I taught at Williams College, where the students tend to be of exceptional quality and the classes were small enough for me to develop very close relationships with many students, and that was very satisfying. In terms of my writing, I suppose the experience of working in the archives on Franklin Roosevelt and publishing two volumes about him — he remains my hero despite certain failings — was tremendously gratifying. But, I must say that the most satisfying aspect of my life was switching from political science, biography, and history to the study of leadership, which, of course, still involves the study of those subjects. Going to the Jepson School at the University of Virginia was tremendously rewarding because I could watch — and have a little role in — the establishment of an undergraduate major in leadership. Then, best of all, I moved on, after three very fulfilling years in Richmond, to the Center for the Study of Leadership at the University of Maryland, to watch and take part in the growth of this institution. To summarize, becoming interested in and writing about leadership, and learning from many others working on leadership, is *the* most rewarding aspect of my professional life.

Question: Tell us about the establishment and function of the James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland.

Burns: I joined this organization when it was the Center for the Study of Leadership, as indicated above. In recent years, it has been transformed, if I might use that word, into an academy with, it seems, a very special status on the University campus. The development of the Academy is an academic “rags-to-riches” story, the story of Georgia Sorenson, as a young academic working for her Ph.D., getting the idea of establishing a center for leadership studies and persevering in this effort for many years. Increasingly, she won the confidence of her colleagues and of the University of Maryland leadership so that they evidently gave her a great deal of leeway in working out the best organization and program for the study and practice of leadership. Keep in mind that, even though there are other leadership centers, some of which were established before

the Academy, her challenge in developing this organization was undertaken at a time when we knew far less than we do, perhaps, today about how leadership studies can be set up in the context of a liberal arts institution. She persevered through thick and thin with strong support, as I said, and now the Academy of Leadership is a well-organized and, in my view, highly successful program that addresses many aspects of leadership. These include both education and research, as reflected in the Center for the Advanced Study of Leadership and in the many grants to scholars like Ron Walters, Robin Gerber and Scott Webster, who are working there. It is a very lively institution intellectually, composed of people who are reaching out to broaden the activities of the Academy, and a thriving operation, in my biased view, a great tribute to the leadership, also, of the University of Maryland at College Park.

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COMMENTS FROM COLLEAGUES AND PAST STUDENTS ON THE IMPACT, PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL, OF J. M. BURNS

Edward J. Larson, Russell Professor of History and Law, University of Georgia School of Law

In the classroom, James MacGregor Burns leads by inspiring emulation. He does not instruct and tell students what they should know so much as he suggests and lets them realize what they think. I was a student of Professor Burns in 1972 at Williams College. I had already decided that preppy Williams was not the college for me — a public school product from the Midwest farm belt — and had been admitted as a transfer student to the University of Michigan beginning the next semester. For my last term at Williams, as a rising sophomore, I decided to take Professor Burns' senior course in political leadership. My idea was to go for the best, no matter what it cost me in my grade.

From the very first, Professor Burns was an inspiration. I had already abandoned political science for history due to the excess of model building in the political science courses that I had taken. Here was Professor Burns, president of the Political Science Association, and clearly one of the most respected scholars at Williams, telling us about American political leadership through stories, anecdotes, and history. He even confided in me one day, as I explained (at his request) my decision to leave Williams and political science, that he would have opted for history over political science if he had anticipated the turns those fields would take. And he invited me to his home for Thanksgiving dinner when he found out that I would be left in Williamstown during the holiday break. He became known for having the entire class into his home to watch the election returns. In 1972, he claimed victory because of McGovern's win in Massachusetts and predicted that "the crows would come home to roost during Nixon's second term."

I was living in Ann Arbor by the time that Professor Burns had finished grading my final paper for that fall course. It arrived full of insightful comments and carried the highest grade that I had yet received at Williams. Both provided further inspiration for me, no longer even a student at his school. But I soon received a call from a William's admission counselor who had spoken with Professor Burns and I ended up returning to Williams for my senior year and then going on to graduate school in history, as Professor Burns advised. When I was surprised by word of having won the Pulitzer Prize for a book that dealt with 20th century American political leadership, my first thought was that Professor Burns had also received that award for a similar book. I was in good company indeed.

Hendrick Smith, Hendrick Smith Productions

Jim Burns was a towering figure on campus when I was a student at Williams; a leading political scientist famous then for *The Lion and the Fox*, his book about FDR's New Deal, and for his own run for Congress against a long-time Republican. In the rural retreat of that small college town, a professor running for Congress was cause for excitement.

