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2013

[Introduction to] Heroic Leadership: An Influence Taxonomy of 100 Exceptional Individuals

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Recommended Citation

Allison, Scott T., and George R. Goethals. *Heroic Leadership: An Influence Taxonomy of 100 Exceptional Individuals*. New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2013.

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Preface

This book is the latest product of a collaboration that started almost 30 years ago when Scott Allison was a graduate student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Al Goethals was on sabbatical there, visiting from Williams College. Looking back on some of our earliest collaborative work, we should have realized that at some point we would surely write about heroes. The first paper we published together, along with David Messick, was inspired by one of our heroes, the boxer Muhammad Ali. We were always fascinated by his influence and leadership outside the ring, particularly his role in changing race relations in the United States. Ali was always his own man. He insisted on being called Muhammad Ali rather than what he referred to as his slave name, Cassius Clay. At first the media refused to go along. But as we know from his long boxing career, Ali never quit. Eventually sports writers and broadcasters recognized that he was right to insist that they call him what he wanted to be called. He led the way for many, many more African-Americans to use names that reflected their pride in their racial identity. There was no doubt that he was the first, and that he led the way.

As we tried to identify the qualities that made Ali an effective leader to a largely hostile white establishment, we focused on his wit and his obvious linguistic intelligence. We remembered that when Ali was once asked whether he had deliberately faked a low score on the US Army mental test, so that he could avoid the draft, he mischievously quipped, "I never said I was the smartest, just the greatest" (McNamara, 2009). That self-characterization led us to researching some of the limits on people's self-serving biases. The result was our *Social Cognition* paper, "On being better but not smarter than other people: The Muhammad Ali effect" (Allison, Messick, and Goethals, 1989).

At that point neither of us had turned to studying heroism or leadership or the connections between them. But we were inching slowly in that direction. Allison's research began to focus on pro-social behavior in groups, examining the conditions under which people place their group's well-being ahead of their own individual interests. Goethals, meanwhile, was publishing work on group goals, social judgment processes, and eventually leadership. Circumstances eventually brought us both to the University of Richmond, where Allison is in

the Department of Psychology and Goethals is in the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. At Richmond we began collaborating again, on both rooting for the underdog and positively evaluating people who have died. This research raised more general questions: Why do I like or admire certain people, what leads us to elevate our estimates of particular individuals? These concerns led to our first book on heroes, *Heroes: What They Do & Why We Need Them*. Although work on leadership, particularly Howard Gardner's (1995) *Leading Minds*, was always important in the way we thought about heroes, our general exploration of the psychology of heroism diverted us from focusing on the connections between leadership and heroism. Those connections are explored more fully in our recent paper in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Goethals and Allison, 2012).

But there was clearly much more to consider. This became increasingly clear in 2010 when we started to blog about heroes, particularly heroes who had clearly been leaders (blog.richmond.edu/heroes). Within two years we wrote more than 150 hero profiles and attracted over 150,000 visitors to the blog. One hundred of those hero profiles are included in this book. Profiling so many great individuals made it increasingly clear that in fact *all* of our heroes were also leaders. They might not fit traditional leader schemas, or people's implicit theories of leadership, but they were clearly leaders in the sense that Gardner defined it. Either directly or indirectly, through face-to-face contact or through their accomplishments, products and performances, they influenced and led significant numbers of other people.

Our purpose in this book is to continue exploring the various ways heroes influence us, and thereby lead. We hope to succeed in more fully developing the taxonomy of heroes that we introduced earlier, and in illustrating each of its ten types of heroes. Those types are Trending Heroes, Transitory Heroes, Transitional Heroes, Tragic Heroes, Transposed Heroes, Transparent Heroes, Traditional Heroes, Transfigured Heroes, Transforming Heroes and, finally, Transcendent Heroes. The influence and leadership of each of these types of heroes is distinct. Thinking about the different ways heroes lead helps us think more carefully about different kinds of leaders, and the many different ways that each kind has an impact on followers.

We should add a word about the heroes we have selected for this volume, and their assignment to one taxonomy category or another. All of them were suggested in formal surveys or in focused discussions. However, we used our own judgment in assigning them to hero types. At times the two of us did not completely agree on where to place certain individuals. It turns out they influenced different people in different ways, at different times in their lives. While we acknowledge that there might be disagreement as to who really is a heroic leader, and what type of heroism they best exemplify, our overall goal is to illuminate as carefully as we can the many ways different heroes influence those who admire them.

Finally, we wish to thank the many people who have helped along the way. First, we are indebted to the many colleagues at the University of Richmond, both in the Department of Psychology and the Jepson School, who have supported, or at least indulged, our interest in heroism and particular heroes. We thank Shannon Best, Joanne Ciulla, Dick Couto, Don Forsyth, Doug Hicks, Gill Hickman, Crystal Hoyt, Peter Kaufman, Pam Khoury, Gary McDowell, Jack Mountcastle, Sandra Peart, Terry Price, Thad Williamson, Tom Wren, Craig Kinsley, Jane Berry, Beth Crawford, David Landy, Laura Knouse, David Leary, Cindy Bukach, Andy Newcomb, and Jeni Burnette. We are also deeply grateful to three friends and colleagues of ours—Rick Hutchins, Jesse Schultz, and Jeff Green—who kindly contributed five of the heroic leader profiles contained in this book.

We also are very grateful to Anne Duffy at Taylor and Francis for her encouragement during the entire course of this project. And we are highly indebted to series editors Georgia Sorenson and Ron Riggio for including our book in their series, *Leadership: Research and Practice.*

Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals
September, 2012