

# American Women of Influence (A Historic Overview)

Tamar SHIOSHVILI\*

## Abstract

Great leaders' power is the power to persuade the society in their vision, and if they reach their goal, the society benefits. The leaders must make wise choices which policies to push, and if they make the right choice, the next step is to put in motion the expertise of communication in order to be properly heard and find support in people. Good communication skills affect outcomes. The American history clarifies, that leadership is a superpower, it isn't something that anyone can give you, you have to earn it. Some prominent American historical leaders are recognized for their vital contributions towards greater equality, towards shaping their society. They were amazing communicators and managed to persuade the society in the rightness of their visions.

**Keywords:** leadership, persuade, equality, communication

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\* Affiliated Professor, Dr., Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.  
E-mail: [tshioshvili@ibsu.edu.ge](mailto:tshioshvili@ibsu.edu.ge)

## Introduction

"Great leaders have no rules" - this is the philosophy of Kevin Kruse, who gives the following interpretation of leadership: "Great leadership is indeed a difficult thing to pin down and understand. You know a great leader when you're working for one, but even they can have a hard time explaining the specifics of what they do that makes their leadership so affective. Great leadership is dynamic; it melds a variety of unique skills into an integrated whole" (Kruse, 2019. p. IX).

When we consider the comforts we enjoy today, the luxuries available, we find the connection to the past. Today most of people who live in the Western world know lavishness beyond the wildest dreams of yesterday's richest king. People eat better, live longer, can travel farther and faster; take daily pleasures for

## Leadership is Power to Persuade

Some experts consider, that leadership is a superpower, and it has no rules, e.g., Kevin Kruse (ibid.,184) considers some advice and tactics that go against conventional wisdom. However, there exists a steadfast rule of communication-essential for leadership. As a matter of fact, Kruse attaches great importance to forging quality communication that benefits you and your addresses (ibid.,17). Possessing the trait of a good communicator is of paramount importance for a leader, and if he/she has the power to persuade, it is realized through communication. In "The Crowd: A study of the Popular Mind", first published in 1895, a French doctor and anthropologist Le Bon introduces the first detailed analysis of crowd analysis of crowd psychology. He is the first to lay out the theory of social contagion, describing how emotions, ideas, and behaviors spread from person to person like a virus. So, leadership is not a choice, it is the phenomenon of social contagion (Le Bon, 2002).

Leadership with its boundless definitions is mostly seethed down to one word: Influence. When the leadership guru Ken Blanchard was asked to define leadership, he answered "Influence." Speaker, author,

granted, not seriously thinking it hasn't always been this way. Viewed through the lens of history, people in the West are a privileged few.

Through the development of huge industries and banks; strong networks of mass communication and transportation the United States has become the center of the most engrossing fast-paced economic engine the world has ever known (Means).

How did it happen? Great leadership often requires counter intuitive action in critical moment. A true leader influences others to take to action. Leadership is about social influence, not positional power. Leadership isn't something that anyone can give you- you have to earn it and postulate it for yourself.

and leadership expert John Maxwell says: "Leadership is influence - nothing more, nothing less" (Maxwell, 2016).

In his book "Leadership for the Twenty-First Century", professor Josep Rost considers the changing definitions of leadership over seven centuries and concludes that the bottom line is, "Leadership is an influence relationship" (Rost, 1993).

## President's Power to Persuade

The most influential leader's impact in the world- an American president's influence in office comes not only from his assigned responsibilities but from his political skills and from how effectively he uses the resources of his office. A classic analysis of the use of presidential resources is offered by Richard Neustadt in his book "Presidential Power". Neustadt develops a model of how presidents gain, lose, or maintain their influence. His initial premise is simple enough: "Presidential power is the power to persuade" (Neustadt, 1980, p.10).

Harry Truman echoed Neustadt's premise when he said, "I sit here all day trying to persuade people to do the things they ought to have sense

enough to do without my persuading them...That's all the powers of the presidents amount to" (Ibid., p.9).

