

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION JAY FLIEGELMAN (1949 – 2007)

Jay Fliegelman, William Robertson Coe Professor of American literature and a leading figure in American Studies, died at his home in Menlo Park on August 14, 2008. The cause was complications from liver disease and cancer.

Jay Fliegelman was born in New York City on March 16, 1949. He grew up in Manhattan, where his father practiced medicine. He received his early education at Birch Wathan School in New York. Several factors that proved decisive in his later life came into play during these years. He became an inveterate museum-goer, learning an enormous amount from hours spent at the Frick Museum, the New York Historical Society, and the American Museum of Natural History. He frequented antiquarian book shops run by immigrant Jews on lower Fourth Avenue and soon became an ardent collector of rare and unusual imprints. While still in adolescence, he was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, a degenerative ailment that took a heavy toll throughout his life. In the words of a friend and colleague, "Jay's spontaneity was always connected to his life-affirming refusal of illness – his intellectual power always played out both against and in reaction to his awareness of frailness and vulnerability." He took his B.A. at Wesleyan University, where he studied with the Americanist Richard Slotkin. An undergraduate research project took him to the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. where he discovered his lifelong vocation for archival research.

From the moment Jay arrived for graduate work at Stanford in 1971, his omnivorous intellectual curiosity and his range of reading and knowledge distinguished him among his fellows. He would sit in lecture and seminar tensed forward, engaged with what was being said and poised for a query or comment to clarify or extend the issue. For him, learning was not so much a competitive as a communal venture in which everyone joyfully participated so as to enlighten and support one another in the larger enterprise. When Jay finished his degree in 1976 and applied for an open departmental position in early American literature, he was cautioned that there was a presumption close to prohibition against hiring our own doctoral students, but he was so clearly the outstanding candidate in the national field of applicants that he joined his former mentors as a colleague and spent his entire professional career at Stanford.

Jay revised his dissertation into his extraordinary and acclaimed first book, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority* (1982).

A "study in intellectual and cultural history," its scope and ambition are comparable to the work of the patriarch of early American historians, Perry Miller. But where Miller's emphasis was primarily intellectual, on the ideas that shaped culture, Jay's was primarily cultural, on the complex ways in which social and psychological life was shaped by ideas. And where his predecessor focused on the Puritans, Jay's interest was on how the American Enlightenment evolved out of Puritanism to shape the American Revolution. Hence *Prodigals and Pilgrims* examines how the Revolution was made possible by a shift in family relations from the older patriarchal family model of the Puritans to an Enlightenment model of "a new paternal ideal characterized by a more affectionate and equalitarian relationship with children." The argument draws

magisterially on literary, pedagogical, philosophical, theological, and political texts from both sides of the Atlantic, and did so before trans-Atlantic criticism emerged as a field in literary and historical studies. Thus the narrative traces the separation of the rebellious sons of liberty from the royal authority of Britain, while indicating how the thinking of Milton and Locke and popular fictions like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Clarissa* informed the lives of the colonists and so enabled the revolution wrought by Paine and Jefferson and Franklin.

Jay's second book, Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, & the Culture of Performance, is a sequel to Prodigals and Pilgrims inasmuch as it likewise explores the cultural genesis of the War of Independence. But whereas the earlier book draws most of its evidence from widely read eighteenth-century printed sources – novels, poems, newspapers, and political treatises – Declaring Independence more fully reflects Jay's personal and professional interest in American Enlightenment culture at its widest: music, theories of oratory and "natural" language, engravings, furniture, and their often improbable interconnections. For instance, in a chapter entitled "Harmonies: Homer, Fugues, and Chairs," we learn how Windsor chairs initially owed their popularity in Britain and its colonies to the taste of George the Second, father of the "despot" and "tyrant" denounced in the Declaration, but thanks to their simplicity, elegance, and strength came to symbolize the Founding Fathers' ideal of union. The homes of Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson were furnished with them, and Jefferson most likely drafted the Declaration while sitting in one. By means of such illuminating juxtapositions of ideas, objects, and events does Jay recreate and enlarge our understanding of the larger cultural milieu of the Declaration.

