

At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on November 1, 2016, the following tribute to the life and service of the late Mark Alan Kishlansky was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.

MARK ALAN KISHLANSKY

BORN: October 11, 1948

DIED: May 19, 2015

Mark A. Kishlansky, Frank B. Baird, Jr., Professor of History, was a pre-eminent political historian of Stuart England and served as Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences from 1998 to 2001. Born in Brooklyn and raised on Long Island, he earned his B.A. at the State University of New York–Stony Brook in 1970, writing a senior thesis on Hilaire Belloc. He received his M.A. (1972) and Ph.D. (1977) from Brown University under David Underdown, a prominent scholar of seventeenth-century British history. He taught at the University of Chicago from 1975 to 1991 and became a member of the Committee on Social Thought there in 1990. In 1991 he was appointed Professor of History at Harvard, becoming the third member of Harvard's distinguished post-war trio of Tudor-Stuart historians, succeeding W. K. Jordan (1943–70), who was also the President of Radcliffe, and Wallace MacCaffrey (1968–90), the foremost authority on politics in the reign of Elizabeth I.

Kishlansky first made a name for himself during the late 1970s as one of the pioneers in the revisionist history of the early Stuart monarchy. Opposing as anachronistic Marxist and Whiggish models of historical development, the revisionist interpretation emphasized the influence of religious controversy, royal finance, the fortunes of battle, and changing institutional frameworks as well as contingent personalities and events. Kishlansky contributed to the ferment in two key monographs, *The Rise of the New Model Army* (1979) and *Parliamentary Selection* (1986), both of which demonstrated a command of the relevant printed, manuscript, and archival sources as well as a mastery of historical argumentation. These skills reflected Kishlansky's pugnacious character and commitment to what he often described as the historian's first duty: getting it right.

Kishlansky was a master storyteller. His cultivation of the art ranged from the repertoire of hilarious anecdotes that enlivened his conversation to the complex historical narratives of his published writings. Three large-scale narrative projects in particular engaged his energies during his twenty-four years on the Harvard faculty. One was his co-authored *Civilization in the West*, a Western Civilization textbook in an innovative format that

eventually became one of the bestselling historical textbooks in America, running through seven editions (1991–2007). The second was *A Monarchy Transformed* (1996), his volume covering the Stuart monarchy for the Penguin History of Britain. Avoiding (for once) open polemics, the volume told the story of “six reigns and two revolutions” while conveying its author’s life-long fascination with Britain’s most tumultuous century.

The third project—a life of Charles I—was never fully realized. Originally intended for publication in 1999, the 350th anniversary of the king’s execution, the work was interrupted by a sudden onset of heart disease, requiring a quadruple-bypass operation. With the deadline past, Kishlansky recast the biography along more ambitious lines. It became a fierce polemic against deeply rooted historiographical traditions that cast Charles as an inept, dishonest, and blinkered monarch wedded to an outmoded past. Kishlansky’s sensitivity to anachronism and contingency prompted him instead to present Charles as an honorable man acting on a conventional code of kingly conduct in a time when the legitimacy of old institutions was under siege by religious fanatics. But the loss of his beloved wife, Jeanne Thiel, and care of his son Eddie, disabled by Down syndrome, hampered sustained research. A much-reduced version of the biography eventually saw the light in the Penguin Monarch series under the punning title *Charles I: An Abbreviated Life* (2014). Its favorable reception, along with the lively company of his new grandchild, Max, comforted him in his final struggle with kidney disease.

Kishlansky’s exceptional skills as a storyteller, polemicist, and interpreter of documents carried over into his teaching. To undergraduates he was the spellbinding lecturer of his long-running Core course “The English Revolution.” His famous lecture on the execution of Charles I, with its theatrical closing—the bell of Westminster Tower tolling for the death of the king, timed to coincide with the bell of Memorial Church tolling for the end of the class hour—often had an audience considerably in excess of the course enrollment. To graduate students he was the professorial exemplar of tough love. Every seminar was a no-holds-barred debate about the meaning of sources and the cogency of historians’ arguments. Egos were often bruised, but minds developed muscle. That toughness was indeed tempered by love was shown in the great pains Kishlansky took to improve his students’ writing. Graduate students would receive exacting criticism, not only “thou ailest here, and here!” but also meticulous suggestions for improvement. Undergraduates in the Harvard Writing Project for years were treated to “How I Write,” a lecture hilarious and moving by turns, yet full of practical suggestions for those smitten with the charms of Clio. In later years his devotion to the art of writing was conveyed through his freshman seminar on George Orwell, for Kishlansky, the greatest writer of English of the twentieth century.

Colleagues knew Kishlansky as a steadfast advocate for excellence in teaching and scholarship, upholding the highest standards in professorial appointments and graduate recruitment. He was one of the core group of faculty who designed a sweeping reform of the History curriculum in the 1990s, and himself anchored for many years the new, faculty-

led sophomore tutorial that emphasized, characteristically, the arts of writing history. Colleagues who thought him rough and loud at first usually discovered him, on further acquaintance, to be generous, witty, and sympathetic. He bonded with some over Bob Dylan, with others over baseball. Fans of the Boston Red Sox might be baffled by his lifelong passion for the Yankees, but his love and knowledge of the game could not be denied. He once described himself as having “the finest baseball mind in Lexington” and for many years proved it as the coach of his son’s Little League team. The proudest achievement of his life was being appointed professor at Harvard, and his loyalty to the university, especially after his son Matthew joined the Class of ’00, was absolute.

Respectfully submitted,

David Armitage

Ann Blair

Michael McCormick

Eric Nelson

James Hankins, Chair