In 1980 for many people Ronald Reagan's victory in presidential elections was a surprise, as he was quite well-known to the world community because of his motion picture experience. How could a movie actor even try to get the presidency? However, very few people were really conscious of the long, political career of Reagan and in connection with this, it should be mentioned, that his outstanding talent was the communication trait; he was acknowledged as a "good communicator" based on his extensive experience as a broadcaster in radio as a commentator. Main

### **American Women Leaders Shaping their Society**

The courses on Women's Studies introduce the challenges facing women in the twenty-first century: challenges regarding work and livelihood, personal and family relationships, violence on many levels, as well as the most disastrous challenges the American women faced starting from the very early days of their history when they had no rights to own their property, custody over their children, no voting rights, no access to education, work. At the same time, the students are exposed to the dynamics of women's rights movement- three waves of feminism, the pace of progress on the educational, social, political frontiers of women's advancement, that took more than 150 years. Outstanding women leaders in one country- the United States- have helped shape their society starting from the Native- American Sacagawea, who guided white settlers through a vast wilderness; to Sojourner Truth, who fought for the end of slavery and equal rights for all.

### **Leading the Dawn to a New World**

Every epoch generates the leaders, be it in good times, or crisis in a country. The survival of the American colonies and later the newly born United States was never guaranteed. Settlers in the 17th century were

characteristic of a good communicator is the ability to persuade and influence. Assumably, exactly this feature helped the U.S. President Reagan to persuade then leader of the USSR Michael Gorbachev to reach the agreement on the reduction of the nuclear weapons in 1986. Presidents differ in the style of communication. We have known the outstanding speeches of some presidents, e.g., Abraham Lincoln, J.F. Kennedy, and an absolutely remarkable speech of the leader of the human rights movement Martin Luther King "I Have A Dream". An exceptional communication trait to persuade the groups of people may turn a person into a leader.

encountering harsh living conditions, scarcity of food, disease, and toil. The "last colony" of Roanoke, Virginia, is the proof of the difficulties they faced. Two centuries later, in, 1800s, Americans would move westward across the Mississippi River seeking new territories and access to the Pacific coast. The survival of the colonies and the ability to explore western territories were critical to the establishment and growth of the United States. Two young Native-American women- Pocahontas and Sacagawea- played a crucial role in this endeavor. Both women would act as pathfinders, literally and figuratively to the settlers they faced. While still a child, Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan, a powerful chief of Algonquin tribe in the territory of present-day Virginia, would serve as a bridge between the first European arrivals and local Indian tribes, saving the life of an explorer Captain John Smith and acting as a go-between during times of tense relations between the two groups. Accounts say, that Pocahontas befriended the new settlers, bringing them food and delivering messages from her father from time to time. She turned out to be a very good mediator due to her communication skills.

### **Sacagawea**

An explorer of extraordinary talent in mastering tribal languages and knowledge of western territories,

Sacagawea would take part in the first U.S. expedition to map the lands west of the Mississippi and guided the first American explorers safely to the Pacific and back. Early in her life, Sacagawea (possibly meaning "Boat Launcher" or "Bird Woman") was captured by a rival tribe. She was traded to a French-Canadian fur trader by the name of Toussaint Charbonneau, whom she later married. In 1805, her husband was hired to assist a newly formed expedition, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, and charged by President Thomas Jefferson with finding a passage to the Pacific. Sacagawea, who spoke several Indian dialects, quickly proved herself as an interpreter, as a guide, as a symbol to various tribes of the expedition's peaceful plan, and even as a diplomat.

## **The Colonial Era**

### **Ann Marbury Hutchinson**

The European immigrants who colonized British North America in the 17th century brought the Old Continent's social and political mores with them. But soon the colonists began to stray away from England, impacted by their new environment, the mix of nationalities and religions, and English traditions of political liberty. An American identity began to emerge. It included increased religious tolerance, attraction for political liberty and representative government, social

## **Birth of Nation**

### **Abigail Smith Adams**

American women played a significant role, if until recently often unrecognized, during the era of the War for Independence (1775-1781) that gave birth to the United States of America. Wife of the second president of the United States Abigail Smith Adams (1744-1818) found recognition, besides acting as her husband's chief confidant, for championing women's rights as well. In 1776 Abigail became famous for making her strongest appeal for women's rights in a letter to Adams, then a member of the Continental Congress that declared independence from Britain.