But I've actually gotten to know Jim more since I graduated than as an undergraduate because, oddly enough, as an American History and Literature major who came later in life to the love and journalistic pursuit of politics, I did not take any of his courses though I did hear him lecture on occasion. Since then, of course, his constant study of leadership in its various manifestations has interested me and I've learned from it. He wanted very badly to have Williams, one of the nation's premier liberal arts colleges, establish an institute or center for the study of leadership. As a member of the college Board of Trustees and a journalist fascinated with political leadership, I shared that goal and felt his burning — no pun intended — frustration at being unable to persuade the college to embrace the idea.

Through it all, my relationship with Jim has been a personal friendship rather than the traditional teacher-mentor one that often develops on campus. Although the example and inspiration that Jim represents are real, they are quite personal and periodic which makes it hard to pin down the answer to the question of the impact of his writings and theories on my own reporting and thinking. Perhaps, mostly, Jim's influence on me is through his restless and relentless spirit of inquiry, his boundless belief in democracy and the vital importance of civic participation, his understanding of the need for both the management of shared powers and the transcendent leader who transforms our expectations of ourselves. His example of scholarship, unquenchable energy, and idealism are all a spur and inspiration. Jim is not merely a scholar and thinker, but a presence and force. Our democracy is parched for more commitment like his.

Al Goethals, Atwell Professor of Psychology, Williams College

I first encountered James MacGregor Burns when I was a junior in high school. Waiting for a train in Boston's South Station, I went to a newsstand and picked up a book about our junior senator. It was called *John Kennedy: A Political Profile*. It was the fall of 1960 and Kennedy had just been elected president of the United States. The author was James MacGregor Burns of Williams College. Five years later, in 1965, I encountered Jim Burns again, reading his essays and commentary in the Kennedy family's book about its fallen son and brother, *John Fitzgerald Kennedy: As We Remember Him*. I was impressed with the careful balance Burns struck, showing respect and admiration for President Kennedy while

also pointing out how one might have hoped that he would have kept growing. After another 5 years, I was privileged to join the Williams faculty in the Psychology Department and to meet Jim Burns. In the 40 years since South Station, I've not asked him to autograph that worn-out old paperback but perhaps, someday, I will.

In three decades as colleagues at Williams, I have benefited tremendously from the contributions Jim Burns' energy and intellect have made to the College and to the world of ideas. The environment at a small college has provided an ideal setting for many informal discussions of history, political science, psychology, and their intersection in the field of leadership. Jim's most profound influence on me has been his gentle but steady urging that Williams support the faculty in establishing a program in Leadership Studies. Not deterred by the hurdles over a number of years, Jim finally caught the attention and interest of Williams President Harry C. Payne. With Jim's guidance and President Payne's support, a number of us on the faculty initiated such a program in 1998.

Our program derives great strength from Jim's guiding insights into the complex nature of leadership and his perspective on the place that the study of leadership should take in a first-class liberal arts college. I know that Jim is pleased that the college from which he graduated in 1939, and at which he taught for many years, has finally undertaken this endeavor and, in doing so, has tried to become a leader in defining the best kind of program in leadership studies appropriate to an undergraduate institution. I do not know whether Jim realizes how profoundly he has energized and shaped it as it tries to sink deep roots into a sometimes inhospitable institutional and bureaucratic soil.

Jim has long emphasized the importance of values, conflict and moral leadership. He has insisted on their centrality, and the centrality of bold and innovative thought and action, in transformational leadership. These convictions have guided the study of leadership around the world and in our small college. We at Williams are pleased that he has agreed to return to the classroom to teach a course next year examining the leadership of Theodore, Franklin, and Eleanor Roosevelt. His intellectual leadership continues to enhance the education of our students. We are grateful for his personal and intellectual engagement in our activities.

Gill Robinson Hickman, Professor, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond

I completed my PhD in public administration in 1978. By coincidence or fate, that was the same year that James MacGregor Burns published *Leadership*. Our paths and ideas were positioned to cross even though I was unaware of his book at the time. While Burns was writing *Leadership*, I was being challenged in my doctoral courses to use the current literature about organizational theory, behavior, and practice to propose concepts and frameworks for the year 2000.

