



BOSTON COLLEGE

FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

O'CONNELL HOUSE 109

CHESTNUT HILL, MA 02467

PHONE: 617-552-3281

800-335-5853

FAX: 617-552-3968

E-MAIL: yourname@bc.edu

www.bc.edu/fye

BOSTON COLLEGE

HANDING EACH OTHER ALONG: MORAL LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

LIVES *of* MORAL LEADERSHIP



*Men and Women Who
Have Made a Difference*

WITH A NEW PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

ROBERT COLES

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

**WITH AN ADDRESS BY
SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN**

GO SET THE WORLD AFLAME!

What will this mean for you?

What ‘wants’ doing in our world?

How do we avoid self-righteousness, what George Eliot calls, “unreflecting egoism”?

Do you have anything you might call a moral routine? Describe it.

BELIEFS AND IDEAS

“I wasn’t normal enough to overlook the wide-spread hunger and disease that plagued my country...My emotions seemed to be getting the better of my common sense—and my parents were desperately worried. All that tuition, all that education.”

Danilo Dolci speaks of love as action and his need to give “direct voice” to the voiceless. What examples of this have you seen in your life?

Your parents may begin to worry about you, particularly as you develop ideas that may run contrary to certain beliefs that have permeated your early life. How will you handle this potential conflict?

VALUES

“I was about to bury myself in a materialistic society which glorified intellect to the point where it killed feelings, those very feelings which could become actions. And I felt the need of action. I suddenly realized that...A home, a car, and all the rest—they weren’t enough.”

Your conversion may never be this extreme. Attend, however, to the values of society which you, too, value.

What will you choose to subvert?

Where will you bring change?

Dolci talks about becoming “interviewers” of the oppressed.

What is the value of this?

What is “the gift of stories that tell daily struggles” to you?

“A moral leader “must be willing to stand apart.” When have you stood apart?

HANDING SOMEONE ALONG

“Listen to people, see how they stick themselves into the world, hand them along, and for good and selfish reasons.”

What does Percy mean when he talks of “handing someone along”?

What is the importance of doing so for both “good” and “selfish” reasons?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Coles speaks to Erik Erikson, the distinguished psychologist who notes that there is “leadership in action.” Coles muses, too, that God can be a moral companion on our journey before cautioning us to remember that “It’s important for us to remember this—that moral leadership as we study it in history and politics...is also moral leadership that can happen right in front of us or not far away.” Indeed it is vital to “look up to those who hold high political office...senators...But we also constantly (must) look to one another, to uphold for one another various suppositions, to hand one another along, morally as well as psychologically.”

What faith, what suppositions, and what actions will you uphold as a moral leader in the Boston College community?

Ultimately, how will you go and set this world aflame?

aflame
logo

THE JESUIT MISSION

Catholic-Jesuit Education...is a process that has three key parts, being attentive, being reflective and being loving. It results in the kind of good decision-making that Ignatius called “discernment.” The goal of Jesuit education is to produce men and women for whom discernment is a habit.¹

This process of formational—where we define formation as the active development of individual character and awareness—decision-making is not an easy one. Students who truly begin to engage in the Catholic-Jesuit character of Boston College—rooted in a charism of informed service which is the very lynchpin of Ignatian education—will find ahead of them lives of great struggle. This is a good thing. For it is through challenge that growth and change must come, indeed we must “thank God for the people who help us go all that way—who take the big chance, who aren’t ‘utilitarian’ and ‘pragmatic,’ but are ‘unrealistic visionaries.’”

When St. Ignatius of Loyola commissioned St. Francis Xavier, set to embark on his voyage east—knowing full well that he would probably never encounter his good friend on this earth again—telling him to “Go set the world aflame,” he was loosing an order of men charged with looking beyond the practical, the human, toward Ad Majorem Dei Glorium, the “greater glory of God.”

In many ways, we gather at Boston College to do much the same thing. If we have succeeded as a community, students, faculty and staff will always be uncomfortable with this world; ever seeking to carry the torches of justice, faith and education in the face of skepticism, violence and despair. Men and women at Boston College, of which you the class of 2010 are now a part, must necessarily ask, as Robert Kennedy did at all times, “How can I be more, do more, give more?” This is a very active example of the Jesuit concept of the Magis; that there is always something more beyond the self. When we begin to examine the world with this lens we enable the possibility of becoming moral leaders, public servants and we will truly begin to live as men and women for and with others seeking ever to excel in the world. Catholic Jesuit education is complete when its graduates embody this vision of life and work.

