

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

By Edgar J. Ridley



Effective leadership takes on two forms: one is to teach people to eventually lead themselves. The second form of good leadership simply realizes its motivations and goals. Leadership is a product of the times in which we live. Unfortunately, too often today, today's global leadership is severely lacking due to the narrow-mindedness and inability to understand the dynamics that shapes today's world. Global leadership today requires one to push the agenda and mandates that have shaped the present world that we live in, with its ills and complexity.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Leadership is as good as the behavior patterns of those who would consider themselves leaders. Most global leadership as practiced today is a vehicle to perpetuate the results of a highly symbolic civilization that glorifies the unreal as reality. The danger in today's leadership is that it has taken the lead to perpetuate and globalize the most destructive forces that have become prevalent in today's world. These destructive forces are, by unanimous decision, racism and religion.

Racism and religion have been the cause of most if not all of the conflicts that we now experience globally. After religion and race, the two other forces that are understood to be destructive, are the quest for power and for economic superiority. Each country and each group selects leadership that they feel will best promote and propagate their

agenda. The key to that leadership is the ability to create an environment where the people can eventually lead themselves to perpetuate the agenda mandated to their particular leadership. To be sure, one can have effective leadership without that leadership being a force that would enhance civilization as a whole. In other words, an effective leader can perpetuate destruction, if that is the agenda; just as an effective leadership can perpetuate good. Said another way, effective leadership can promote justice and enhance civilization; or effective leadership can promote evils such as racism, religious discord and confusion around the world.

So be clear: effective leadership can promote issues and agendas good and bad. A case can be made that both Adolf Hitler and Nelson Mandela provided good leadership for their constituencies. As a matter of fact, Hitler, it has been said, created such magic for the people he persecuted, that they often saluted and cheered him as fervently as did his followers. Conversely, Nelson Mandela's leadership and personality were so effective that even his most ardent opponents were touched by his charisma. Leadership is merely providing and taking on the agenda of the people that appointed it.

HOW SYMBOL SYSTEMS DICTATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP

One cannot discuss the dynamics of leadership without understanding the effect

that symbol systems have on human behavior. Because we live in a universe that is governed by symbol systems and their resulting mythologies, rituals and superstitions, leadership is really at the mercy of how one uses and interprets these symbol systems in their individual scenarios and environment. Symbols have an extraordinary effect on human behavior. If you understand that myths and symbols are synonymous, then you understand that mythology has governed history and justified it at the same time. Man's attitude is basically a symbolizing attitude. This symbolizing attitude has led to a penchant for never-ending mythmaking. Unfortunately, most people do not understand how symbolism is used to mythologize history, manipulate behavior, and set in motion a way of thinking that creates the phenomena of racism, greed, neurosis and other forms of mental illness.

The leadership we experience in today's world is a guidance that spreads the results of a symbolizing attitude that affects every area of human existence. This leadership has made possible the distribution of ideologies and concepts that are the engine for the conflict and discord that we see operating in all areas of human activity. In other words, because we live in a mythological universe, the goals that are perpetuated and realized are often destructive and harmful to the universe as a whole. This is easily verified by the conflicts that we are experiencing throughout the world.

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who recently retired as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, has been the leader of a country that was pivotal in the economic surge of Southeast Asia. Malaysia, which had one of the fastest growing economies in the world, has been a source of concern in the Western world. The concern was prompted by the audacity and decision-making of Mahathir Mohamad. Dr. Mahathir has never been afraid to challenge the racist attitudes of the United States and the West and its conspiracy to control the global economy. When commenting on America's attempts to remove Saddam Hussein from power, Dr. Mahathir said: "...(That the U.S.) attitude was symptomatic of a new 'racism' reminiscent of that practiced by the British in colonial times. 'The feeling is that a western life is much more valuable than anybody else's. It is all right for others to die but don't you dare touch westerners.'" His joint ventures with African countries were a source of irritation to the European Union. The Western world has always had problems with countries that are populated with the non-white majority population in the world.

THE LEADERSHIP EXHIBITED IN THE AFTERMATH OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

Rudy Giuliani, former Mayor of New York City, was lauded for his leadership of New York City after the bombing of the World Trade Center. Prior to September 11, the majority of New York's populace experienced the racially divisive leadership of Giuliani. Many maintained that Giuliani fostered an atmosphere of racial tension throughout the City of New York. In countless instances, non-white people experienced the unfairness of Giuliani during his so-called leadership.

Abner Louima was a Haitian immigrant sodomized with a plunger handle by members of the New York Police Department one of the most barbaric acts known to so-called civilization. Giuliani showed not only a lack of concern for the victim, but downplayed the significance of the act, and once again showed unwavering support for the New York Police Department. Amadou Diallo, an unarmed African immigrant, was shot 41 times while standing in his doorway by New York police officers. Giuliani supported the New York Police Department and showed no sympathy for Diallo's family.

