

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on October 15, 2002,
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Adam Ulam
was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

ADAM BRUNO ULAM

BORN: April 8, 1922
DIED: March 28, 2000

Adam Ulam was a pre-eminent scholar of Russian and Soviet politics and of the history of the Cold War.

He was born and raised in Lwów, a major city of interwar Poland. He was the third child in the prosperous Jewish family of Jozef Ulam, a lawyer, and Chana Ulam (née Auerbach), who died in 1938. His elder brother Stanislaw, an outstanding mathematician, came to the United States in 1936 to join the Harvard Society of Fellows. He would later move to Los Alamos and be a key contributor to the Manhattan Project.

Adam Ulam, having followed Stan's recommendation about college study in the U.S., narrowly missed being trapped by the outbreak of World War II. It was only his father's sense of impending disaster and plea that he depart early that got him on board a ship out of Poland around August 20, 1939, weeks before the invasion by the German Reich and the Soviet Union. The family left behind met a cruel fate in the Holocaust. Ulam's sister Stefania was executed by Nazi camp guards in 1943; Jozef died in unknown circumstances; cousins, aunts, and uncles also perished. Letters from Poland stopped in 1940. The brothers learned of the deaths of father and sister only in 1945, by which time Lwów (now L'viv) had been incorporated into Soviet Ukraine. Their bereavement, and Adam's gratitude for the mentorship Stan offered, cemented a bond which remained unshakeable until Stan's death in 1984.

Ulam was introduced to academic pursuits as a Brown undergraduate. His main interests were British history and philosophy, which merged in a senior thesis on the English Utilitarians. Afterward, denied enlistment in the army because of his nearsightedness, he spent a year teaching Slavic languages to soldiers at the University of Wisconsin. He entered the Ph.D. program in the Harvard Department of Government in 1944 and completed a thesis on Fabian socialism in 1947; it became his first book in 1951. Ulam was never to leave Harvard. Hired as an instructor in the Government Department in 1949, he was awarded tenure in 1954. He was Gurney Professor of History and Political Science

from 1979 until his retirement in 1992.

As a young scholar, Ulam took up the study of the Soviet bloc, first as a sideline but soon as his main focus. He later quipped that with an eye to course enrollments he hitched his star to a rising empire, now that the sun was setting on the British. But the shift fitted perfectly with two lifelong fascinations—with political ideas and with the totalitarian regimes that had engulfed his birthplace—and he already had the linguistic tools needed. Ulam's first book in the field, *Titoism and the Cominform* (1952), argued presciently that the Communists' reckless pursuit of their goals risked social and economic disaster and internecine quarrels which could undermine their power. His last scholarly book, *The Communists: The Story of Power and Lost Illusions* (1992), took the same approach, now in retrospect. Communism, he said, lost out because its ideology was wrongheaded and because growing awareness of that in the governing parties demoralized them and bred irrepressible conflicts within and between Communist nations.

Ulam was an incisive and remarkably fecund scholar. All told, he authored twenty books. His *Unfinished Revolution* (1960) was a searching exploration of Marxist thought. *The Bolsheviks* (1965) quickly became a standard biography of Lenin, and *Stalin: The Man and His Era* (1973) just as quickly for Stalin. The magisterial *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-67* (1968) was perhaps his most widely read book. There were two sequels: *The Rivals: America and Russia since World War II* (1971) and *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1970-1982* (1983). Among Ulam's other works were a textbook on comparative government (*Patterns of Government*, 1958, with Samuel Beer); a critique of U.S. higher education (*The Fall of the American University*, 1972); several volumes on Russian revolutionary thought; and a novel on the Soviet 1930s (*The Kirov Affair*, 1988).

Ulam was hard to pigeonhole intellectually, and he took some pleasure from this fact and from his independence of all orthodoxies and parties. Despite his abhorrence of Communist regimes, he counseled patience and adherence to Western values as the best way to contain them and bring about their dissolution. His writings emphasized historical and civilizational context while also insisting on the significance, and occasional perversity, of personalities. He meted out praise sparingly; his criticisms were more often couched in coolly ironic than in hotly dismissive tones. Ulam resisted the trend in the social sciences toward hypothesis-testing, and over the years took his distance from the Government Department. He was more in his element in non-departmental venues, principally Eliot House, the Signet Society, the long table at the Faculty Club, and the Russian Research Center—seeing in them, one suspects, qualities of the convivial Polish coffeehouses recollected so fondly in his memoir *Understanding the Cold War: A Historian's Personal Reflections* (rev. ed., Transaction Publishers, 2002). The Russian Research Center was his real intellectual home. A charter member since its founding in 1948, he directed it with distinction for sixteen years.

Ulam had deep friendships in and beyond the Harvard community. He maintained, however, an inner reserve which undoubtedly owed much to the tragedy of the Ulams of Lwów, a topic on which he was nearly silent until its appearance in his memoir. He never returned to Poland or Ukraine, and made but one brief visit to Russia. Indeed, he made a point of minimizing all travel. Even on campus, he sent research assistants to Widener rather than browse the shelves because, as he told colleagues, he feared their riches would distract him from his latest writing project.

Adam Bruno Ulam married Mary Hamilton (Molly) Burgwin in 1963. Their marriage produced two sons, Alexander and Joseph. The couple divorced in 1991 but reconciled later, when Molly did much to nurse him through his illnesses.

Respectfully submitted,

Samuel Beer
Abbott Gleason (Brown)
Samuel Huntington
Martin Malia (Berkeley)
Richard E. Pipes
Timothy J. Colton, Chair