



IN MEMORIAM

Gerald D. Feldman

Jane K. Sather Professor of History, Emeritus
UC Berkeley
1937 – 2007

Gerald D. Feldman, professor emeritus in the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley, died on 31 October 2007 at his home in Berkeley at the age of 70 after a long fight with lymphoma.

From 1963 until his retirement in 2007, Gerald Feldman was a member of the Department of History, where since 1 July 2005 he held the Jane K. Sather Chair. An internationally known and influential political historian and authority on Germany in the twentieth century, Feldman published more than 27 books — authored, coauthored, or edited — and more than 100 scholarly articles. Throughout his career he was the recipient of prizes and honors, culminating with the award of the prestigious Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (2000) and election to the equally exclusive Bavarian Academy of Sciences (2004).

Colleagues in the United States and in Germany, where he was a frequent visitor, admired his commitment to original research, his energy for digging in the archives, and his passion in the pursuit of historical explanation that never flagged over more than four decades. His first book, *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany, 1914-1918* (1966), explored the extent to which Germany's political, social, and economic institutions became transformed by the demands of war, as heavy industry and socialist labor collaborated in exploiting the opportunities war provided. It was a pathbreaking study, one that immediately put Feldman among the leaders of his generation, and made Berkeley, where he and Hans Rosenberg established a warm relationship of mutual respect, a center of what was then known as “the new critical history.”

Feldman followed with an explosion of articles and books laying bare the intersection of economic with political power in Central Europe, eventually covering the whole first half of the twentieth century. A series of studies on the German inflation, which Professor Feldman coauthored and coedited with a number of eminent German scholars in the 1970s, led in 1993 to yet another classic, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924*. It won him the best book award of both the German Studies Association and the Conference Group for Central European History of the American Historical Association.

Never formally trained in economic or business history, Gerald Feldman nonetheless became preeminent in that field. He contributed in the 1980s and 1990s to a new history of the Deutsche Bank from its beginnings to our own day. More recently, he produced a monumental study of Austrian banks during the period of National Socialism, and, in 2001, his *Allianz and the German Insurance Business, 1933-1945*, which also won the German Studies Association's best book prize.

The term “political economy” hardly does justice to Feldman's animating passions. Like another author of monumental works, E. P. Thompson, he was explicitly concerned with the “moral economy” of the world he

studied. “[E]conomic logic does not exist independently of business ethics and basic moral standards,” Feldman insisted; it is “important to examine the political and moral economy of entrepreneurial behavior.” Economic recovery, the need for foreign exchange, and the demands of war all get their due, but his works are also alive to the human stories—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Indeed, researching the collaboration of the German and Austrian financial institutions with the Nazi regime became a special commitment during the last decade of Feldman's life. As he worked on his last major project, the Austrian Creditanstalt, tirelessly and vigorously digging his way through thousands of economic and political records, he concluded that the behavior — private as well as public — of individual leaders in the economic and financial community was infinitely worse than he had suspected. The shock of this discovery went very deep. He became dedicated to unearthing the stories of legions of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe who were systematically stripped of their livelihood and their dignity as their holdings were stolen by colleagues and long- standing business associates (the euphemism was “Aryanized”), and who were hounded and humiliated, and eventually annihilated. His wife, Dr. Norma von Ragenfeld- Feldman, recalled that

he would often re- tell the story of a particular individual, a Jewish businessman and his family, a story he had put together from a multiplicity of different sources: their inexorable—sometimes faster, sometimes slower—degradation through the most insidious methods the Nazis and their business collaborators could devise, their entrapment in a host of bureaucratic regulations from which there was no escape, the final closing off of all loopholes that might yet have afforded an opportunity, if ever so slight, to exit from this hell. In his book he gave a voice to those ... who had been robbed of their voice ... long before they went into their awful death. Their fate, as he came to know it intimately through these sources, constantly broke his heart.

At the beginning of 1994, Professor Feldman took over the directorship of the University of California's Center for German and European Studies, a research center serving all campuses of the University. In 2000, the center became part of the newly formed Institute of European Studies, where Feldman served as founding director until 2006. Under his leadership, the center, and then the institute, funded students and faculty whose research focused on Europe.

Throughout his career, Gerald Feldman was renowned for his devotion to his students. No American historian of Germany, his Berkeley colleague Professor Margaret Anderson commented, trained more doctoral candidates, virtually all of whom now hold teaching positions in the United States and abroad. One of the most prominent, currently active in Israel, remembers her first graduate seminar, offered by Assistant Professor Feldman in 1966. “His figure in class is still vivid in my mind even today — a young teacher full of enthusiasm, a professional of the highest order, even at that early stage, dedicated to his students, sensitive to their needs, knowledgeable to a degree that left us all speechless.” Renowned for the passion with which he argued for his own ideas, Feldman just as passionately insisted that students develop their own. It was terribly important to him, one recalled, that graduate students “do their own thing — even when that thing curled his toes.” This enthusiasm and respect for students' ideas endured over the decades.

Feldman's concern and respect extended to legions of undergraduates, who, as Anderson recalled, “sat spell-bound through lectures characterized by their depth of information, analytical bite, and wit.” One—now a professor in Philadelphia—wrote that Feldman's “guidance of my senior and honors theses in German history launched me into my own career at Penn and beyond. Though I was one of a graduating class of 400 history majors, he always found time for me, whether he was rushing red- faced around Dwinelle Hall, at conferences, or, in later years, via email. I treasure his memory.”

In addition to all his other professional pursuits, Feldman served as an enthusiastic and tireless member of the editorial board of the journal *Contemporary European History* for over 15 years. His expertise and wisdom were invaluable to successive editors and to the board as a whole. He promoted the journal among new and established scholars, was a perspicacious reader of submitted work and remained ever- helpful when it came to identifying expert referees or issues that the journal should bring to its readership. He is missed for the energy, humor, and sense of fun he brought to the annual meetings of the board. He would always arrive from the other side of the world, proverbially bright- eyed if not bushy- tailed, his stamina shaming younger colleagues who had traveled far shorter distances.

Feldman was a man of parts, with an immense curiosity about the world, a keen interest in public affairs, and an abiding passion for music, especially opera (and especially Wagner). He was justly famous for his generosity to colleagues, his loyalty to his students, his years of service to our profession and the institutions that sustain it. No one could be so productive without iron discipline, yet Feldman dropped everything when

visitors — scholars from abroad or former students — came to town. During the decade he directed Berkeley's Center for European Studies, dinner parties chez Feldman would sometimes occur several times a week, a hospitality made possible by the talent and graciousness of his wife Norma, who shared in all his work, enthusiasms, and undertakings. It is difficult to imagine the work of German history going forward without Gerry Feldman and his titanic energies. Our world has suddenly become a smaller, poorer, drabber place.

Margaret Lavinia Anderson
Thomas A. Brady
John Connelly