

PREFACE

William Lee Miller described his book on Abraham Lincoln, *Lincoln's Virtues*, as an ethical biography, “a book of a different sort from those whose authors write about moral ideals and moral choices from the perspective of a commune, a sanctuary or a library.” Much the same can be said about this book. It is in many ways an ethical autobiography, a very personal account of a moral journey through a fascinating period of American history. It is a story of half a century of seeking to identify and apply values to all three sectors of American democracy: the private sector driven by markets, the public sector driven by ballots, and the third or so-called independent sector driven by voluntarism and the institutions of civil society. The manuscript was completed while I was in residence at the University of Cape Town, and in the best African tradition of storytelling uses seminal moments from my own experience to raise critical questions about the relationship between private virtue and public values.

I have been encouraged to write this book by my students and faculty colleagues at Duke and the University of Cape Town, by graduates of the leadership program I launched in South Africa more than a decade ago and in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, and by members of various audiences around the world who have invited me to lecture at their universities and to speak to civic groups in their communities. I write with both strong personal conviction and great passion. Yet this book was written with many audiences in mind: students in public policy, ethics, theology, business, and public management courses; those who are developing leadership programs and designing curricula for leadership studies; managers in business and the institutions of civil society in search of best practices; and all those in the

general public who want their leaders to be more moral, their institutions more humane, and their communities more caring.

The narrative is set against the backdrop of a continuing public debate about the role of ethics in public life. The prologue recalls a defining moment in the South Pacific when my rescue from a plane crash in deep and distant Micronesian waters left not so much an emotional scar as a sense that I had been saved for a purpose. I took the trip to help sort out a moral dilemma in American foreign policy; but after hours on a life raft waiting and hoping to be rescued, I was led when I finally reached shore to ponder larger questions about the meaning of life and the genesis of the human capacity to engage adversity without being consumed by it.

Part I begins in the segregated South, growing up black in Louisiana's Cajun country. It was a time of brutal assault on both my dignity and my humanity; yet there was a refusal to hate and a development of the moral and spiritual intelligence that enabled me to rise above the hostility that could have so easily consumed me with rage. It was here in the 1950s that, greatly aided by the black church of my father, I learned to say no to the impulsive urge to respond in kind to those who used violence and intimidation to limit our reach, but could not stifle our dreams.

Part II chronicles the search for values to guide my engagement in the social movements of the 1960s. There is a firsthand account of the moral challenges in moments of great danger, trying to organize a movement and integrate a community in Alabama that served as the national headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan. There is also a report on painstaking but transforming experiences in California during the campus debate—often overshadowed by the Vietnam War—regarding the moral use of knowledge. The questions we raised about the civic responsibilities of a university, the public role of religion, and the emphasis on respect for the humanity of the adversary should have special relevance today for those who compete in the public square for positional leadership. Indeed, it was on the front line of activism in the turbulent 1960s that I learned that there is often no adversary more dangerous than the religious zealot or the self-described patriot who bars the door to social change because he is convinced that he is executing the will of God.

The chapters in part III share the insights of my efforts to apply ethics to the more traditional leadership roles of a democratic society. My constant concern with what was the right thing to do kept me in the domain of applied ethics, striving often to apply the ethical theories I had so studiously examined in my theological studies to real-life issues and dilemmas. It is a story of the professional challenge of a business executive seeking to make the case for capitalism with an ethic, including support in the 1970s for dis-

investment from South Africa, a debate that led to the first of many trips to that country. It is the story of a government official seeking to distinguish private wants from public needs. It is also the story of a spokesperson for benevolent wealth raising moral questions and proposing ethical standards for the public use of private assets.

The chapters in part IV tell the story of four fascinating years at the end of the 1990s as the U.S. ambassador to South Africa, the period in which Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and others sought to reconcile both conflicting images of the past and the deep racial divisions caused by the apartheid policy of separate development. Looking through the special window of an additional fourteen years of part-time residency in that remarkable country, this section chronicles my efforts to distill lessons for the United States from the South African experience with forgiveness and reconciliation. It includes a look at what I learned from Nelson Mandela and concludes with a snapshot of the remarkable displays of presidential diplomacy by Bill Clinton when he delivered on a promise made to me earlier at the White House that he would come and visit.

Set in the early twenty-first century, the final section of the book is about leadership and public values. It tells the story of a partnership I launched and led between two world-class universities in South Africa and the United States to help build a culture of ethical leadership. It showcases the contributions of some of the young leaders in the program who have gone on to high-profile leadership roles in their communities and countries. The last chapter brings this narrative to a conclusion by identifying a lexicon of public values that have shaped and guided my engagement in public life, whether as a social activist, a business executive, a government official, or in the many other activities that have challenged me to integrate values into my work.

An epilogue offers a portrait of the resilience of the people of Louisiana as I joined them in rebuilding their lives and literally remaking their state after Hurricane Katrina. As chair of the board of directors of the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation set up by Governor Kathleen Blanco, I was able to help empower groups that had long been denied access to the corridors of power where decisions about their future were made. The journey that began in Louisiana had finally come full circle. The passion that was once reflected in the strong drive to leave the state of my birth had been transformed into a passion to help change it.