

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on December 4, 2018,
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Richard Edgar
Pipes was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

RICHARD EDGAR PIPES

BORN: July 11, 1923

DIED: May 17, 2018

Richard Edgar Pipes died on May 17, 2018. A Harvard Ph.D., he spent his entire academic career at the university, teaching Russian and Soviet history from 1958 until his retirement in 1996. After a two-year tenure as director of East European and Soviet Affairs at the National Security Council (1981–82), he returned to Harvard and continued to work regularly in Widener Library after his formal retirement. Although he dubbed himself a “non-belonger,” Harvard was the place to which he belonged for most of his long and dramatic life.

A refugee from Nazi rule, Pipes was born to an assimilated Jewish family in Poland on July 11, 1923. He spoke German at home and Polish on the streets of Warsaw. In 1939, his father used governmental and diplomatic connections to smuggle his family out of Nazi-occupied Warsaw to Italy and then the United States. Most members of his family who stayed behind perished in Nazi concentration camps. Richard Pipes called himself a refugee from the Holocaust. He became an American citizen in 1943 while serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps.

Pipes came to Harvard after undergraduate study at Cornell where the Army had sent him to learn Russian, thereby launching his career as one of the nation’s foremost Russian specialists. His Harvard doctoral dissertation on the formation of the Soviet Union, defended in 1950 and turned into a book in 1954, remains an important history of the creation of the Soviet multi-national state—a subject all but ignored by mainstream academia at the time but crucial to explaining the Soviet collapse of 1991, which Pipes had both long predicted and strongly desired. A contrarian by nature, Pipes questioned received wisdom on Russian and Soviet history, starting his revolt against established historiography by contesting the interpretation of his Ph.D. supervisor Michael Karpovich, who regarded Russia as a “normal” European state that had temporarily lost its way during the Revolution of 1917. Pipes became one of the chief representatives of the “totalitarian school” in Western historiography of the U.S.S.R.

Pipes sought the origins of Soviet totalitarianism in Russia’s medieval and early modern past. In his opinion, elaborated in his 1974 bestseller, *Russia under the Old Regime*, the lack of

individual liberties and rights of property ownership under the tsars had distinguished Russia from the West from the very beginning. His view of the Russian Revolution, presented in his 1990 study under that title and in his subsequent book, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (1994), was equally controversial, for he described the Bolsheviks as a conspiratorial clique hungry for power, rather than as well-intentioned idealists, and the October Revolution as a political coup. Pipes viewed history as a humanistic endeavor and saw himself as a writer. He ultimately produced over two dozen books.

In 1970, Senator Henry Jackson invited Richard Pipes to testify before Congress about U.S.-Soviet relations, which initiated his second career as a public intellectual and policy analyst. He wrote numerous essays in publications such as *Commentary* expounding his understanding of the Soviet Union as an oppressive and aggressive state. In 1976, he led a group of experts on the Soviet Union who questioned the conclusions of their CIA counterparts about Soviet foreign-policy intentions and capabilities. Dubbed Team B to distinguish Pipes and his fellow experts from the CIA's Team A, the group argued that the Soviet Union's strategic doctrine was not defensive, as the CIA analysts suggested, but offensive. Pipes continued his advocacy of a robust American response to the Soviet challenge as the Russia and Eastern Europe expert in the National Security Council and the de facto chief adviser to President Ronald Reagan on the Soviet Union (1981–83). He considered détente a mistaken policy that allowed the Soviets to strengthen their nuclear capabilities. Pipes supplied intellectual authority and academic legitimacy to endorse Reagan's belief that communism, as an economically ineffective and immoral system, would ultimately be defeated by the democratic West.

A frequent target of Soviet propagandistic attacks during the Cold War years, Pipes was hailed after the collapse of the Soviet Union as one of the few historians who had predicted its eventual demise, both as a cynical regime based on a failed ideology and as a multi-ethnic empire based on domination. Boris Yeltsin's young advisers saw him as an analyst who identified the faults of the system they were eager to dismantle. Ironically, Pipes was also highly esteemed by some of Vladimir Putin's advisers, who found his works about Russia's historical divergence from the West a source of inspiration and justification for Russia's separate path and new wave of authoritarianism.

Richard Pipes gave his memoirs a Latin title, *Vixi*—I have lived. He had indeed lived to the fullest. “I felt and feel to this day that I have been spared not to waste my life on self-indulgence or self-aggrandizement but to spread a moral message by showing, using examples from history, how evil ideas lead to evil consequences,” he wrote in *Vixi* (2003), referring to his escape from Nazi rule. Pipes has been justly identified by a biographer as one of the five founders of Russian historical studies in the United States. Distinguished by his gentlemanly style, Pipes trained more than 60 Ph.D. students, insisting on deep immersion in primary sources and clarity in writing but not agreement with his own interpretations. At Harvard he directed the Russian Research Center and was among the founders of the Ukrainian Research

Institute. He stayed in Cambridge after retirement, with no slackening of his activity in the field, as evidenced by the eleven books he had published thereafter.

Richard Pipes is survived by his wife of 71 years, Irene Roth Pipes; two sons, Daniel Pipes and Steven Pipes; and four grandchildren. He will be missed by all who were fortunate enough to appreciate the depth of his intellect and the strength of his moral convictions.

Respectfully submitted,

Timothy Colton

Terry Martin

Serhii Plokhii, Chair