Will They Come When You Call?

Jeremy Paul
Will They Come When You Call?

JEREMY PAUL*

In his elegant book on what makes a leader, prominent historian and social critic Garry Wills poignantly reminds us of what every leader needs most: followers. Mr. Wills explains how even leaders with the best ideas or the strongest convictions will not accomplish much if no one chooses to answer their call. He illustrates the point with a quotation, which everyone at Connecticut knows as one of Hugh Macgill’s favorites. Wills writes,

When Shakespeare’s Welsh seer, Owen Glendower, boasts that “I can call spirits from the vasty deep,” Hotspur deflates him with the commonsense answer: “Why so can I, or so can anyone. But will they come when you do call them?”

Following the call of leaders has always posed special significance for those who came of age during the Vietnam era. Asked to follow our nation’s leaders into a war that went horribly wrong, many heeded the call; others did not. But the agony of choosing was something more widely shared. And from this experience as well as the broader civil rights and sexual liberation struggles of the 1960s, the need to Question Authority grew into more than a familiar bumper sticker.

Now that the Vietnam era has faded and baby boomers have aged not quite so gracefully, a common theme in American politics has become whether those who so forcefully questioned authority when they were young can effectively wield it in later life. The overall verdict on that one remains in doubt, and it would be foolhardy to tackle such a broad topic in a brief essay of this kind.

In looking back on Hugh’s career at the Law School, however, it occurred to me that we have been treated to our own success story along these very lines. Hugh is most definitively not a baby boomer. Perhaps because of this his style of leadership has reflected little patience for the

* Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of Law, University of Connecticut School of Law; A.B., Princeton University; J.D., Harvard University.

have marked the last twenty-five years. Second, I will explain how criticisms developed in the narrow context of legal analysis are particularly significant when viewed as challenges to conventional notions of leadership. Third, I will describe the rhetorical problems leaders face in seeking to overcome our collective loss of faith in core ideologies that might have served as rallying cries in earlier eras. Finally, I will detail four strategies available to solve the rhetorical challenge and link them back to my initial remarks concerning Hugh's style in leading the law school. The connections I wish to draw are more impressionistic than demonstrable at this early stage in my work on leadership. But I hope to provoke a continued conversation that will continue well beyond reactions to this brief essay.

I. QUESTIONING AUTHORITY

It does not take much historical study to identify the challenge to authority as a core theme of the Sixties spirit. The decade included simultaneous rebellions against the Vietnam War, against racist laws and practices in place since the Civil War, against sexual mores that limited people to traditional relationships, and against gender roles that confined both men and women. Despite the numerous books on the Sixties era, interesting work remains to be done putting those strands together into a series of simple arguments challenging the powers that be.3

For our purposes, however, it is important to draw a simple distinction that has proved as central to legal theory as it has seemed peripheral to everyday understanding of political change. Governments have two very different ways to secure compliance with top-down demands. In many cases, people follow orders because the consequences of disobedience are both sure and severe. We might say in this case that rulers have "power" over subjects.

As H.L.A. Hart pointed out long ago, however, a citizenry that experiences its leaders as having only this sort of power will rightly view their government as unjust. To use Hart's colorful metaphor, people who take orders at the point of a gun are victims not followers and a just legal regime must be more than a "gunman writ large."4

So governments need a second sort of tool to encourage willful compliance, and here we move closer to our central topic. Successful leaders produce followers not with threats but with arguments or, to put it another way, such leaders must rely not only on power but also "authority." And people prepared to challenge their leaders, as many in the Sixties proved themselves to be, must be ready to take on both the "power" of the state

---

2. For a book length critique of the Clinton Administration that blames its failures on the impossi-
bility of leading change from the center, see JAMES MACGREGOR BURNS & GEORGE J. SORONSON, DEAD CENTER (1999). For an explanation of why non-ideological leadership is likely to be mistakenly characterized as "waffling," see Jeremy Paul, Is the President a Waffler?, WASH. MONTHLY, Apr. 1996, at 36.


