

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS MURRAY J. EDELMAN**

Never one to do the expected, or to take institutional claims of expertise seriously, Murray J. Edelman, the George Herbert Mead Professor Emeritus of Political Science, died on January 26, 2001, more than 25 years after his doctors claimed his heart disease would take his life imminently.

Professor Edelman was born in 1919 in Pennsylvania, received his bachelor's degree in social sciences from Bucknell University in 1941, his master's degree in history from the University of Chicago in 1942, and his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Illinois in 1948. He joined the faculty of the University of Illinois that year, and remained there until he joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin - Madison in 1966. Professor Edelman received many awards during his career, including distinguished and visiting professorships in this country and in Austria and Italy, Fulbright Awards, fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as other distinctions. He was awarded a University Houses chair in 1971, which he named for George Herbert Mead, the great philosopher and social psychological theorist who inspired much of his own work on symbolic politics. In 1984 he was named a WARF Senior Distinguished Research Professor. He retired in 1990.

Murray Edelman began his career investigating public policy, especially with respect to labor-management relations, but he soon turned to the intellectual preoccupation that was to dominate his intellectual life for more than forty years: symbolic politics and the subjective aspects of politics and power. He was interested, above all, in the meanings of politics, and how the multiple meanings of single events, persons, processes, and institutions could alternatively be powerful sources of good or evil. He cared passionately about democracy, but believed, as he said in his first major book on this subject, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (1964) that "not only does systematic research suggest that the most cherished forms of popular participation in government are largely symbolic, but also that many of the public programs universally taught and believed to benefit a mass public in fact benefit relatively small groups" (p.4). He spent his career looking under political performances to see the hidden shadow plays.

The Symbolic Uses of Politics was an eye-opener to his discipline, it became a classic, and it remains required reading for anyone interested in symbolic politics. He followed this work with many others exploring different aspects of this problem. Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence (1971) focused especially on mass political action and public opinion in democracies. Political Language: Words that Succeed and Politics that Fail (1977) is a stunning compilation of essays revolving around such problems as the implications of the designation of a situation as a "crisis," the meaning of political architecture, and perhaps his most influential essay, on the language of the helping professions. These works were followed by Constructing the Political Spectacle (1988), From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions (1995) and his final book, completed near the end of his life by his daughter, the sociologist Lauren Edelman, The Politics of Misinformation. Each of these works demonstrate his acute observation, his devotion to language, and his broad intellectual interests.

Murray Edelman's eleven books and numerous articles constitute only the most obvious contribution he made to the scholarly world. Even more important is his living legacy: the scores of students, colleagues and others who learned from him, and whose continuing work depends on his teaching and inspiration. This was never more evident than at the conference held on the occasion of his retirement, attended by an impressive array of scholars who came to honor him, to toast him, and to roast him. The latter was important as well, for no one who knew Murray Edelman can forget his quit wit, and the way his eyes would light up and his mouth twist into a wry and puckish smile at the slightest provocation.

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Professor Edelman is survived by his wife, Bacia Edelman; their daughters Lauren Edelman, Judith Edelman-Green and her husband Bernie and their children, and Sarah Coyne and her husband Tom and their children; as well as his twin brother Milton, and many other loving family, students, and friends.

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