

At a Meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences on November 7, 2017, the following tribute to the life and service of the late Samuel Huntington was placed upon the permanent records of the Faculty.

SAMUEL HUNTINGTON

Born: April 18, 1927

Died: December 24, 2008

Samuel Huntington was perhaps the most distinguished American political scientist of the brilliant generation that reached adulthood after World War II. His books changed the way scholars and politicians thought. A youthful prodigy, he defied demographic destiny and was as original and productive in his 60s as he was in his 30s. Elected president of the American Political Science Association, his works in international relations, American government, and comparative politics laid the foundations for the study of topics ranging from civil-military relations to the comparative study of democratization to the impact of religion on world politics.

His first book, *The Soldier and the State*, was inspired by the confrontation between President Truman and General Douglas MacArthur and called upon the military to serve the country by focusing on the development of its professional competence, while keeping its officers politically neutral. Widely debated inside the military and at Harvard, it remains the first book that civilians and military officers read when they study the problem of how the military and a free society can best co-exist.

His book on political development, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, was for years the most frequently cited work in political science and focused on the challenge of developing institutions that could satisfy in a peaceful manner the increasing demand for political participation in rural societies that were becoming more educated and more industrialized. The central message was simple. The increasing demand by people for more participation in the political decisions that affected them could not be denied. The real choice was between constructing effective institutions that facilitated orderly popular participation in politics or having disorderly extra-legal public movements that disrupted social and political life.

His book on the spread of democracy, *The Third Wave*, tracked economic growth around the world and predicted the peaceful transitions to democracy of countries as far apart as Spain and Taiwan when per capita GDP reached levels high enough to sustain a middle class. *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* was perhaps his most original work. The observation that the United States was defined not by blood but by a set of political principles is commonplace. Huntington pointed out that every 50 years or so, American society was aroused by a renewed commitment to the principles of liberty and equality and, in the grip of what he called “creedal

passion,” Americans would attack the government by demanding that it actually live up to those principles. Huntington noted these periods of passion: the Revolution, the Jacksonian era, the anti-slavery movement of the 1850s, and the first wave of feminism and the call for direct democracy by means of voter initiatives and recall at the turn of the twentieth century. Starting in the 1950s and continuing into the 1960s, there were the civil rights movement and the second wave of women’s liberation. On the basis of this cyclical understanding of American politics, in 1991 Huntington presciently predicted another wave of creedal passion in the second and third decades of the twenty-first century, when the inevitable frustrations with reforms would lead to calls for authoritarian efficiency.

Huntington today may be remembered most for his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, a title chosen by the publisher of the article that gave rise to the book and not one that he particularly liked. The core of the argument is that you cannot understand what people want until you understand who they think they are. Religious beliefs shape identity but do not determine interests, much less behavior. Civilizations do not inevitably clash. He engaged in an active discussion with historian William McNeill, who agreed that cultural areas defined by religions existed and were important but argued that contacts between civilizations were one of the major drivers of intellectual and cultural creativity, a conclusion with which Huntington agreed. If the events of 9/11 and after led others to see a world locked in wars among civilizations, this was not Huntington’s conclusion. In that book and in his final years he was a strong advocate of international multiculturalism, a policy of live and let live and non-intervention in the ways of life of other cultures.

His works were controversial. Huntington relished controversy as a weapon against intellectual complacency. If many Americans thought that civilian politicians ought to pick generals, Huntington thought they ought not to any more than they ought to pick doctors. That choice should be left to professionals. Should poor countries have more democracy? Not before they had effective political institutions. Should America spread its values abroad? No, it should work on spreading its core values at home. He was firm in his beliefs and even more firm in his insistence that his arguments, and all arguments, should be subjected to the most stringent empirical tests possible. He would never back down in a controversy but would never back away from engaging in arguments in which he was challenged to defend his ideas from criticism. It would have been inconceivable for him to insist that his students, who now populate political science departments across America, agree with him. He was particularly delighted with his students who argued to his face that his ideas were wrong, as long as their arguments were grounded in logic and data.

He was an undergraduate at Yale, but was devoted to Harvard. He gave his time unstintingly to strengthening the institutions of Harvard and was named a University

Professor in recognition of his service. He was innovative in his thought but was old-fashioned in some ways, proud of his Anglo-Saxon Protestant heritage, straitlaced in his dress, and fiercely loyal to his friends and his principles. This could make him seem austere. To paraphrase Shakespeare, to those who liked him not, he could seem cold and distant, but to those whom he loved and who loved him, he was as warm and as radiant as the sun. He passed from this earth in December of 2008. His family and friends miss him every day.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Putnam
Henry Rosovsky
Stephen Rosen, Chair