mobility, and tough individualism. The most crucial American concepts of freedom of religion and freedom of speech had one of their earliest supporters in Ann Marbury Hutchinson. Yearning for greater freedom to practice her religious beliefs, in 1634 she persuaded her husband- merchant William Hutchinson in 1634 to follow her beloved minister John Cotton to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, today's Boston, and here her troubles began. Well-educated and not afraid to speak her mind, Ann Hutchinson's reputation grew, as she began attracting not only devout women, but men as well. In addition to crossing the bounds of conventional women's behavior, her criticizing of the colony's ministers set her in disagreement with the religious establishment, which reprimanded her for having "a very valuable tongue, more bold than a man". Despite her vigorous defense of her beliefs, she was excommunicated and banished in 1638, and moved with other followers to Rhode Island. She is considered one of the founders of that colony, the first to establish complete separation of church and state and freedom of religion in what would become the United States. But the greatest tribute to Ann Hutchinson's influence is the First Amendment to the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (Introduction To Human Rights, 2001).

"In the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make. I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors". Her plea was the first call for the equality that American women would gradually achieve (Women of Influence, 2006).

## **Other Prominent American Women of Influence**

American women were vital to the emancipation movement. Harriet Beecher Stowe, a white woman wrote a famous book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1852. The

novel encouraged excessive enthusiasm for the antislavery cause. It provided Stowe's place in history as an ardent abolitionist. What's important to note, she became a celebrity, speaking against slavery at many gatherings.

A fervent abolitionist and a proponent of women's rights, Sojourner Truth found her voice in 1840. She was born a slave named Isabella and took the name of Sojourner Truth, because she felt God had called her "to travel up and down the land, showing the people their sins and being a sign unto them," After New York state abolished slavery on the Fourth of July, 1827, Truth moved to New York City and began to speak out against the evils of slavery. She was an impressive figure- almost six feet tall with powerful, sonorous voice, who expressively described abuses of slavery and the hardships she had experienced. Truth was self-educated and possessed a quick wit and charisma that often-attracted big crowds. An ardent supporter of suffrage, Sojourner Truth became a national symbol for strong black women, and for all strong women. Her speech: Ain't I a Woman,"given at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, has become a classic text on Women's rights (ibid., p.12).

### **A Woman's Right to Vote**

The 19th century enthusiasm to provide equal rights for women engendered courageous women in America, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, who at the antislavery conference in London faced quite an unpredictable reaction from men, who considered their speeches before the audience inappropriate and unwomanly and were excluded from activities of the convention because of their gender. Here, these women understood, that first of all they had to fight for women's rights, that seemed so unequal with men's. in July, 1848 they organized the Seneca Falls first Women's Convention in the U.S., drafting a Declaration

of Sentiments based on the U.S. Declaration of Independence, which set the agenda for the movement: the right of custody over children in case of a divorce, the right to testify against an abusive husband in court, the right of women to enter various kinds of jobs and keep their salaries instead of giving money to their husbands, and the most controversial at that time - women's right to vote. The political intuition of Stanton and her equally famous partner in the 19th century women's rights' movement, Susan B. Anthony, was that to change society, initially, you have to change public opinion. Both women dedicated themselves to propagating ideas: Stanton through her writing, Anthony through personal leadership and extensive lecture tours. At the same time, both women understood, that freedom and liberty for some groups means freedom and liberty for all groups. Fighting for the abolition of negro slavery, they were doing everything to convince Americans in the late 19th century that women like former slaves, deserved legally protected rights. In 1848 Elizabeth Stanton helped persuade the New York legislature to enact laws protecting the property rights of married women. In 1850 Stanton started her association with Susan B. Anthony as a leader in the movement to give the right to vote. Their 50-year collaboration benefited from Stanton's skills as the better orator and writer and Anthony's as the organizer and tactician. Stanton became well known as president of the National Woman Suffrage Association, and also lectured on topics such as maternity, divorce law and the social effect of liquor. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had created a national agenda for women's political and social equality that was to be realized in decades following. (Stanton, 1992).

## Conclusion

This article offers a glimpse at how certain outstanding women leaders in one country – The United States have helped frame their society. These prominent women – from the Native American Pocahontas and Sacagawea playing a pivotal role in the survival of the colonies and exploring western territories for the establishment and growth of the United States – to

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Sojourner Truth, who fought for the end of slavery, Abigail Smith Adams, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony- ardently fighting for women's social and political rights. These women's extraordinary leadership talents got realized through the incredible expertise of communication to persuade the population in the rightness of their visions from which the society benefited immensely in the long run.

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