

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on December 6, 2005,
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Franklin Lewis
Ford was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

FRANKLIN LEWIS FORD

BORN: December 26, 1920

DIED: August 31, 2003

Franklin L. Ford served as a major participant in this Faculty's business throughout his career, as Assistant and Associate Professor, Allston Burr Senior Tutor of Lowell House, McLean Professor of Ancient and Modern History, and as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences from fall 1962 through spring 1970. He was born in Waukegan, Illinois on December 26, 1920, and attended the University of Minnesota, where his uncle Guy Stanton Ford, a leading historian of Germany, served as president and presumably had an impact on his nephew's vocational choice. Graduating in 1942, Ford enrolled for a semester of graduate study at Cornell, then entered the army and after receiving a commission, joined the Research and Analysis Branch of the OSS. There he served with a galaxy of young historians, some recruited by Professor William Langer, who had studied or would regroup at Harvard, including John Clive, H. Stuart Hughes, and Carl Schorske. He returned to Harvard to take his M.A. in 1948 and Ph.D. in 1950 in early modern French history. His dissertation became a distinguished contribution to the history of the Ancien Régime, *Robe and Sword: The Regrouping of the French Aristocracy after Louis XIV*, published by Harvard University Press in 1953. Ford was well aware that he was venturing into one of the densest historiographical thickets of the West, but intrepidly analyzed the ambiguous role of the eighteenth century French nobility, which, "if it did not have the strength to suppress revolution, had at least recovered enough strength to make revolution inevitable."

With the completion of his dissertation, Ford briefly joined the faculty of Bennington College, and he and Eleanor continued an attachment to the faculty and town long after his teaching stint ended. Ford also followed German history, offering a two-semester sequence on Germany as well as lectures on early-modern France, once he returned to Harvard in 1953. For his second book he chose to study a site where both cultures played a formative role. *Strasbourg in Transition 1648-1789* examined the frontier city from before its annexation by Louis XIV to the French Revolution. As a lecturer Franklin had a dry, ironic sense of humor and a sophisticated way of framing questions. These were happy and productive years: he was a senior tutor at Lowell House, member of a poker circle that included distinguished faculty colleagues, a stalwart baseball fan, and father of two young boys, Stephen Ford, who graduated

from Harvard in 1969 and has had a long career as managing editor of the *Louisville Courier Journal* and John Ford, who settled in Arizona and developed his vocation as a gold- and silversmith.

While Franklin was a visiting fellow at the Center for Behavioral Studies in Stanford during 1961-62, Nathan Pusey called on him to succeed McGeorge Bundy as Dean of the Faculty—a position that forty years ago still allowed him to teach his undergraduate courses and the graduate colloquium in European history. He had already served Harvard greatly, by chairing the 1960 Faculty Report on Admission to Harvard College, which urged allocating greater financial aid to strive for a more diverse student body with respect to class, race and region. This is a report that helped to create the modern Harvard College. As Dean, he reshaped and modernized the General Education curriculum, and he oversaw the physical renewal of the campus with the renovation of the Yard dormitories, the conversion of Lehman Hall into Dudley House, the renovation of Emerson, Boylston, and Harvard Halls, the construction of the Science Center, Mather House, and Peabody Terrace. Through all this, he ably stewarded the Faculty's resources.

By the late 1960s, however, the deanship had become an exhausting burden. As the Vietnam war escalated, the Faculty and student body divided over American participation, and student protest grew more militant, the civil constitution of the University also became strained. Essentially Ford became caught in the center as the student left grew more determined to contest what it saw as university complicity with American foreign policies. Ford himself personally opposed American escalation, but felt his first duty was to serve President Pusey and to preserve civility and freedom of research and speech within the University, at a time when a student left protested what it believed to be Harvard's *de facto* collaboration with the military and the companies that supplied it. Following the rowdy demonstrations attending the Dow Corporation's effort at student recruitment and an appearance by Secretary of Defense McNamara, Ford convened a lunch with younger faculty members to see if one could not somehow secure consensus on the maintenance of peaceful dialogue and tolerance within the University, but he was left disappointed with the sense that the impending rupture was not likely to be averted. These growing tensions took a personal toll such that in the spring of 1969, he suffered a mild stroke. In April 1969, when divisions moved toward crisis over the status of the ROTC program on campus and radical students—some organized in the Students for a Democratic Society, a few in would-be revolutionary groups—occupied University Hall, Franklin endorsed the summoning of Cambridge police to clear the building—a necessarily controversial decision that led to student strikes and one of the gravest conflicts that Harvard had ever experienced.

Had Franklin Ford been less committed to the values of liberal tolerance and university openness, less aware as a historian how other societies had succumbed to violence, he might have been less personally afflicted. He came to the deanship at a moment when the Kennedy presidency promised the harmonious union of scholarship and politics and had to live with the

consequences of the rupture of that vision. Those close to him, regardless whether from among the so-called liberal or conservative caucuses of the Faculty, had to observe from his example, what he as a student of the Wars of Religion and of Weimar Germany had long understood: namely that wisdom and moderation and liberal values could not always preserve societies from painful civil strife.

Above all he safeguarded the most important values of this or any institution of higher learning. In a speech delivered to the Harvard Club of Chicago on March 17, 1967 entitled “How Liberal Should College Education Be?”, Franklin Ford said:

The most obvious answer to the question posed by the title of my remarks is that college education must be liberal, *without qualification*. But liberalism must be here understood in its classic sense: the insistence on unrestricted freedom of inquiry and the belief that the highest values of our civilization are those of individual striving and individual attainment, within a community of free men who respect the rights of others. That is what I mean by ‘liberal,’ and it is what I take to be the intellectual position without which higher education would be not just diminished, but destroyed.

On leaving the deanship, he wrote an eloquent defense of the American university in general and of Harvard in particular, and of the need for intermediate institutions—all those associations of civil society that his eighteenth and nineteenth century liberals had celebrated and which he feared were under sustained attack as they had periodically been in earlier eras.

Following the crisis, Franklin returned to teaching and to scholarship in the 1970s. He completed a synthesis of European history during the era of the Revolution and its aftermath, *Europe, 1780-1830*, and then—perhaps reflecting the impact of Kennedy’s death on his generation as well as the Red Brigades of the 1970s—a study of political assassination in 1985: *Political Murder: From Tyrannicide to Terrorism*. He could not have been surprised by the revival of the practice near the end of his life. Although he maintained a remarkable liberal faith, history and experience had taught him that fanaticism was always an option, even for people of learning. Ford continued to train graduate students and retired in 1985, slowly recovering the ironic humor that sustained him and immersing himself in a large-scale study of French Huguenot tradition. He was also collecting material for a history of the Secret Intelligence Branch of the OSS. Eleanor Ford, his sparkling companion, helped sustain him throughout a long and difficult period; she maintained a tradition of hospitality to students and maintained a continuing interest in their progress and families. They took immense pleasure in the birth of their granddaughter; and Franklin remained a model of a precise, wide-ranging, and imaginative scholarship. Following retirement he continued research on his Huguenot history, but the onset of illness interrupted the task. He died on August 31, 2003.

Besides his family, he left a large number of graduate students who gathered twenty years ago this month to celebrate his 65th birthday and have themselves had careers of distinction at universities throughout the country. As a graduate adviser, he never pressed his own agendas or views upon them but gave them space and encouragement to develop wide-ranging and diverse topics. Franklin Ford left an ideal of historical research and university administration, as Tacitus, and later Max Weber summarized it—*sine ira et studio*, without anger or prejudice—and he practiced it tenaciously in an era when it was often held at a discount.

Respectfully submitted,

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