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A Leader Becomes a Leader: Inspirational Stories of Leadership for a New Generation

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BOOK REVIEWS

WHAT MAKES A LEADER?

Sheehan, J. Kevin. *A Leader Becomes a Leader: Inspirational Stories of Leadership for a New Generation*. Belmont, Mass.: TrueGifts, 2008. 230pp. \$27.95

At first glance, this book seems to be something much like a book of virtues. It is a series of brief biographical sketches that might be mistaken as a return to a simpler and more forgiving literary genre—one where leaders are joyfully portrayed in the most positive light and any trait or act that could be considered detrimental is ignored. Sheehan seems truly to admire his subjects, and his lyrical facility with verbal imagery is so rich that the narrative at times approaches poetry. The book is copiously illustrated and loaded with biographical observations and quotes. Taken in its entirety, it is hard to imagine how *A Leader* could get farther from the in-depth, “warts and all” treatment that modern biographers have come to embrace.

Yet this is not, appearances perhaps to the contrary, a simple book. It provides real value to a spectrum of disparate audiences on very different levels. Readers who do put down the volume after a quick glance-over should not be surprised to find themselves returning later to its pages. This is a work that tends to

raise questions after the book is back on the shelf.

Its list of “leaders” is long and covers a broad range of professions and pursuits. Some readers will have trouble accepting all the showcased people as true “leaders.” There are scientists, presidents, philanthropists, artists, athletes, political activists, and religious figures. There are relatively few business tycoons and soldiers. While war leaders are not completely absent, as attested by the inclusion of Churchill and Lincoln, the book boasts only one military leader, General George Marshall. (Marshall’s virtue is “command presence.”) Whether or not each of the individuals identified in the book is a leader may be debated, but there is no doubt that they are all exceptional.

This book raises several intriguing questions, some of which it attempts to answer; others silently accompany the material. What makes a “leader,” and just who is a leader? Is the ability to inspire the same as the ability to lead? Does emulation equate to followership? Should possession of additional, less positive attributes detract from a

person's positive reputation as a leader? Is it possible to pick out a single strongest virtue in a leader? How can opposing leadership characteristics both be virtues? Were Grandma Moses, Bob Marley, and Nadia Comaneci truly leaders, or did they simply inspire? Was Churchill's "instinct" truly his most dominant leadership virtue? As for feet of clay, some of the leaders identified in this book may have inspired millions but also cheated on their wives. Anwar Sadat was a peacemaker, but he became one only after he had ordered his army to wage an offensive war against Israel. Sheehan identifies the opposite traits of "flexibility" and "determination" as leadership virtues, begging the question of *when* each is a virtue.

The fact that this volume may lead the reader to ask these questions is in itself a virtue. A discussion about whether there are better choices than some of the men and women in the book is bound to be interesting and could well become passionate—another good thing. If Marie Curie is included, why isn't Stephen Hawking? If George Marshall could make the cut, why didn't John Archer Lejeune?

At another, younger level of readership, *A Leader* serves as a marvelous gateway book. Many that have been named will be unknown to the current rising generation of readers. We can only hope that Sheehan will inspire these young scholars to learn more about these remarkable people, making this a book it would be good to see on the shelves of junior and senior high schools across the United States.

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Murphy, Martin N. *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money: Piracy and Maritime Terrorism in the Modern World*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009. 411pp. \$60

In the past year the public's fascination with piracy has grown as piracy has manifested itself as a more tangible threat to commerce and individuals with the incidents off the Horn of Africa. Whether it was the 2009 pirate attack on the containership MV *Maersk Alabama* or the terrorist attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000, the media found itself at a loss to understand the issue in depth and often turned to similarly misinformed commentators to feed the twenty-four-hour news cycle. Fortunately, the timely *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money* puts to rest misconceptions about modern piracy, surveying as it does the real threats posed by terrorists at sea.

The author asks three questions: What form does piracy take in the contemporary world? What is maritime terrorism? Are the two similar or linked? Although seemingly simple, these questions constitute a necessary launching point for any serious discussion.

Readers will be hard pressed to find a more methodical and better researched book on piracy and maritime terrorism. The bibliography comprises an additional hundred pages, and one chapter alone has five hundred footnotes. Martin Murphy is a senior fellow at the Center of Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, and his extensive academic, professional, and writing credits on littoral warfare and maritime terrorist threats more than sufficiently rank him