In Memoriam: Jon Bridgman, 1930-2015

Submitted by Eric W. Johnson on March 26, 2015 - 11:32pm

The Department of History was saddened to lose one of its leading lights, Emeritus Professor Jon Bridgman, on March 9th, after more than five decades of teaching at the University of Washington. Bridgman joined the university in 1961, as a specialist in modern European history. After his retirement in 1997, he continued to be an active participant in the life of the university and the department through teaching courses and giving public lectures. His absence will be sorely felt.

Professor Bridgman was an esteemed scholar, having authored *Revolt of the Hereros* (1981) and *The End of the Holocaust: The Liberation of the Camps* (1990). But he is remembered, first and foremost, as an inspiring teacher, and a fierce advocate for the relevance of history to understanding the modern world. Over the years, Bridgman shared his passion for history with thousands and thousands of students, earning their deep admiration.

In the classroom Professor Bridgman had a uniquely engaging presence. As his friend, James Binder, remembered, his nervous energy, story-telling flair and, most of all, his distinctive laugh “would disarm students—within a couple of classes they were hooked.” Bridgman’s style was paired with immense substance. His knowledge was vast, and the clarity with which he organized and presented information allowed students to navigate complex historical terrains with confidence. He wrote each lecture from scratch, with fountain pen and legal pad, and as Binder recalled, “You could take the same class time and again, and every time Jon would present it from a new perspective and you would learn new things.”

In 1973, Professor Bridgman became one of the first recipients of the UW Distinguished Teaching Award. From 1987 to 2002, he headlined the wildly popular History Lecture Series sponsored by the UW Alumni Association. In many ways, however, he shied away from the limelight - always humble, he would often slip out of class early on the last day of the quarter, just to avoid the inevitable round of applause. What motivated Bridgman was simply the opportunity to share his love of history with others.
Although Jon Bridgman is no longer with us, his legacy remains to inspire new generations of history students. In 2001, in recognition of his tremendous contributions in the classroom and beyond, UW alumni and friends established the Jon M. Bridgman Endowed Professorship in the Department of History. Professor Joel Walker currently holds that chair.

- A Talent for Teaching (Article from the College of Arts & Sciences Perspectives Newsletter)
- Seattle Times Obituary
- Former student James Grose on Professor Bridgman