

November 25, 2003

**IN MEMORIAM  
JOHN S. GALBRAITH  
PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF HISTORY  
CHANCELLOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
1916-2003**

John Galbraith, UCSD's second chancellor, died of complications from pneumonia on 10 June 2003. He was 86 years old. A pre-eminent scholar of the history of the British Empire, John was recruited to the campus chancellorship in 1964 from UCLA, where he had held academic appointment since 1948. After a four year term as Chancellor, John took up the distinguished Smuts Visiting Fellowship at Cambridge University. He subsequently returned to UCSD and served as a professor of history. At the time of his retirement in 1986, John explained that he understood he "was closing the door on a career in administration." He claimed he never regretted it.

A native of Glasgow, John Galbraith emigrated to the United States in 1925. He received his bachelor's degree from Miami University of Ohio in 1938. A strapping 6-foot-3, weighing in at a bit over 200 pounds, John was a formidable center for the Red Hawks men's basketball team. By 1943 he had earned a master's degree and a doctorate in history from the University of Iowa – where he also met his bride-to-be Laura Huddleston. A brief stint as an official historian with the U.S. Air Force preceded a teaching appointment at Ohio University; later, in 1948, he joined the ladder-rank faculty at UCLA. John became Chair of the UCLA History Department in 1954.

In the Spring of 1964, John assumed duties as UCSD's Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, reporting to the campus' founding Chancellor, Herb York. Shortly thereafter, on the occasion of Herb's stepping down, John became Chancellor himself. Almost immediately John engaged in a sharply contested disagreement with UC President Clark Kerr over UCSD's library resources. The struggle over funding continued for some time – President Kerr envisioning a very modest commitment with regard to collections, John insisting that UCSD had to have a first-rate library in order to be an outstanding UC campus. Indeed, at UCSD's commencement exercises in 1967, which President Kerr attended, the Catholic Bishop of San Diego gave an invocation that included a request that God provide the kind of library UCSD needed. This got a titter from the audience and an angry glare from the University President! But John had made his point – and his victory in the great "library battle" is immortalized today in the UCSD library collections themselves. They are some of the largest in California, and they rank 42<sup>nd</sup> among the most prestigious research libraries nationwide. Indeed, on the occasion of his death, one colleague referred to John as "the modern patron saint of libraries." Needless to say, it was more than fitting when the campus renamed the Undergraduate Library building (that now houses the Center for Library and Instructional Computing Services) Galbraith Hall.

While the creation of a major research library remained a fundamental priority for John during his tenure as Chancellor, he also presided over the founding of UCSD's first departments in the humanities – notably History and Literature. In these efforts, he enjoyed the support and encouragement of the founding faculties in the natural and life sciences who believed that the campus could only achieve international stature by hiring senior humanists comparable to the David Bonners, Joseph Mayers, and Harold Ureys who had so quickly rocketed the science departments to remarkable levels of visibility and influence. Initial appointments in History and Literature focused, therefore, on the recruitment of well-established scholars (such as Roy Harvey Pierce in Literature) as well as programmatic breadth. Reflecting the wide array of John's historical interests, the first appointments in History focused on fields of study outside of U.S. experience: Samuel Baron in imperial Russian history, Geoffrey Barraclough in world history, Guillermo Céspedes in colonial Latin American history, Gabriel Jackson in modern Spanish history, and Curtis Wilson in the history of science. Even when the department began to add the first U.S. history specialists to its ranks, John oversaw the recruitment of additional junior colleagues studying the ancient world, early modern and modern Europe, and South Asia.

John Galbraith specialized in what was then known (until the early 1960s) as Imperial History, and he devoted much of his prodigious scholarly efforts to the study of the British Empire in the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, he ultimately enjoyed considerable prestige and influence as an historian of the British Empire and as a pioneer in the field of modern African Studies. What fascinated John about this period of British history was imperialism; he devoted four books to the study of this subject in four areas of the British Empire itself: Canada, Kenya, Rhodesia (modern Zimbabwe), and South Africa. From a methodological perspective, John's unique contribution was to perceive, in the records of trading companies engaged in overseas commerce by Crown warrant, a source of significant evidence regarding British imperial ambitions, designs, and practices. His second

book, The Hudson Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, first published in 1957, had a tremendous impact on the field and it set the stage for his subsequent scholarship. Six years later, the release of John's Reluctant Empire: British Policy on the South African Frontier, 1834-54 brought many accolades. Scholars hailed the work as a masterpiece of its type. Indeed, in 1995, reflecting on John's distinguished career, the noted historian Samuel McCulloch declared that John was "the best historian of the British Empire in the United States."

British imperial history ultimately became the foundation of what was called Commonwealth Studies. As the nations of the British Commonwealth became independent, during the wave of "decolonization" after World War II, Commonwealth Studies specialists like John Galbraith became pathfinding scholars in the study of the now-independent states of the former British Empire. In particular, John became an expert on the history of South Africa and he contributed immensely to scholarship and teaching in this area. Not surprisingly, as African nationalism and independence movements gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s, interest in African scholarship and teaching steadily increased. For this reason, especially given his unique status in the field, John helped to make the Department of History at UCLA a leading center for the training of historians of Africa. The large number of students he mentored at UCLA constitutes a living tribute to the major contribution he made to the emerging field of African Studies worldwide.

In addition to his enduring interest in the history of South Africa, John stepped beyond the boundaries of his teaching and scholarship and also quietly contributed to the changing political climate in that nation – and to the burgeoning political and social movement that confronted apartheid. One typical example involved John's donation of an automobile to Ezekiel Mphahlele, the celebrated writer and a leader of the public transportation boycotts in which a growing number of South Africans participated during the 1960s. With the benefit of John's generosity, Mr. Mphahlele was able to travel among the various (and notorious) South African townships, mobilizing public sentiment in support of the resistance against the racist regime in Pretoria.

John was a colleague and a friend – uncommon in both roles. Thoughtful, wise, witty, focused, and principled, he served as a special mentor to his associates in the History Department, especially junior faculty members. In later life, along with his wife Laura, he became a generous and enthusiastic supporter of departmental initiatives focused on the development of funds to support the research enterprise – efforts now immortalized in the creation of two endowments – for graduate students and faculty – that bear their names.

In more recent years, John was a happy and energetic presence, especially in the early mornings of the days he would teach, in the corridors of our department. As his health began to fail, his colleagues in History sorely missed his companionship. That sense of absence is made all the more poignant now as we contemplate the fact that John is forever gone. There is no more fitting epitaph than that found in the words of the poet laureate of his beloved Scotland – these lines speak to us of John himself:

Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,  
An honest man's the noblest work of God.

– Robert Burns [1759-1796]

Michael E. Parrish  
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