

J. Woodford Howard, Jr.

J. Woodford Howard, Jr., the Thomas P. Stran Professor Emeritus at the Johns Hopkins University—known as “Woody” by his colleagues and former students—passed away on May 19, 2017 after a long illness. Highly regarded in the field of public law, Woody was an inspiring scholar and teacher, wonderful advisor, passionate patron of the arts, and loving husband and father.

Born July 5, 1931, Woody grew up in Prestonsburg, eastern Kentucky, the son of a lawyer. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Duke University in 1952 and began graduate school at Princeton University, taking two masters degrees in 1954 and 1955 before serving with the US Air Force in Morocco. He returned to Princeton to complete a PhD in political science in 1959, under Alpheus T. Mason, and would later recount that he sequestered himself in the graduate facilities for eleven months, stepping off campus only once while finishing his dissertation. He spent several years teaching at Lafayette College and Duke before arriving at Johns Hopkins University in 1967 as an associate professor. He became a full professor in 1969 and chaired the department in the early 1970s. Earning the endowed chair in 1975, he served there until taking emeritus status in 1996.

Woody’s expertise and passion were in US constitutional law, the Supreme Court, and the judicial process—the traditional core of the public law subfield—and in his teaching and work he was committed to a broad and pluralistic future for the field. His first book, *Mr. Justice Murphy: A Political Biography* (1968), is commonly considered among the finest judicial biographies. In a 1971 article in the *American Political Science Review*, he sought to defend a place for biography “related to, if not part of, the scientific enterprise”: valuing aggregate analysis but using the case studies of judges to “reclaim human beings from abstraction, a function the more to be prized the greater is our success in aggregation” (Howard 1971, 715). His second book was highly influential in turning the subfield’s preoccupation with the Supreme Court, while Woody himself developed new methodological skills. For *Courts of Appeals in the Federal Judicial System* (1981), Woody tracked the work of three circuits over two decades and, combined with 35 interviews with circuit judges, advanced a conception of the judicial role that explains how political attitudes affect behavior when judges do not have the independence of the high court. In his later career, Woody returned to biography but extended his work to trial courts, with the project of the authorized biography of Harold R. Medina, the most famous trial judge in America during the early Cold War era. (The biography will be published posthumously.)

Through his life and work, Woody fought against the over-simplification that threatened to reduce all judicial behavior to mere political attitudes, and that divided the discipline as a battle of quantitative versus qualitative approaches. Far from being a methodological warrior, he sought to identify what the “quantifiers” and “qualifiers” shared in common. As he emphasized in an influential *APSR* article, “On the Fluidity of Judicial Choice” (1968), what he saw in close study of the Court pointed to “the essential unity of research techniques,” where the “the critical need is for attempts to combine the findings of aggregate analysis and microanalysis in a theoretical synthesis.” The field responded, working to account for institutions and strategic behavior well before similar turns were made in other subfields. In a chapter reflecting on Woody’s contributions to the study of judicial behavior, Nancy Maveety and John Maltese concluded that his work had been “both a substantive foundation for subsequent research questions and a catalyst

for the ongoing dialogue about research design.” In 2008, Woody was recognized by the Law and Courts section of APSA with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

An outstanding, dedicated teacher, Woody sought to impart the history and richness of his subjects with his students. He was exceptionally generous with his time, taking many hours to prepare for each class, and then sitting with students in appointments that could last for hours. He was as passionate as anyone about the Supreme Court and recent developments in constitutional law, but urged students to never overlook the significance of lower courts and the non-constitutional domains of public law, especially administrative law. Recalling his father’s practice in a rural county, he declined to allow political scientists to become too confident in their methods, holding everyone to the test, “so what do we political scientists know now that a good courthouse attorney didn’t know all along?” To raise expectations even further, to Woody, great scholarship required great writing. Many of his students recall his blue pencil markings all over their work, detailed line edits that elevated their writing. Multiple winners of the Corwin Award, given to the best dissertation in public law, are testament to his success as a mentor. As Cornelius Kerwin, until recently the president of American University said, “I came to Hopkins as a student, and after he worked me over, I left as a scholar.” All the same, he urged students to find balance in their lives, particularly encouraging them to catch concerts or walk through the Baltimore Museum of Art on the edge of campus.

Beyond life as a scholar and teacher, Woody was a gentleman of grace and gentle wit. He was a noted patron of the arts. For decades, he frequented museums, concerts, and the opera, and he accelerated the pace of travel in his retirement. Students, frequently welcomed to his house for dinner, knew his taste for abstract expressionism, and were offered a tour of his collection, which included work by Jasper Johns, Grace Hartigan, and de Kooning. He sat on the multiple boards for the arts, particularly the Baltimore Museum of Art. His constant companion in these pursuits was Valerie (known as Jane), his wife of 57 years, and Woody was equally a devoted father to his daughter Elaine. Woody is survived by Jane and Elaine, along with two grandsons. A memorial service was held in June 2017 in Baltimore.

—Patrick Schmidt, Macalester College

REFERENCES

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