As fine a scholar as Jay Fliegelman was, his colleagues probably remember him even more vividly for the extraordinary dedication that he brought to teaching. On three occasions he won awards for teaching, including the Dean's Award for Outstanding Teaching and the Associated Students of Stanford University Teaching Award. These honors do not begin to tell the story of his remarkable devotion to classroom instruction and to advising and reading dissertations. He set the highest standards for his students, and then continued to guide them long after they left Stanford. By March 2007 he had directed no fewer than thirty completed dissertations, of which twenty-one were either published or accepted for publication; he was also involved then in directing three other dissertations and serving as a reader on four others. Altogether he was a reader on fifteen additional dissertations, of which seven were eventually published.

Jay loyally served as chair of the English Department for three years and as Director of the Program in American Studies for five, but by neither temperament nor ambition was he cut out to be an administrator. Rather, his principal contributions to university and professional service – which were immense – reflected his intense engagement with early American literature and culture and his dedication to his English Department colleagues and to the graduate student community of which he had once been a member. Besides serving as the English Department's Director of Graduate Studies for many years, he was a highly successful Director of Graduate Placement, devoting countless hours to counseling our jobseekers, helping them devise attractive applications, and promoting their candidacies through his network of professional contacts. How extensive and important that national network was is suggested by his many invited lectures at peer universities and his memberships on the editorial boards of prestigious journals in the fields of American Studies and general

literary studies: William and Mary Quarterly, Eighteenth-Century Studies, Early American Literature, Arizona Quarterly, and, perhaps most notably, PMLA.

On May 20, 2007, less than three months before his death, Jay and his work as a scholar and teacher were honored at a one-day conference at Stanford organized and presented by former graduate students, most of them now faculty members at colleges and universities across the country. This event, which came to be known as the “Jayfest,” had an agenda that combined relatively standard panel topics (for instance, Jay’s forthcoming edition of Herman Melville’s Benito Cereno) with ones that defied conference convention (“The Fliegelman Style,” “The Fliegelman Effect”). It proved an extraordinary combination of intellectual rigor and passionate testimony to Jay’s importance as a mentor. (In the invited audience, too, were younger Stanford faculty whom Jay had mentored and older faculty who had been his own mentors.) Altogether, the Jayfest was a moving tribute to one great teacher-scholar and a validation of our collective work as research university professors - an event unique in the experience of the authors of this resolution.

The Jay Fliegelman library, a collection of remarkable copies of texts ranging from America’s Colonial period up through the Civil War, has now been acquired by the Stanford University Libraries. Jay collected association copies, books owned and in most cases signed or annotated by a person of historical significance. His collection of more than 150 titles includes, among others, Thomas Jefferson’s copy of *Paradise Lost*, a copy Jefferson loaned to James Madison, who then signed it himself; one of the few known imprints of the 1831 edition of *Nat Turner’s Rebellion* (a copy owned by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow), Frederick Douglass’ *My Bondage and My Freedom*, presented by its author to Ellen Richardson, the woman whose money manumitted Douglass from slavery; Patrick Henry’s copy of a play by General John Burgoyne, turned into a promptbook for performance in Henry’s own home; and a copy of *The Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* owned by both Increase Mather and Cotton Mather. The annotations and ownership associations in these books will provide scholars for years to come with insights into print culture and book ownership in early American history.

Jay Fliegelman was a brilliant conversationalist, treasured friend and devoted husband. He is survived by his wife Christine Guth of London, U.K. and his sister Sarah Benenson of Menlo Park. His friends, colleagues, and students paid tribute to his remarkable achievement and unforgettable vitality at a service in Stanford’s Memorial Church on September 20.

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