A HISTORY

The First Year Academic Convocation began as a call for a new ritual called First Flight whereby members of the Boston College community might best welcome each incoming class into the academic conversation already resounding throughout the Heights. Begun as an effort of student and faculty collaboration, the event has grown from a commissioning of first year students to a bracketing procession; seniors now follow the same route on their day of graduation as they too are welcomed into the greater community of graduates, professionals, alumni.



Convocation and graduation ceremonies on campus.

It is our hope that in the four years that pass between the Convocation and Graduation, our young men and women will become charged with the sense that they are what William Conrad would call “folks who walk when walking has to be done.” Ultimately we hope that they will have begun seeking what Dorothy Day might ask, “wants doing” in this world. The best way to get to that point of discernment is to engage in the act of conversation. And so the First Year Academic Convocation is an event but it is also a discussion, a literary experience centered around the vital issues put forth in an FYE program called Conversations in the First Year.

All incoming students, then, have been issued a book and the charge to begin engaging in conversations with faculty, staff and their fellow classmates, that we might struggle together to be active, to be loving as a community of learners. These conversations begin

HONESTY

“I think the people we met in Mississippi, they’ll keep us honest.” (Coles)

“They are honest, but I’m not sure they’ll keep us that way.” (Kennedy)

What is important about this distinction made by Kennedy?

What will keep you true to your mission of vocational discernment?

What/who will keep you honest?

KINSHIP

“We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother...”

What, for Coles, is flawed about this call to kinship?

How might we apply this idea to current political contexts?

HUMANITY

“For Conrad, then, moral leadership has to do with a rock-bottom decency that is...in someone’s bones...in a human nature... moral leadership becomes revealed in its awesome emergence.”

What does the above say of Conrad’s belief in the inherent tendencies of humanity?

What might be misleading about the terms “awesome emergence”?

SERVICE VS SAVIORISM

“Mr. Tomasello, I should let you know—my family has no future, the way it is now here. This is their big chance, to feel there’s something ahead, waiting for them. As it is, we’re treated like things. Maybe someday we can be something.”

Here Andrew Thomas, an African-American, speaks of his desire to affect change in a hostile South, through the symbolic act of registering to vote. Coles is careful to note the tension between

men and women ensconced in a reality of violent racial bigotry and the young men and women from the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee who came “from a distance away” and thought they could “turn a world upside down, all in one summer.”

What is the difference between service and saviorism?

When, in the past, have you been able to “stand up and be counted” in support of men and women detrimentally affected by a situation beyond your own context?

LEADERSHIP AND SELFHOOD

“If you force people to do things, then it won’t work in the long run.”

“I honestly believed they all convinced one another—that you have to change your way of thinking sometimes, but you also have to understand why it is that some people have more trouble doing that than others do.”

“A moral leader is someone who isn’t only out for himself. He’ll do something that he knows is right to do, even if it’ll give him some trouble.”

The above are all drawn from the classroom of Ms. Elaine Vogel who challenged children to examine their own notions of leadership and selfhood.

What historical and contemporary examples of forced change have had positive or disastrous effects?

What, in your mind, distinguishes the two?

In other words, why does some forced change bring about great hardship? Great joy?

MORAL ROUTINE

“God’s ways aren’t ours—but we have to find our ways to do His bidding.”

HANDING EACH OTHER ALONG

“There are a lot of issues out there, but it’s our job to decide which ones matter most.”

In so saying, Robert Kennedy has touched upon the human capacity for becoming overwhelmed in the face of great and multivariate need. Certainly there are myriad problems in this world begging for reconciliation, but how to choose which cause will become yours? Similarly there are many ways in which you, as a student, can approach your formal and informal education. The following are some touch-points to aid in your reading of Coles, to frame your mindset as we engage Senator McCain in the fall that you might best decide what matters most for you, for our community and for this world.

The endgame of this discussion is that you might create your own social ethic, your own mode of moral leadership and service, that is outward looking while remaining reflective and personal. How to begin? Coles notes Robert Kennedy’s propensity to “listen in order to act.” He also stresses the context of political machinery and the potential for change to happen, albeit in a painstakingly slow manner. Let us begin our examination by first listening to the mentors in our lives all while carefully attending to the lives with which Coles confronts us:

MORAL LEADERSHIP

What is moral leadership?

When have you seen it manifest in your life?

Who have been your moral exemplars?

When have you “exerted a kind of leadership...and been effective,” “gotten something done” in the face of opposition, or apathy?

STRUGGLE IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIP

“I’ll tell you now, it’ll seem easy at first—there’ll be a lot of attention and interest. But it’ll get hard, really hard.”

How do you determine what is worth a struggle in the face of hardship?

What can we do better, as Kennedy muses, in this country?

