

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

ON THE DEATH OF DEAN AND PROFESSOR EMERITUS E. DAVID CRONON

Edmund David Cronon, dean emeritus of the College of Letters and Science and professor emeritus of history, died on December 5, 2006, after a brief illness, at the age of eighty-two. "Dave," as he was known to everyone, spent the better part of his adult life at this university, and it is safe to say that he did as much as any single person to give this university the shape and stature that it enjoys today.

Dave was born on March 11, 1924, in Minneapolis, where he grew up. After a year at Macalester College, he joined the U.S. Army and saw action during World War II in the Philippines and attained the rank of first lieutenant. Taking advantage of the G.I. Bill — a program he always valued and honored — Dave returned to college at Oberlin, from which he was graduated in 1948, and then came here to Madison, where he received his M.A. in history in 1949 and Ph.D. in 1953.

Dave became one of a stellar group of students who worked with a stellar faculty in American history, including Merle Curti, who remained a close friend for fifty years, William B. Hesseltine, Merrill Jensen, and Howard K. Beale, with whom he wrote his dissertation. Dave's first book was his master's thesis, a study of the black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey. Published in 1955 under the title *Black Moses* and recently reissued with an introduction by the leading African-American historian John Hope Franklin, this book remains one of the University of Wisconsin Press' all-time best-sellers. Dave later published two books from his dissertation research: one, a study of Josephus Daniels as ambassador to Mexico in the 1930s; the other, an edited volume of Daniels' diaries as secretary of the navy under Woodrow Wilson. Also as a graduate student, Dave spent a year in England as a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Manchester.

After receiving his doctorate, Dave left Madison for nine years, to teach first at Yale, from 1953 to 1959, and then at the University of Nebraska, from 1959 to 1962. He enjoyed both those experiences, but he liked telling the colleagues at Yale that he was accustomed to better library and archival resources in Madison. He also disliked the practice of hiring young faculty without prospects for promotion to tenure: he once told one junior recruit to our faculty (the chairman of this memorial committee), "We don't make ivy league appointments."

Dave's appointment as professor in the Department of History in 1962 was a true homecoming for him, and he quickly involved himself in assuring the department's continued growth and continued excellence. In 1966, he was elected chairman of the department, and his three years in that office encompassed both the best and worst of times for the department and the university. His chairmanship began in expansionary times, and Dave oversaw the recruitment and retention of a large number of historians who added to the breadth of the department's offerings and maintained the excellence he had known as a student. He also managed the department's move from its overcrowded quarters in Bascom Hall to spacious facilities in the then-new Humanities Building, which is now named for one of the distinguished historians whom Dave helped to retain here, George Mosse. On a more trying note, Dave also chaired the department during the beginning of campus protests over the Vietnam War, Afro-American studies, and the strikes by teaching assistants. In this turmoil, Dave remained a rock of integrity, stability, and sanity.

In 1970, Dave began four years as director of the Institute for Research in the Humanities, and he also served on the newly created University Committee. He had already been involved in campus affairs, but these two posts plunged him deeper into the broader life of the university. One of the tasks of the University Committee during these years was to arrange the practical workings of the newly merged system. Dave and other members regularly met with their counterparts at the University of Wisconsin to deal with the devil in the details of this change in Madison's context.

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At the beginning of 1974, he took a brief break from university involvements to serve for a semester as the first Fulbright professor at Moscow State University. As the first American to teach U.S. history in the Soviet Union, Dave got this diplomatically sensitive professorship off to a superb start.

Dave's greatest contribution to the wider university began when he returned from Moscow. He was named dean of the College of Letters and Science, a post he would hold for the next fifteen years. The impact of his work in that capacity can only be described by such adjectives as "extraordinary," "monumental," and "path-breaking." Under his deanship and often despite recurring budgetary stringencies, Dave oversaw the growth of "L & S" from 14,000 to 21,000 students. He consistently supported the advance of programs and scholarship into new fields.

Unexpectedly perhaps for someone with a background in the humanities, Dave took the lead in promoting both the study and use of computers in the college. Without special funding, he backed the expansion of the Department of Computer Sciences, and he provided funds and encouragement for faculty and staff to acquire and learn how to use computers. Perhaps the clearest tribute to Dave's role in this field came last year when a distinguished computer scientist, Guri Sohi, named his WARF/University Houses professorship for Dave.

Other new fields such as women's studies and many of the area studies and study abroad programs began during his deanship. When he interviewed a distinguished women's historian, she commented that she thought some members of the faculty were unsympathetic to her appointment and field. In a characteristic display of his wit and understanding, Dave answered, "Perhaps, but we have demography on our side." She accepted the appointment, and the rest, as we say, is history. Dave revamped the structure of the dean's office, instituting the academic planning committee and the appointment of associate deans for the three main disciplinary areas in the college. Always an innovator and modernizer, he also remained a respecter of tradition and practices. The college had the best of both worlds in Dave.

After his retirement from the deanship, he remained a valued advisor and supporter to successive deans, chancellors, History Department colleagues, and friends throughout the university. He also returned to the study and practice of history, but in a way that drew upon his administrative experience and acquaintance with the workings of the university. Dave accepted the assignment to continue the history of the university begun by his friend and mentor, Merle Curti. In collaboration with John Jenkins, he produced two volumes that brought the history of the university up to 1970. These were published in 1994 and 1999 and stand as worthy successors to the two volumes previously done by Merle Curti and Vernon Carstensen.

For such a busy, productive teacher, scholar, and administrator, Dave carried his occupational burdens lightly. He made time for many outside activities in the community. He was a loyal member and supporter of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, where he served on the Board of Curators from 1964 to 1990 and as president from 1970 to 1973. A music lover, he served as vice-president of Madison Opera, and he belonged to the Madison Literary Club. He was also a long-time and active member of the First Unitarian Society. Dave was a devoted family man and lover of the outdoors. In 1950, as a graduate student here in Madison, he met Jean Hotmar, who became wife of fifty-six years. Dave and Jean shared travels around the world, hiking in many places, and a second home on Green Lake. They had two sons, William, who joined his father as a member of the Department of History and is now Vilas Professor of History, Geography, and Environmental Studies, and Robert, who operates a consulting firm for non-profit organizations. The Cronons also had four grandchildren. Dave was blessed to have both his sons present at the time of his brief final illness, and his family gathered for a moving memorial service at the Unitarian Meeting House. The service was a celebration of a life of service, devotion, and accomplishment, and the overflowing attendance was testimony to the impact that he had on so many people.

In Dave Cronon's passing, this university lost a giant, one of its greatest builders. If you seek his monument, look around you.

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