

Harry P. Jeffrey
1937– 2007
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, EMERITUS

B.A., Dartmouth College; M.A., Ohio State University; Ph.D., Columbia
University
California State University, Fullerton From 1969 To 2000
Birth:1937; Death: November 4, 2007

My most vivid recollection of Harry dates to about 2004 when I was nearing completion of my book about Jesse Unruh. I needed quick access to a rash of recently published books about the turbulent politics of the 1960s, many of which were not yet available from the Pollak Library. Knowing that Harry was an avid purchaser of publications on Twentieth-Century American political history, I asked him how many of my list of twenty-some books he had in his possession, and could I borrow the ones he had? He glanced at the list saying he knew he had some of them, but hadn't yet read them, since they were so recent, but that I was welcome to borrow any and all that would be useful to me. He was on his way to class, but, in a typically gracious gesture, he gave me a key to his office so that I could immediately survey his collection.

He had every book on my list! Moreover, since I was then retired and had no office on campus, he let me use his office in which to read his books and take my notes. This kindness greatly speeded up my progress in bringing my book to completion. He also was very interested in Unruh and asked many thoughtful questions about him, which deepened my own thinking about him and his place in history.

This episode piqued my interest in Harry, himself, and I came to at least three abiding conclusions about him. First, he was a very congenial, cooperative colleague. This wasn't particularly easy for him as he was a notorious Republican engulfed in a history department full of decided Democrats. He always held his own, however, and maintained his sense of humor in political arguments, a position strengthened by the fact that he was a prominent member of that vanishing breed in California, a MODERATE Republican. Second, he was a doer as well as thinker about things political and historical. This worked out badly for him when he took a flyer at political office in his 1976 U.S. House of Representatives candidacy, only to suffer the wrath of his decidedly immoderate Republican constituents who ate him up in the primary election. In other activist endeavors, however, he served his department and university well. The Richard Nixon Oral History Project stands as a monument to him. Likewise, his services to the Nixon Library and to the Nixon administration, when he took leave of absence to serve in the Economic Stabilization Program. Always a political activist, he also served as an aide to other Republican moderates in Washington, DC, such as Representatives John Heinz and Paul Schrenk.

Third, although he published relatively little, Harry was nevertheless a committed scholar. If he didn't write a lot, he read a great deal, and he brought his studies to fruition in the classroom. The reason he had all those books that I first alluded to was that he wanted to alert his students in modern American history to the best scholarship in that multifaceted specialty of his. I had become aware of this before I borrowed his books, because on several occasions when he was going out of town, I had agreed to teach some of his classes during his absence. Having taught the basic survey course in American history for some thirty years, I had some familiarity with whatever topics were on his agenda for those days, but I did not wish simply to "wing it," nor did he want me to do so. Instead he always supplied me with an in-depth lecture outline for that day, with frequent references to current as well as classic publications on the topics at hand. These were exercises in applied scholarship that I remember well, and I would wager, so do many of his students. As a perennial member of the History Department personnel committee, I also recall reading many glowing student testimonials about his infectious enthusiasm for his subject and his ability to awaken similar enthusiasm in them. In conversations with many such students whom I also knew, I was struck with the fact that often these were very good students, who recognized a good teacher when they saw one.

Despite the sadness of his too-early demise, Harry left an enduring legacy that his students and colleagues can treasure.

Submitted by
Jackson K. Putnam
Professor of History, Emeritus
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