



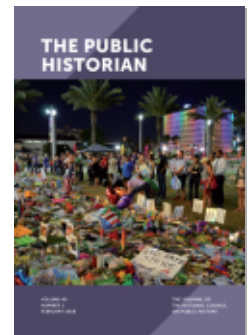
PROJECT MUSE®

Otis L. Graham, Jr., 1935–2017

Betty K. Koed

The Public Historian, Volume 40, Number 1, February 2018, pp. 10-12
(Article)

Published by University of California Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/737476>

Otis L. Graham, Jr., 1935–2017

On November 14, 2017, we lost Otis Graham to the complications of Parkinson's disease. Historian, professor, activist, mentor, editor, agitator, colleague, innovator, friend—no matter what title you knew him by, Otis Graham shaped ideas and influenced careers.

Born in Nashville, Tennessee, on June 25, 1935, Otis Livingston Graham Jr. graduated from Hillsboro High School, completed undergraduate studies at Yale University, and served three years in the US Marine Corps. From 1960 to 1966, he pursued PhD studies at Columbia University, studying with Richard Hofstadter and William Leuchtenburg. His dissertation became his first book, *Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (1967).

Otis took his first teaching position at Mount Vernon Women's College in Washington, DC, followed by a year at California State University at Hayward, but in 1966 he found his professional home at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he joined a growing faculty determined to build a first-rate department that would take the profession in new and innovative directions. Otis quickly became one of the department's chief innovators. Soon after arriving at UCSB, he began working with the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, an influential think tank founded by Robert Hutchins in 1959 and located in Montecito. There, Otis worked alongside such noteworthy thinkers as Paul Ehrlich and Rexford Tugwell, both of whom had a lasting influence on his work.

When Robert Kelley founded the department's graduate program in public history in the 1970s, Otis was an early supporter. He was equally enthusiastic when Kelley joined G. Wesley Johnson Jr. to establish *The Public Historian*. In 1980 Otis relocated to Chapel Hill, to become distinguished professor of history at the University of North Carolina, but returned to UCSB in 1989 to chair the graduate program in public history and to serve as editor of *The Public Historian*. He brought energy and creativity to such tasks, establishing the "First Thursday" events, expanding the focus of the journal to include "gray literature," museum exhibit and film reviews, and an "Editor's Corner," while teaching undergraduate and graduate courses and serving as mentor to a number of students pursuing advanced public and traditional history degrees. After retiring from UCSB in 1995, Otis took on part-time teaching at UNC Wilmington but continued to edit *The Public Historian*.

THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 10–12 (February 2018). ISSN: 0272-3433, electronic ISSN 1533-8576. © 2018 by The Regents of the University of California and the National Council on Public History. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2018.40.1.10>.

through 1997. In 1999 the National Council on Public History awarded him the Robert Kelley Memorial Award for distinguished service to the field. During his long career Otis also was named a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

When Otis lost his wife, Delores, to cancer in 2011, he again returned home to Santa Barbara and to UCSB. Settling into Maravilla, a senior living center near campus, he continued to inform and entertain students and faculty at the monthly “First Thursday” events, orchestrated book talks at the senior center, and remained active and engaged in the profession despite the ravages of ill health. Otis loved nothing more than engaging in high-level debate with people he respected and admired, and the UCSB History Department provided such a venue. He later moved to Westlake to be nearer to his two children, Wade Graham and Lakin Graham Crane, and his four grandchildren.

Otis Graham’s list of publications is impressive, with well over twenty-five books—authored, co-authored, or edited—to his credit, along with scores of articles and opinion pieces. Primarily a historian of the twentieth century, his works reflected lifelong interests in national planning, reform movements, immigration policy, and environmentalism. *The Great Campaigns: Reform and War in America, 1900–1928* (1971) and his *Toward a Planned Society: From Roosevelt to Nixon* (1976) extended his examination of the history of relations between expertise and state agency through the twentieth century. His interest in national planning also led to his editing *Soviet-American Dialogue on the New Deal* (1989) and authoring *Losing Time: The Industrial Policy Debate* (1992). His steadfast dedication to environmentalism produced a number of books and articles, including his last monograph, *Presidents and the American Environment* (2015), which stands tall as his final statement on the need for national leadership in establishing strong and protective environmental policies.

Otis Graham also embraced the historian’s role as public intellectual, bringing historical knowledge and analysis to debates of current interest. In *A Limited Bounty: The United States since World War II* (1996), he placed issues of population growth, diminishing natural resources, and the endangered environment at the center of his narrative of postwar US history. In collaboration with public history students, he produced books of local interest that also carried broader environmental themes, such as *Sifting through the Ashes: Lessons Learned from the Painted Cave Fire* (1993); *Stearns Wharf: Surviving Change on the California Coast* (1994); and *Aged in Oak: the Story of the Santa Barbara County Wine Industry* (1998). Casting a critical eye on US immigration policy, he co-authored with Roger Daniels *Debating American Immigration, 1882–Present* (2001) and authored *Unguarded Gates: A History of America’s Immigration Crisis* (2003) and *Immigration Reform and America’s Unchosen Future* (2008) to voice concern about the high levels of immigration resulting from the policies of the 1960s. He served on the board of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), which lobbies for restrictions on immigration, and was a founding member of the Center for Immigration Studies.

Scholar and historian, editor and innovator, teacher and mentor, Otis Graham was a force of nature who touched the lives and careers of those lucky enough to cross his path, including me. As a new graduate student at UCSB, I met Otis Graham in 1989 when I became his teaching assistant and, soon after, his research assistant. From that beginning we became colleagues, collaborators, and friends. We frequently argued and constantly laughed, and along the way I discovered what it meant to be a professional historian.

Betty K. Koed, United States Senate Historian