4. See id.
and the authority to which its leaders appeal. Arguments to move a community in a particular direction may, of course, come not merely from leaders but those who seek the mantle of leadership from the outside. So not every argument for action fits within the rubric of authority. Nor is it always easy to differentiate between raw exercises of power and more subtle appeals to authority. It is, however, easy to tell when those in charge seek to justify their actions through the use of argument and thus leave room for those seeking to challenge the status quo to put forward opposing views.

Let us further distinguish between two sorts of arguments available to national leaders so that we might connect the topic of political leadership with ideas more familiar to legal scholarship. First, leaders may seek to generate enthusiastic followers through the use of detailed analysis of the consequences of a proposed course of action. Proponents of the Vietnam War, for example, defended it with predictions concerning how other countries would fall to Communism (the domino theory). Defenders of traditional gender roles might carefully describe how some children may not be cared for adequately when both parents work outside the home. The rough and tumble of such political debate continues unabated, and it is largely outside the concerns of this essay.

A second, and perhaps equally important, rhetorical tool for leaders is the appeal to abstractions or ideology that might motivate large groups of people precisely because details are not too carefully spelled out. "America, love it or leave it" was a familiar rallying cry for one side during the Vietnam era. Civil rights opponents put their claims in terms of "states rights." More generally, the grand abstractions of politics—liberty, equality, freedom and rights—constitute rhetorical devices to which leaders appeal to justify a course of action and to rally followers. Consider, for example, contemporary appeals to alter national health care policy on grounds that each citizen has "a right" to health care. Vietnam proponents certainly argued we were fighting for "freedom." And, it remains unclear precisely what was meant by "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice."

Appeals to grand political abstractions, however, depend upon a form of reasoning that has come under withering attack over the last thirty years (and, of course, before). We still have no shortage of leaders seeking to rally the public with traditional appeals. Even President Clinton, our first baby boomer president, organized the rhetoric of his second campaign around themes of "opportunity, responsibility and community." By now, however, even the average voter wonders whether it is really possible for those in power to derive concrete solutions to practical problems from such familiar abstractions. In terms of "questioning authority," the outsider strategy here is to concede the value of the abstraction but to argue that many different outcomes could be justified in terms of the agreed upon goal.

Here is an easy example of the problem with abstractions. Political leaders may argue that certain policies should be supported in the name of "family values." One response would be to challenge the idea that the government should get involved in promoting such values. But the rebellious strategy I want to emphasize here is the one that agrees family values are great, yet notes how no one really knows what they mean. Supporters of same-sex marriage, to continue the example, might defend the idea on grounds that it promotes the values of family by enlarging gay couples to enter permanent partnerships rather than participate in more transient relationships. This argument, of course, is not what the traditional defenders of family values have in mind. The emptiness of abstractions such as family values limits the effectiveness of rhetorical appeals employed by contemporary political leaders.

The attack on abstractions is, of course, not really new. Anatole France's famous comment about the rich and the poor being equally free to sleep under bridges reminds us that astute observers have long been aware of the possibilities for rhetorical rebellion. Moreover, the attack on abstractions is very much a double-edged sword from the perspective of political outsiders. Established leaders may have more trouble rallying followers around an idea such as freedom. Yet opposition figures may also have trouble shaking things up if people yawn when presented with arguments for greater equality. Equal pay for equal work is an appealing slogan unless everyone doubts that any real content can be given to ideas such as equality.

No literature of which I am aware, however, has so relentlessly focused on what I am calling here the attack on abstractions as certain strands of contemporary legal scholarship. Each of the grand concepts within politi-

---

7. Rallying cries are, of course, as important to those mustering opposition as to those already in charge. Vietnam's critics captured their own challenge both to the War and to traditional sex roles with the phrase "Make Love Not War." And the phrase "civil rights" was so successful that we no longer even remember its invention as an elegant way of dramatizing the plight of those who lacked such rights. But one of the crucial choices facing any opposition group in America today is whether to enter into the clash of rallying cries or whether to challenge all such abstractions and slogans as a form of rhetoric insufficient to produce meaningful change.

