

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

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS EDWIN BLACK**

Edwin Black, professor emeritus of communication arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, died January 13, 2007, in League City, Texas, outside Houston. He was born in Houston in 1929, attended that city's public schools, received his B.A. from the University of Houston, and earned his master's and doctorate degrees at Cornell University. After serving on the faculties of Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Pittsburgh, he joined the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Communication Arts in 1967, where he taught until his retirement in 1994.

Widely recognized as the single most important figure in the development of rhetorical criticism as an academic enterprise during the second half of the twentieth century, Ed vaulted to prominence with the publication of *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (1965), a seminal book that redefined the nature, scope, and methodology of the critical enterprise. Over the next three decades he produced a stream of celebrated essays on topics ranging from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address to Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream," from the sentimental style of nineteenth-century oratory to the cancer metaphor in the rhetoric of the radical right, from the aesthetics of American political discourse to the recurrent idioms of secrecy and disclosure, from the mutability of rhetoric to the malleability of Richard Nixon. Distinguished by their singular insight and gifted prose, these works kept Black at the forefront of his discipline—as did his co-editorship of the enormously influential *Prospect of Rhetoric* (1971); his highly successful term as editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1975–1978); his acclaimed book *Rhetorical Questions: Studies of Public Discourse* (1992); his many invited lectures at universities throughout the United States; and his participation in scores of professional meetings and conferences. Twice he received the National Communication Association's most prestigious discipline-wide awards for outstanding scholarship—in 1966 for *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, and in 1988 for his essay "Secrecy and Disclosure as Rhetorical Forms."

In addition to his achievements as a scholar, Ed had an exceptional record of service to the university. He served two terms as chair of the Department of Communication Arts (1970–1975, 1980–1981), during which time he oversaw the department's emergence as one of the largest undergraduate majors in the College of Letters and Science and as a top-ranked graduate program. From 1981 to 1989 he was the Graduate School's associate dean for the humanities, a post he filled with gusto and distinction. During the same years, he also sat on the Graduate School Administrative Committee, the University of Wisconsin Press Publication Board, and the Executive Committee of the Institute for Research in the Humanities. From 1979 to 1990 he served three chancellors as chair of the Committee on Honorary Degrees. To all these posts he brought keen intelligence, astute judgment, unfailing decency, and scrupulous devotion to the highest ideals of the University of Wisconsin.

Ed is survived by his wife, Sharon Ruhly, and his canine companion, Sammy. With his passing, the university has lost one of its most distinguished scholars and finest citizens.

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