The literature of the times characterized the environment of the future as "highly turbulent," producing indigenous changes arising from the environment itself. I raised the question in my own work: "What kind of organization will be best suited for a highly turbulent environment?" I began writing papers about a new conceptual framework that I termed "transformistic organizations." I proposed this organizational type to succeed bureaucratic and organic forms. My premise was based on the concept that each of the previous two organizational types was naturally compatible with its environmental context;

that is, bureaucratic organizations were compatible with stable environments and organic organizations fit changing environments. I developed the characteristics of transformistic organizations in relation to a turbulent environmental context. Other than receiving laudable responses from my professors, very little happened with those initial papers until the 1990s.

When I joined the faculty of the new Jepson School of Leadership Studies in 1992, none other than James MacGregor Burns was the resident senior scholar. It was at this point that I was exposed to his classic, *Leadership*. There was an immediate and obvious linkage between my earlier work and transforming leadership. With Burns' encouragement, I returned to my work on transformistic organizations.

James MacGregor Burns may seem to be an icon of almost mythical proportions to those, like my students, who know him only through his eminent publications. To those of us who know him as a beloved mentor, colleague, friend and scholar, he is simply *Jim*. He is generous in spirit and gracious with his time. He is inclusive, supportive, and greatly unassuming. Conversations with Jim are almost never about himself. He immediately focuses the conversation toward you by saying, "Tell me about you" or "Tell me what you have been doing since I last saw you." He is passionate about leadership that brings about real change — the kind that elevates and enhances the human condition. Most significantly, James MacGregor Burns walks his talk. For me, his leadership has been truly transforming. I will always be grateful that our paths were destined to cross.

Damon Vangelis, Program Associate, John M. Olin Foundation

I never had the chance to take a course with James MacGregor Burns at Williams College. By the time I enrolled in the early 1990s, he had retired from full-time teaching. But he was active on campus in other ways. He delivered frequent lectures, met with students to discuss political trends and, through his presence, gave those of us interested in history and political science a connection to the rich past of both the college and the country.

I still recall the first time I met him. He arranged to meet with a small group of students to discuss his latest book project — a profile of Bill Clinton's leadership. The book was still in its early stages but Professor Burns wanted to share with us some of his initial impressions of the new president. He engaged the group in a substantive and spirited discussion of Clinton's leadership style. The discussion was wide-ranging: we talked of Clinton's strengths and weaknesses, and compared his leadership style to those of past presidents and historical figures. We wondered whether Bill Clinton would be a fox or a lion, picking up on the terminology Professor Burns had once employed to describe Franklin Roosevelt.

In that discussion, as in his books on Roosevelt, Kennedy and leadership in general, Professor Burns reminded us that our experiment in republican government relies not only upon a system of laws, precedents and institutions, but also upon people — elected representatives who serve as policymakers, judges who interpret the law and administer justice, and statesmen whose task it is to galvanize the public in support of a vision of the virtuous and greater good.

Professor Burns amply demonstrates that we can best understand our leaders when we study them from an interdisciplinary perspective — by bringing to bear on their actions an understanding of not only history, but of government, political science, philosophy, sociology and literature. The breadth and seriousness of this approach is why Professor Burns' writings

have been so compelling and influential. Scholars worthy of his legacy would be well advised to emulate his approach.

In thinking about Professor Burns, I am reminded of the philosopher John Stuart Mill, who believed that education strengthens democracy because it enables people to participate effectively in the political process. Professor Burns can certainly be said to have done his part to strengthen our democracy through his books and lectures. In this day and age of limited historical perspective, his works could not be more important for future generations.

Like John Stuart Mill, Professor Burns believes in the nonviolent clash of ideas. He has long argued that America should give serious consideration to replacing the Madisonian system of legislative checks and balances with something closer to a parliamentary system. I have disagreed with him on this issue but he has always defended his ideas with intellectual vigor and, just as importantly, has always respected and encouraged those who disagreed with him.

In recent years, Professor Burns has been a vocal supporter of the *Williams Free Press*, a newspaper that I founded while a student at Williams. The paper's mission is to generate greater debate and discussion among students, faculty, administrators, and alumni on contemporary issues facing the college. From time to time, the paper has taken unpopular positions on campus issues. While some administrators and faculty have sought to undermine its mission, Professor Burns has publicly stated that he believes the spirited debate is healthy for the campus. He believes it is through the clash of ideas that we come closer to finding truth. He once said to me: "I may not agree with everything that a newspaper writes, but today we need more people who are willing to stand for something. We should never be afraid of ideas." Alas, this is where we find the challenge for statesmen: to face the great debates and challenges of one's time and to transcend them.