8. For President Clinton's own defense of these themes, see PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, BETWEEN HOPE AND HISTORY (1996). The book devotes a chapter to each of these three grand themes.

9. "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread." THE LAWYERS QUOTATION BOOK 30 (John Recy-Smith ed., 1991) (quoting Anatole France).

10. Bob Dole, for example, in his 1996 Presidential campaign spoke from the heart about a kind of freedom that would keep the government out of private life. Yet at the Democratic Convention, Senator D'Amato eloquently pointed out that sometimes freedom is about being able to do something. Thus, a government that enabled someone to go to college with a student loan was more an instrument of freedom than a threat to it.
cal theory, concepts to which leaders throughout history have repeatedly referred, has itself spawned a cottage industry of writings elucidating the difficulties of moving, as Holmes might have put it, from general propositions to concrete cases. This is no place for a thorough review but let us briefly consider three prominent ideas in recent legal scholarship: the so-called deconstruction of equality; the critique of rights; and the challenge to the public/private distinction. The point here is not to defend or extend these ideas but rather to illustrate their shared challenge to reasoning from abstractions.

Equality is a norm that nearly everyone embraces as at the root of moral and ethical argument. One way to decide whether government rules are fair is to ask whether the rules treat like people alike. Appeals to equality are perhaps most typically identified with outsider critics of authority looking to redress unequal treatment. But people in power may also invoke equality claims to deny certain benefits. If we gave that to you, the argument runs, we would have to give it to everyone in your situation, and that is just not practical. Indeed, this is precisely the kind of argument against selective conscientious objectors that Hugh Macgill sought to rebut in his early work. Hugh employed the familiar technique of showing how the sincere selective conscientious objector might actually be more closely analogized to other conscientious objectors than to the phonies about whom a court might be concerned.

Contemporary legal scholarship, however, contains a more scorching earth attack on the idea of equality. This attack, made famous by Peter Westen, asserts that the idea of equality is empty and thus adds little to normative debate. Westen’s argument is straightforward. Equality begins from the premise that like cases should be treated alike. But all cases are alike in some respects and different in others. Anyone seeking to decide whether two cases are alike needs criteria to determine whether the cases resemble each other are relevant to the decision at hand. Accordingly, Westen argues that the criteria of relevance and not the claim to equality produce the normative argument. Consider, for example, the argument that two wage earners should be paid the same because they performed the same work. The two are identical in terms of the work performed, and thus standard equality arguments might suggest that equality should compel equal payment. But Westen points out that the workers are properly viewed as the same only after it is decided that work (rather than let’s say hair color) is what deserves compensation. If people are to be paid for the work they perform, however, it is that principle and not any independent claim to “equality” that produces the conclusion that equal pay is essential.

Deborah Stone’s political science text, Policy Paradox, presents a slightly different formulation of the equality problem. Her work also, however, points toward Westen’s conclusion that concrete solutions to political issues are not likely to be derived from the notion of equality. Stone’s emphasis is on how equality has many different meanings. She uses the engaging example of how to divide up a piece of chocolate cake among the different folks in her public policy seminar. The approach to equality that might first come to mind is that if there are eight people each should get an equally-sized piece of cake. But, Stone notes, this approach ignores several other solutions all defensible with different ideas of equality. Bigger people might get bigger slices. People who skipped dinner might get bigger slices. Professors might be given bigger slices than the slices that are given to students. In short, because the idea of equality points in so many directions, it effectively points in none at all.