Finally, Patrick Dorismond, an unarmed security guard trying to summon a taxi, became engaged in a case of mistaken identity, when New York policemen working covertly shot him to death. Not only did Giuliani unshakably support the offending policemen, the Mayor then proceeded to condemn the dead man by suggesting he was a criminal. Rudolph Giuliani created an atmosphere of fear, distrust and disdain for

people of color in New York City. It was evident in the Black community that a Black person's life meant nothing. However, the vast majority of whites showed support for Giuliani mainly because of his racist leanings and his dictatorial style of running the city government.

Giuliani cared very little about the prospect of Blacks and Whites coming together in unity; but after September 11, he perpetuated an atmosphere that hypocritically reached out to the non-white population of New York City to support his self-contrived attempts at leadership. Giuliani's objective was to uphold the mythic image of the white warrior being in control. As long as the white warrior was in control, everything would be all right. The very Blacks that he denigrated throughout his term in office were supposed to rally around him as a hero. Because America is basically an extremely racist country, Giuliani's actions during and after September 11 were considered heroic, and he was reborn in the public's mind as a hero of New York City. Consequently, he made the cover of Time magazine as its Man of the Year. September 11 actually saved Giuliani's reputation and reinvented him as the mythic savior of New York City. Giuliani's leadership was opportunistic at a time when an unfortunate occurrence took place that took a large amount of lives. The fact that he was so readily accepted as a hero by the white community only illustrates how determined they were to deify him because they agreed with his racist attitudes.

THE CASE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Giuliani's leadership of New York City was symptomatic of the leadership of the United States as a whole. We currently have a President who has no respect for the United Nations or the value of any multilateral action that embraces attitudes and concepts from non-Western groups. Realizing that his rise to leadership was one that arose from a corrupt political system, President George W. Bush is simply mimicking the attitudes of White American citizens. Nowhere in the world has leadership been so hypocritical as that which is displayed in the United States of America. The United States deserves special credit and emphasis for its sophistication and its ability to manipulate symbols to a degree that far surpasses other countries in the world today.

The United States' ability to oppress people of color, especially African-Americans and immigrants of color, is unprecedented in world history. The United States is able to manipulate symbol systems in such a way that causes the oppressed to believe in their own oppression. That is especially the case with African-Americans. United States leadership understands the dynamics of

symbols and how they influence people of color. A very effective way to keep people of color in a state of satisfaction is to create a mythological existence under the guise of success and status. This is done for a small elite segment of the Black community who feel they have attained the status that would make them, at least subliminally, honorary whites. That same elitist Black group perpetuates a symbol system of success that they encourage the Black majority to follow, as if to reach the end of a rainbow. This is in every area of human endeavor. Those Blacks who resist are usually destroyed and then made an example of what happens to Blacks who step out of the box to promote real equality, justice and fairness in the most racist system in the world.

United States leadership readily understands that African-Americans, like their African ancestors, are the most symbolic people on earth. That is uncontested. Due to that symbolism, they are easily manipulated to live out a mythological existence disguised as the American dream of success, which entails attending the "proper" schools from elementary to the graduate level, attending the "right" church, living in the "acceptable" neighborhood, buying the right home; and behaving in a way that whites see as non-threatening and, indeed, subservient - even if that subservience is masked in a way that it appears not to be dehumanizing.

The question needs to be asked and answered: why do Blacks in the United States tolerate the insults and dehumanization from the United States leadership that makes them die at a younger age than anyone else in not only America but comparable to some of the worst-case scenarios in the developing world?

"Poor urban blacks have the worst health of any ethnic group in America, with the possible exception of Native Americans. It makes you wonder whether there is something deadly in the American experience of urban poverty itself. ...Since the time of slavery, physicians have noted that the health of impoverished blacks is, in general, worse than that of whites....The experience of racism and discrimination in everyday life is also still very real, and very stressful. [Arlene Geronimus, University of Michigan professor of public health] says that blacks are faced with a society that institutionalizes the idea 'that you are a menace – and that demeans you.' Nancy Krieger, a Harvard researcher, found that working-class African Americans who said they accepted unfair treatment as a fact of life had higher blood pressure than those who challenged it." [Epstein, 2003] As the United States population becomes increasingly non-white, its leadership is

projecting symbol systems that indeed cause identity confusion within people of color. Nowhere is that more apparent than the attempts to categorize people of color by the U.S. Census Bureau. The option is given for people to mythologize their racial identity. This simply means inventing new identities that categorizes as neither Black nor White. The nation's Hispanic population is now mythologizing racial categories that they feel will erase the stigma that is usually associated with people of color.