One final point. The fame and attention that Professor Burns has achieved over the years through his books might have led an ordinary scholar to give up teaching and focus solely on writing. But not him. He has never forgotten his primary calling. He combines passions for both scholarship and teaching – something that is increasingly rare these days. I consider it a great privilege to know him, to continue to learn from him, and to call him a friend. He is, indeed, a special educator.

Georgia Sorenson, Founding Director and Senior Scholar, The James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership, University of Maryland

I met Jim Burns many years ago on a lovely fall day. We drove over and walked back across the bridge over Virginia's James River. The day was brilliant as a diamond and the water was like a crystalline mirror. As we talked about leadership, I realized instantly that he and I shared a destiny. He, too, apparently, felt the hand of fate, as he wrote a little note to himself that he later shared with me:

I remember vividly, soon after we met in Richmond, driving you over the river a few miles from the university, and feeling a 'revelation' that your and my lives would somehow be intertwined. And now that is happening at your university, thanks to your masterly handling of possibilities there, or just 'leadership.' So, sometimes revelations work out. – Jim

Destiny is as destiny does; I have learned not to resist her wisdom. And so we took her journey, both of us believers in fate. He was a member of my dissertation

committee; later I recruited him as Senior Scholar to the Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland. He loved to introduce me as his “boss.” Much later, at the Schloss Leopold in Austria, I told him my plan to name the Academy in his honor. I believe that schools should be named after great teachers as they were in ancient times. He cried.

Over the years as I have gotten to know him as a mentor, friend, confidant and coauthor, I have also given him the most intimate of roles — my teacher. I grew up in Asia, and to me nowhere is the role of teacher expressed more aptly than in the *Tao Te Ching*:

The ancient masters were subtle, mysterious, profound, responsive.
 The depth of their knowledge is unfathomable.
 Because it is unfathomable,
 All we can do is describe their appearance:
 Watchful, like men crossing a winter stream,
 Alert, like men aware of danger,
 Courteous, like visiting guests,
 Yielding, like ice about to melt,
 Simple, like uncarved blocks of wood,
 Hollow, like caves,
 Opaque, like muddy pools.

It is mysterious to be in the presence of a great teacher: there is a certain quixotic magic. Somehow, everyone around Jim Burns becomes a writer — and he is such a beautiful writer. In his presence, meetings produce results, yet he hardly says much of anything. (Later, I learned his trick: he huddles with the influentials before the meeting starts.) Women the world over adore him — I remember sitting with a very attractive man watching all the women of an entire international conference in Salzburg follow him out of the lecture hall. He was about 80 years old at the time. My friend turned to me and said, “He is surely the sexiest man alive.” It is true. His contemporaries — people like Arthur Schlesinger, Bernie Bass, and Fifi O’Scard — respect and love him. Younger men try to topple him, yet he yields and disarms them with an eagerness to do intellectual battle. He can appear simple in his rubber boots throwing a ball to his great golden retriever, Mr. Jefferson, but there is no shrewder strategist. He is peace-seeking, modest to a fault, yet he defies conflict.

One way to assess great teachers is to look at their students. Over the years I have come to know some of them: historian Michael Beschloss, college president Tom Cronin, CEO Steve Case, director of the presidential debates Janet Brown, filmmaker Hedrick Smith, National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Richard Moe, presidential candidate Bill Bradley, and, more recently, scholars Robin Gerber, Gill Hickman, Dick Couto and Scott Webster. There is greatness in him as in them all.

Oh, my goodness, there are some maddening parts to the man! He flatly refused to accept a coveted White House invitation from Hillary Clinton because his strawberries were ripe that week. Nothing can induce him to leave his corn in July. Why? He has to stand vigilant against the raccoons! (He is a wonderful farmer, though, truly he is engaged in some mythic primeval struggle with raccoons. Ted Kennedy once told me that, as a child, he thought Jim Burns, a family friend, was Peter Rabbit’s Mr. MacGregor.) He has never cancelled a meeting with a

student for any reason. He refuses to gossip or say a bad word about anyone. He loses his plane tickets and his keys more times than is humanly possible. He has taken trains going in the wrong direction.

Jim once asked if I couldn't find a way to get his hero, Eleanor Roosevelt, up on Mt. Rushmore. And, for a moment, I almost think I can.