Similar work has been done criticizing the idea that we can determine appropriate political outcomes based on identifying what “rights” people have. The notion of rights has played an important role in legal and political theory and it serves as another rallying cry for political leaders. The problems with rights rhetoric, however, have been amply detailed and are worth recapifying only to mark the parallel between the critique of rights and the indeterminacy of equality. Arguments based on rights face the familiar problem that it is very hard to say where rights appropriately originate. Accordingly, it is always possible to challenge assertions such as I have a right to a minimum income. The simple reply is “on what basis” or more colloquially “who said so?” But the challenge to rights that I wish to emphasize here is very different. I might concede the general formulation that a right to a minimum income exists and yet contend that this really solves little. How much, for example, is the minimum income? What happens when John’s right to a minimum income conflicts with Suzy’s right not to pay taxes for programs she opposes? Once again the problem is that the idea of a “right” is rhetorically powerful but its significance dwindles when one attempts to apply it to particular cases.

Last but certainly not least is the way in which contemporary legal scholarship has challenged core ideas upon which generalized notions of freedom have come to depend. It is hard to imagine a political leader in America today who would not be thrilled to identify his or her program as

13. See id. at 39-42.
built on a platform, or better yet a party, of freedom. More likely than not, however, the implicit idea of freedom upon which such claims might rely would start with an idea that private citizens should be kept free from government interference. When we say America is "the land of the free," it is the contrast with monarchy and despotic control that gives the claim such resonance.

It is hard for people trained in today's law schools, however, to find such rhetoric particularly convincing. After all, we might all agree that a core component of freedom is the ability to rest safe in bed each night uncouncerned that your neighbor will enter your home and take your things. This security, however, depends upon the government's active involvement in policing your neighbor, restricting his freedom so as to preserve yours. More generally, virtually every freedom we prize includes a component of government protection against encroachment upon it from others. Government in short is both a threat to freedom and a guarantor of it. Such paradoxes, however useful for analysis, serve to jeopardize appeals to freedom as a way of justifying a course of action. Government action it turns out can be criticized and defended in the name of freedom. Once again, an abstraction proves less than fruitful for determining a particular course of action.

I have made many mistakes in my writing in the past, but I would never be so foolish as to suggest that the contributions of legal scholars have themselves produced a citizenry more difficult to lead. Many of us wonder whether anyone except our friends and families actually read our law review articles, and certainly those articles do not carry what we might call here "the indeterminacy critique" to the general public. I will settle here then for the much more modest claim that the various components of legal scholarship that might seem to bear most directly on the legal context for which they were developed in fact have broader implications for political leadership. To that topic I now turn.

II. WITHOUT VISION, WILL THE PEOPLE PERISH?

The challenge for leaders in an age when people have come to question their allegiance to grand concepts should be readily apparent. It is all well and good to seek followers who will come when you call. The problem becomes precisely what is it that the leader is supposed to call people toward.

Conventional notions of leadership almost always begin with a description of a person who knows where he or she wants to go and is able to move people in the desired direction. That is why Garry Wills' book on leadership is called "Certain Trumpets," even if a careful reading of his work shows how leaders are themselves often uncertain and edge gently toward consensus based on what is possible.

Nothing in the contemporary legal scholarship I describe above directly undermines the ability of strong leaders to head firmly in a particular direction. John McCain might chart campaign finance reform as a polestar toward which he wants to lead the nation. Ralph Nader might urge us toward national health insurance. What is crucial about these examples is that they find direction in an institutionalized solution to a perceived (although not clearly identified) problem.

The difficulty arises when the leader seeks to put forward justifications for the leader's plan of action. Leaders are, of course, always free to appeal to the self-interest of followers. We all saw the power of the question "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" Successful leadership, however, often requires the ability to steer people in directions that are not always immediately defensible in terms of self-interest.

