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Leading Against the Grain

Listening to Leaders from Around
the Globe and Throughout Time

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This book began, like so many others, as a conversation after listening to some particularly insightful school leaders speak about their work. We were attending a school leadership conference in Los Angeles and had just left a session in which newly appointed and experienced principals were discussing their inspirations. For some, their inspiration had been a person in their family—perhaps a caring parent, grandparent, or sibling who had been a role model or guide. Other educators pursued a career path in leadership after a professional colleague encouraged or recruited them to join a leadership development program. These people explained that someone had seen their potential as they worked in a school, and that they had moved toward leadership thanks to the backing of that supportive person. As the conversation developed, each participant eventually mentioned an iconic leader whom he or she hoped to emulate: Andrew Jackson, Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, George Washington, Nelson Mandela, and the list went on. Over the following years, we asked our students and the leaders with whom we worked if any iconic leaders had inspired them and the list continued, but it didn't increase much in number or diversity—we realized that although people sought inspiration, there were many incredible leaders whose stories were unknown.

For this book, we asked authors to choose inspirational leaders outside of the mainstream Western canon of leaders. Our aim was to introduce readers to leaders with whom they might be unfamiliar or about whom they might have misconceptions. *Leading Against the Grain: Lessons for Creating Just and Equitable Schools* includes brief profiles of outstanding leaders paired with succinct explanations of what their experiences can

teach contemporary school leaders. Importantly, *Leading Against the Grain* includes leaders from around the world, which helps facilitate a sharing of innovative and classic ideas across national and cultural boundaries.

In addition to drawing from exemplars across the globe, we were also careful to maintain an equitable balance between women and men, an important dynamic that books of this ilk have at times neglected. Some of the leaders highlighted in chapters include Aung San Suu Kyi (Burma), Wangari Maathai (Kenya), José Rizal (Philippines), Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (Japan), Golda Meir (Israel), Antonia Pantoja (Puerto Rico), John W. Tippeconnic III (Comanche/Cherokee), and many others. In addition to gender and demographic diversity, readers will find that authors explain and interpret the lessons these leaders offer from a variety of theoretical and practical perspectives. Each chapter is structured in a similar manner, in an effort to give the book an overall cohesion and balance. Chapters focus on a single leader rather than a group or movement, even though nearly all of the chapters describe leadership that is in some ways collaborative, distributed, and complex.

Save for a few, each chapter follows roughly the same structure:

- 1. Introduction and biographical sketch.** Each chapter introduces the basic details of the leader's life. This typically includes information such as date and places of birth and death, education, career milestones, and the leader's importance within her or his country.
- 2. Discussion of context and activities as a leader.** This section includes a discussion of the context in which the leadership activity occurred, meaning a consideration of societal dynamics, organizations, and people with whom the leader interacted as well as actions that the leader took that defined his or her work. The emphasis here is on both the processes and outcomes that the leader was able to facilitate and the way his or her specific approach was effective, depending on the aims of the leadership activity.
- 3. A list of the key lessons readers can learn from the leader.** In this section, authors will list a number of lessons that readers can learn from the leader's work and life. The list format is meant to make the lessons specific and clear. In doing this, we do not intend to downplay or eschew complexity; instead, we are thinking of the chapters as an introduction to a way of thinking about and enacting leadership. References at the end of each chapter offer additional resources and information for curious readers.
- 4. Explanation of how this leader's lessons are relevant for today's educational leaders.** This section connects the leadership lessons of the previous section directly to contemporary educational leadership practice. The emphasis here is on practical application, and authors have attempted to translate research, theory, and

ideas from disparate contexts into practice of the key lessons that practitioners can use in their schools tomorrow.

In summary, *Leading Against the Grain* is an invitation and an introduction. It is an invitation in the sense that it is full of exciting stories of heroic leadership that are concise and selective rather than deep and exhaustive. Our aim here is to pique curiosity. The book is also an introduction in that we are guessing that several of the leaders in this book may be new to readers, even to scholars and practitioners seeking to learn something new. One of the great joys of editing this book was reading and commenting on drafts of the chapters as they came through. Many of these leaders were new to us, and even chapters about those with whom we were familiar were shown in a new light.

It is important to point out that the book includes many of our heroes and heroines, among both the subjects of the chapters and the chapter authors themselves. It represents a roll call of outstanding and innovative thinkers writing about leaders who excite and challenge them. For example, Peter McLaren's chapter, singular for both its interview format and its theoretical perspective, looks closely at one of the most influential leaders in the Western world, Jesus Christ (considered together with Karl Marx, which makes for a fascinating read). It is curious that this leader who inspires so many is so seldom written about in academic discourse. Gloria Ladson-Billings's chapter about Anna Julia Cooper is an outstanding contribution to our understanding of an important thought leader who helped shape our thinking and urgency around intersectional issues of race and gender as they relate to Black girls. Jackie Blount's chapter extends and revisits her work on Ella Flagg Young published in the germinal 2004 book *Fit to Teach*. Melanie C. Brooks examines Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement, and John M. Heffron introduces us to important Japanese thinker Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. Haiyan Qian and Allan Walker discuss renowned leader Sun Yat-sen, while Sonia Nieto offers a remarkable chapter on Puerto Rican leader Antonia Pantoja. Lisa Catherine Ehrich and Fenwick W. English revisit *Rules for Radicals* author Saul Alinsky, and Atiya S. Strothers and Catherine A. Lugg provide an excellent chapter about the Reverend Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor. Coharie scholar Susan C. Faircloth reflects on the life and work of Dr. John W. Tippeconnic III (Comanche/Cherokee), and Michelle D. Young and Bryan A. VanGronigen take an uncommon look at the principled life and presidency of Jimmy Carter. Polly Hyslop and Brian Jarrett discuss the peace-focused efforts of Tlingit leader Harold Gatensby, and the outstanding Israeli scholar Izhar Oplatka examines the importance of Golda Meir's leadership. Gaëtane Jean-Marie examines the leadership of civil rights icon Fannie Lou Hamer's contributions, while Catherine M. Marshall and Becca Merrill consider the work of women's rights leader Ethel M. Smith.

Whitney McIntyre Miller and Margaret Grogan contribute an interesting chapter about Burmese leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Collectively considered, these contributions help expand our conceptualization of leadership, expanding our familiarity with new leaders as we learn new lessons and allowing school leaders to reflect on their practice. We hope you enjoy learning about these leaders as much as we have, and we entreat you to use their stories and lessons as a point of departure for learning about them, not as a final destination.