In this institution? What can you improve in your life?

in early fall with the First Year Academic Convocation. In the past, Dr. Paul Farmer, through Tracy Kidder’s work *Mountains Beyond Mountains* asked students to examine how our commitment to educational excellence can allow us to better form a true vocational life, centered in service, looking beyond the comforts of wealth and basic health care to those who enjoy neither luxury. Senator Barack Obama addressed students in the context of his memoir, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, wondering aloud just how we might close the “empathy gap” present in American society today particularly surrounding questions of race and identity. The conversation continues.

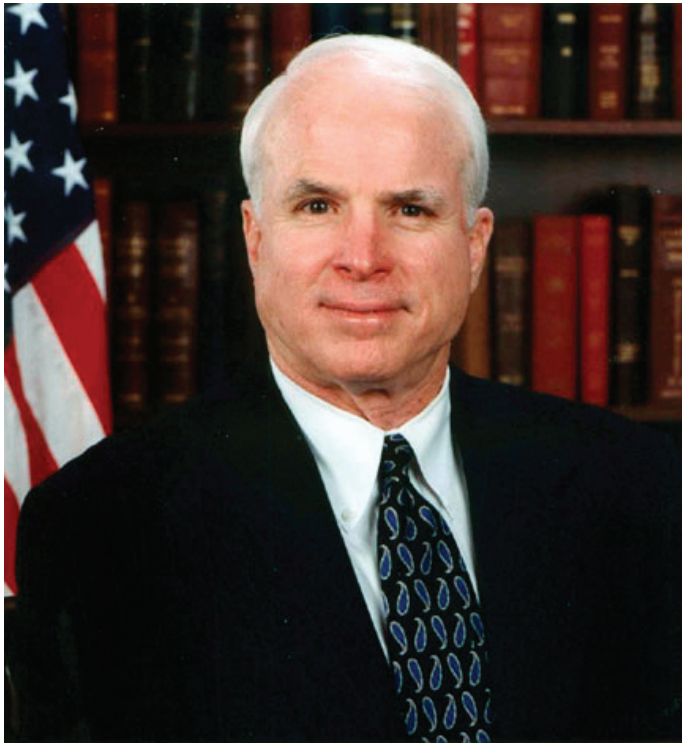
In September of this year, Senator John McCain of Arizona will address the class of 2010 and the greater Boston College community on the topic of service and leadership both in the public and private sphere. As a class, each of you will have the opportunity to prepare for this conversation with Senator McCain by engaging in Robert Coles’ work *Lives of Moral Leadership: Men and Women Who Have Made a Difference*. The foundational question to frame the ensuing discussions is perhaps best posited by Robert Kennedy, as recorded by Coles, who was consistently asking himself and others “How to exert a kind of leadership—moral leadership—and be effective, get something good done?”

Make no mistake Boston College expects a great deal from you, its newest students. You are now our fellow leaders and we will call you to struggle, to attend, to reflect and to love in the course of your daily lives here. It is our mission, then, to provide you with the guidance, with some of the questions which beg solutions, neither easy nor myopic, to begin you on your journey, to aid you in setting this world aflame!

BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

Robert Coles and Senator John McCain are busy men who have never shied from acting upon what they have seen “needed doing” for the betterment of others.

U.S. Senator John McCain has embarked upon a long career of public service.



Senator John McCain

After graduating from the Naval Academy in 1958, John McCain began his career as a Naval aviator. In 1982, he was elected to Congress representing what was then the first congressional district of Arizona. In 1986, he was elected to the United States Senate and is currently the senior senator from the state of Arizona. He is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs,

and serves on the Armed Services, and Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committees.

Recently, Senator McCain has called for the rejuvenation of the concept of national service, looking to ensure funding for AmeriCorps while perpetuating an ethic of patriotism as community building. He holds great hope for the possibilities of a selfless youth in America, noting that, “public service is a virtue, and national service should one day be a rite of passage for young Americans...Though today's young people, according to polls, have little faith in politics, they are great believers in service. Indeed, they are doing volunteer work in their communities in record numbers---proof that the urge to serve runs especially deep in them.”

McCain, like Coles sees the possibility of leadership amongst the masses. This moral leadership—as Coles would describe it—comes from “sacrifice for a cause greater than self-interest.”

Coles is the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of more than fifty books. Raised in Boston, he is currently a professor of psychiatry and medical humanities at the Harvard Medical School and a research psychiatrist for Harvard University Health Services; he is also the James Agee Professor of Social Ethics at Harvard. Dr. Coles has done extensive psychiatric work with children, while speaking internationally on the value of service, which he sees as an inherent moral value.

“You are all busy...it’s important to be busy...but if you don’t find the time to change the world, then you’re busy keeping it the way it is.”

—Al Jones