Perhaps the easiest way to navigate hard leadership challenges is to call people to arms on behalf of great causes. Campaign finance reform might be defended on grounds that the current system threatens "our democracy." National health care might be put forward as the only fair way to give people what they have "a right" to enjoy. What happens, however, when the public at large begins to understand that "our democracy" might have many meanings, or that a right to health care is properly understood only in the context of other competing rights? More important, why have we not noticed the threat that the legal academy's skepticism about abstractions poses to the rhetoric of leaders, both those in power and those seeking to obtain power?

One answer might be that the deconstruction of equality, the critique of rights, and the attack on the public-private distinction have been thoroughly developed in a context focused almost entirely on adjudication. Duncan Kennedy's most recent book surveying many of the accomplishments of contemporary critical legal theory is a prime example.15 And, it makes sense for those writing in the legal academy to be particularly suspicious of judges who employ rights arguments, equality arguments, or freedom arguments. Judges, after all, face a perennial challenge to their authority. Since they do not speak directly for the people, the burden on their arguments is great. When judges cannot persuade us that their results are compelled by argument, we are troubled that judicial results may be motivated by politics.

The focus on adjudication, however, distorts the significance of the accomplishments of legal scholarship in several ways. First, there is just plain old confusion. Arguments highlighting the difficulty of drawing a line between public and private, for example, may be read to suggest that no line can be drawn or that no line can be drawn that is consistent with a court's need for objectivity. Second, there is the problem that arguments

15. See KENNEDY, supra note 14.
such as the critique of the public/private divide are likely to be more fiercely resisted when they are viewed as a threat to adjudication. People are unlikely to hear what you say if they view the consequences of your position as untenable. Third, the debate over the viability of grand generalizations as justifications is likely to get mixed up in the debate over the rule of law, a debate even those who revel in deconstruction do not really want to win. Finally, and this is the most important point here, the criticisms of grand justifications are likely to be minimized when viewed through the lens of a critique of adjudication. Many people believe we can muddle through for centuries, simultaneously believing that law is objective and that it is not. So if contemporary legal theory has done little more than further develop critiques that suggest judicial decisionmaking is political, then we should not be surprised to have witnessed a muted response.

What I hope to accomplish in this essay, however, is to turn our attention to the significance of contemporary legal scholarship for the rhetoric of leaders. Again, I do not mean to suggest that legal theory has actually influenced anyone outside the legal academy. Instead, my claim is that we share a world where grand rhetorical flourishes have taken on a different character from the kind we might have seen prior to our increased sophistication concerning ideas such as equality and freedom. The national press corps continues to hope for a political leader who leads from the left or right by defining certain ideological themes and running with them. As I will discuss in more detail in Part IV, James MacGregor Burns and Georginia Sorenson blame the failures of the Clinton Administration on his inability to lead transforming change from the center. When one takes the critique of abstractions seriously, however, the rhetorical center turns out to be the only place to be.

III. WE ARE ALL CENTRISTS NOW

During his 1988 acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, Michael Dukakis proclaimed the upcoming election to be “not about ideology,” but “about competence.”16 As a matter of electoral politics, this turned out to be the beginning of a series of fatal mistakes. Dukakis hoped that he could downplay ideology because Democrats were on the wrong side of too many ideological divides. The Bush camp understood that the historical path to winning elections is to split the electorate along ideological lines in ways that leave your side with a convincing majority. So Bush repeatedly tagged Dukakis as a “liberal” and watched that label block Dukakis’ bid for the White House.

As an intellectual matter, however, Dukakis’ stance fits neatly with the themes I am stressing here. Elected leaders within liberal democracies have long faced the challenge of navigating conflict between familiar grand themes. Perhaps the deepest divide in American politics is one sometimes pitched as the tradeoff between freedom and equality. Conservative leaders stress their ability to get government off the backs of citizens, to unleash the power of the market, and to let individual initiative move the country forward. Progressive leaders contrast their ability to level playing fields, to open access to those who have been left out, to reduce income inequality through the tax structure, and to regulate business excesses in the name of a safer workplace and a healthier environment. Centrists have long understood the need to appeal to both ideologies as a path to putting together a winning majority.