Because of the racist (symbolic) attitude of whites, and their treatment of people of color, Blacks who have some degree of physical characteristics that are not associated with African-Americans prefer to identify themselves other than being Black. See Tiger Woods and others who would deny their African heritage. The United States puts such great emphasis on the degradation of Black Americans and the continual mythologizing of their existence that it is undesirable to be identified as an African-American. Those people who feel as though they can get away with identifying themselves as anything but being Black will do so. This is indeed a tragic and unfortunate scenario. What needs to be emphasized here is that Whites and their leadership see that as a way of maintaining power and domination over the non-White majority. Make no mistake about it they do that by manipulating a symbol system that is ingrained in every area of people activity.

As long as Blacks fail to understand these symbolic dynamics, they will continue to be a people that are intellectually and physically enslaved by a White leadership that continues to see them as an inferior people. This is why it is paramount to comprehend the role of symbols and their ability to produce a superstitious mode of existence that keeps people docile and subhuman. That is one of the reasons why America is becoming a South Africa in its racial identity and its way of enslaving a majority people who are indeed, in reality, an African people. America prides itself on being the leader of the world. But, America can be proud of perpetuating a leadership that is able to set an example of racism and hypocrisy. America is a perfect leadership paradigm for its mastery of the use and manipulation of a symbol system that produces a mythology that is able to confuse and disorient its population.

THE CHALLENGE TO LEADERSHIP

The mythological environment we are currently in makes it imperative that leadership takes on a certain shape. This is unlike any time in human history. Because we live in a mythological existence perpetuated by symbolism, we live in a racist environment that perpetuates greed, dishonesty, and a continual type of

barbarism that has not been experienced before due to the advanced stage of symbolic behavior in our population. This state of civilization makes it imperative that leadership takes a proactive role in the elimination of symbols and symbolic behavior by the populace. Leadership must lay out a program that exposes the dangers of symbolic behavior and unveils the treacherous decision making that superstition fosters. There needs to be a realization that superstition is operating only because of a civilization driven by symbols.

Unlike the assumptions of the past on the role leadership takes, it is imperative that leadership becomes a servant for the elimination of symbols and symbolic behavior. Such a mandate has not been made before because of the assumption that symbolic thought is a natural neurological process. Symbolic thought is not a natural neurological process; it is indeed, a neurological misadventure. "Because we live in a highly superstitious and ritualistic civilization, unpredictability has been the rule of the day. Because the very nature of mythology is change, i.e., apples become oranges, bananas become pears, the changes of names and situations are at the mercy of the mythmakers. When reality seeps in, myth takes over to the extent that it changes situations to suit the desires of the mythmaker irregardless of reality. In other words, what hinders the smooth running of the symbolic circle is the traumatic presence of the real." (Zizek, 1992)

On the other hand, a symptom (which is indeed the real) dissolves after we have symbolized its presence. What is being said here is that the general populace of the world has not been taught to deal with reality. Indeed, when confronted with reality, man has been taught to mythologize because it is considered easier to mythologize than face the brutal facts of reality. However, what is truly needed is a civilization without myth. Such a civilization would have no mythmakers, and symbolic homo sapiens, sapiens would be nonexistent. There would be no symbolic thought, and the Symptomatic Thought Process would be the rule of homo sapiens, sapiens. Since such an existence would eliminate superstition, racism would be absent in all its forms, decisions would be just, and problems stemming from poverty like starvation and disease would be eliminated. This is not a Utopia but an understanding of how life in civilization would be ordered without the damaging effect of mythology. The leadership that would be present in such a situation would be the leadership that will allow people to lead themselves without the limitations that stem from racism, sexism and classism. There can be no other mandate for any type of leadership that does not focus on the

elimination of symbolic behavior and its damaging effects. Unfortunately, that type of leadership would be a marked leadership in terms of the standard backlash against people who wish to make qualitative change, for there is a sizeable segment of people in the world today that benefit from the injustices that man faces. These people would not easily give up the benefits that they receive from a barbaric civilization that is dominated by symbolic-behaving humans.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

What has just been described is the role that global leadership must take. It is a daunting task but entirely feasible. The kind of effective global leadership that we need today will always run the risk of criticism. They will be called tyrants, dictators and other kinds of labeling geared to impede their effective leadership. Realizing that no man or situation is perfect, it is easily understood that the leadership that is most needed today is a leadership of courageous individuals who are able to withstand utmost scrutiny and the cruelty that a barbaric civilization will heap upon them.

Nelson Mandela in South Africa is symptomatic of that kind of situation. What Nelson Mandela had to endure is symptomatic of what can happen to effective leadership that is unwanted or denied because of the changes that would occur because of that effective leadership. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad stood up to the racism of the Western world and also had the courage and self-confidence to reject the economic policies of the World Bank and IMF. Indeed, this is symptomatic of the leadership that is needed if we are to usher in a true civilized world.

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