Contemporary critiques of ideological abstractions, however, have created whole new forms of centrism. If freedom has many meanings—and it does—then a leader is unlikely to be able to persuade people to move in a particular direction through mere appeals to freedom. Congressional leaders may oppose an increase in the minimum wage because it restricts the freedom of small business to provide low wage jobs. Supporters of a minimum wage increase will defend it on grounds that it will increase the freedom of low paid workers to gain an education or have children. If equality is a many-splendored thing—and it is—then a leader will be unlikely to accomplish reforms merely in the name of equality. Statutes that guarantee people time off to care for children or sick relatives may be seen as promoting equality by opening the workplace to parents. These same statutes can be decried as hindering equality by giving an advantage to those who want time off to care for children, as opposed, let us say, to someone who wants time off to pursue an additional educational credential.

There is, of course, nothing much new in the multiplicity of rhetoric available to support or oppose various policy prescriptions. What is new, I am arguing here, is the spreading sophistication concerning these rhetorical maneuvers. It is no coincidence that political debate now tends to be de- rided as “spin” or that people are struggling to give meaning to politics. I do not want to downplay the appropriate dismay created by the current campaign finance system. But what I want to add to the mix is applause for a citizenry that instinctively understands the inability of leaders to appeal to precisely the kind of ideological argument that our scholars on leadership say is so essential to persuasion.

Progressive scholars may have once hoped that the critique of ideological abstractions would move the country to the left because those in power so often relied on abstractions to justify the status quo. It has turned out, however, that precisely these same abstractions—freedom, equality, rights—were needed for opposition leaders to rally dissenting voices. There is no going back to the good old days. So the question is what style of leadership is suited to our anti-ideological era, in which we are all cen-

16. For a transcript of this speech, see The Democrats in Atlanta, N.Y. TIMES, Jul. 22, 1988, at A10.
IV. LEADING FROM THE CENTER

James MacGregor Burns and Georgia Sorenson’s new book on the Clinton Administration is an extended exploration of the idea of centrist and leadership. They conclude that a major part of Clinton’s failures as a President is that centrist is too practical, too moderate, and unable to stand up to those dominated by ideology. But they make several mistakes. First, they assume that centrist is a stance adopted for purely political reasons, as if no one would be a centrist unless they hoped to get something out of it. Second, they often move too quickly from the claims that Clinton made big mistakes and Clinton was a centrist to the conclusion that Clinton made big mistakes because he was a centrist. Finally, the book is conspicuously silent on the authors’ own views of policy questions. So it is never clear whether the critique of Clinton’s brand of centrist is that Clinton, himself, was unable to pull it off or that the direction Clinton wanted to go was incorrect.

Despite these failings, however, Burns and Sorenson are to be congratulated for putting forward enormously interesting questions. How could Clinton simultaneously stress the importance of change and also lead from the middle? What kind of rhetorical approaches are available to a leader who wants to inspire people but who finds herself suspicious of familiar ideological poles? In short, what kinds of leadership will work for a leader whose sees the nuance and desirability of multiple positions but wants nonetheless to move people toward particular solutions?

It should be clear by now that I am working my way back to the answer that we need the kind of leadership Hugh Macgill offered our law school over these last ten years. But let me first add one more bit of categorization to describe four different rhetorical approaches that might respond to the challenge Burns and Sorenson raise.

First, and most apparent, one way to inspire people toward a path between ideological poles is for the leader to emphasize her ability to steer the proper course. The style here is for the leader carefully to paint the strengths of both sides of a conceptual divide. In the old days, this was as simple as stressing the value of freedom and the value of equality. My claim now is that a leader must explain how she sees the wisdom of different definitions of freedom or equality. But either way the rhetorical strategy is the same. “Trust me,” the leader says, “I see both sides and I will safely chart a course down the middle.”

I sometimes mock this approach as the “Goldilocks” approach to ideology. The left likes it hot, the right likes it cold, but I will make things just right. No matter how much we mock it, however, this style of leadership has enormous resonance. It is what the press today would call “the character issue.” If people do not have confidence that problems can be resolved through adherence to abstractions, then why should they not resort to more personal issues in picking someone to be their leader?

A second rhetorical strategy is for a leader to rely on the well-chosen, often emotionally charged, anecdote. Ronald Reagan made this style famous but it is important to see how and why it works. In the abstract, people might be genuinely conflicted over the proper role of government in regulating certain aspects of the economy. We may favor government rules that ensure safety in the workplace but worry that too many rules will strangle entrepreneurial initiative. Bold statements from politicians siding with one view or the other are likely to alienate voters. Suppose, however, that you want to move the country in the direction of fewer such regulations. You might tell an emotional story about small business owners in a rural area who sent their teenage son on a long drive to buy a government approved ladder because none was available in their town. If the son turned out to die in a highway accident on the trip, listeners will come away hostile to government regulation, precisely because they were suspicious (yet also supportive) of it in the first place. In this way, the leader can move people along without necessarily having to engage in a meaningful debate of alternatives.

A third rhetorical strategy is one that attempts to reinvent the appeal to abstractions that centrist leaders would seemingly eschew. This approach is to redefine the relevant abstraction at such a high level of generality that opponents would seem nothing but nineties. When people are fighting over how to divide the economic pie, the leader can take a forceful stand in favor of growing it. When a debate erupts over the appropriateness of policies such as the Family Leave Act, the leader might talk about giving people options. If battles rage over guns or tobacco, leaders appeal to banalities such as keeping these items out of the hands of children. This strategy seems remarkably empty, yet it often turns out to be surprisingly effective.

Finally, my personal favorite for inventiveness among rhetorical strategies is the careful phrase that combines both sides of an ideological divide. People are battling over whether health care should be run by the government or private enterprise. The Clinton Administration supported "managed competition." Battles rage over the role of government. Clinton declares "the era of big government is over," yet for those listening he quickly adds that we should "not return to an era when people are left to fend for themselves." He wanted to "end welfare" but only "as we know it." And, in case we fear this strategy is limited to one party, George W.

17. See BURNS & SORENSON, supra note 2, at 145-68.

18. This approach, of course, was more effective in the days before heightened environmental consciousness.
Bush, Jr. is building his whole campaign on the rhetorical combination of “compassionate conservatism.” As Clinton did, Bush attempts to blend two ideological opposites into one whole. No wonder Clinton immediately recognized the power of Bush’s approach and sought to re-define the phrase pejoratively. Compassionate conservatism, Clinton quipped, means that, like any other Republican, Bush sees no way to extend Social Security, reform education, and expand access to health care. The difference is that Bush feels bad about it.

The beauty of these rhetorical combinations is that they allow the leader to return discussion to the more practical problems he or she hopes to solve. It becomes possible to mount an ideological defense of most things the leader might wish to do. If Bush wants to spend more government money, he can say it is compassionate to do so. If he does not, he can say it is conservative not to. A sophisticated audience will not be fooled. But a sophisticated audience may not mind either. When ideological appeals are distrusted, people would rather watch a leader invent room for himself to maneuver than see him pin himself down.

All of which brings us back to our very own “rebellious leader.” No one would ever accuse Hugh Macgill of lacking rhetorical skills or being unable to find room to maneuver. He has skillfully led a sophisticated community for ten years. It is hard to remember him ever moving us forward through appeals to ideologies. That approach would have been pointlessly divisive. Instead, he has taught us to trust him; he has never wanted for the well-chosen analogy; he has found large causes in which we all believe, and he has never wanted for the conciliatory phrase. In short, he has shown us all what leadership looks like in a sophisticated community suspicious of abstractions. No wonder we came when he called.