

# A Scholar & a Gentleman

Remembering Samuel Huntington

By Michael C. Desch

SAMUEL HUNTINGTON died on Christmas Eve at age 81 after a long and slow decline. We have lost not only an astute public intellectual but a fine man. Fortunately, he left a rich legacy: pathbreaking scholarship in all four subfields of political science and a community of scholars whose careers he generously nurtured.

A graduate of Yale at 18 who began a 58-year Harvard teaching career at just 23, he went on to write, co-write, or edit 17 books—the last of which was translated into 39 languages. Considering the peaks he reached, it is hard to believe that Sam ever suffered professional setbacks. But the controversy surrounding his first book, *The Soldier and the State*, now in its 15th printing, initially cost him tenure at Harvard.

When that work came out in 1957, the first notices were negative, largely because of the final few pages in which Huntington unflatteringly contrasted the ramshackle town of Highland Falls, New York with its scrubbed and orderly neighbor, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. His admiration for the latter did not escape liberal reviewers, who thought they detected the odor of fascism. The young professor was convicted of one of the few capital offenses in Cambridge—being conservative—and temporarily exiled to Columbia. This pattern would characterize the rest of his career: initial rejection followed by grudging acceptance as the power of his ideas prevailed.

Sam was an unusual conservative by today's absolute standards, which tend toward doctrinaire defense of democ-

racy and free markets. His conservatism was instead a presumption in favor of established political and economic orders. On the occasion of Sam's retirement as director of Harvard's Center for International Affairs, his friend Eric Nordlinger suggested that Sam's favorite philosopher was Edmund Burke. With characteristic modesty, Sam pooh-poohed any association with such a highfalutin thinker. When I subsequently read Huntington's 1957 essay "Conservatism as an Ideology," however, I realized that Nordlinger had identified the reason behind Sam's abiding concern for political order as an essential prerequisite to liberty.

Burkean as he was in his skepticism of radical change, Sam's greatest theoretical influence came from the Left: his Harvard colleague Louis Hartz. In *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Hartz argued that the U.S. was a thoroughly liberal society, deeply committed to Lockean principles of democracy and individual freedom. But unlike Europe, where liberalism confronted real ideological challenges from both Left and Right and had to adapt in an ideologically diverse environment, in the New World liberalism had adopted a messianic strain that was at once utopian in its desire to remake the planet and paranoid in the face of nonliberal ideologies and institutions.

Sam's argument in "Conservatism as an Ideology" was that a conservative living in a liberal society would be compelled to defend its values and institutions. Following Hartz's argument

about the contradictions of American liberalism, part of this defense involves a candid recognition that America's liberal tradition is weak precisely because it lacks a real conservative alternative. Hence, to preserve the best of American liberalism, with which he always identified, Sam became a particular type of conservative—one committed to conserving but also to refining liberalism, checking its excesses by offering a conservative alternative.

It is true that during the 1970s Sam found common cause with some of the first-generation neoconservatives, particularly his old friend Daniel Patrick Moynihan. This association was consistent with his "positional conservatism," as his former student and coauthor Dick Betts characterizes it, in that these conservative Democrats were standing up for the New Deal against the challenge posed by the New Left and other radicals. Sam was nonetheless a lifelong Democrat (with only a few lapses), having met Nancy, his wife of 51 years, when the two were working for Adlai Stevenson in 1952.

He had less sympathy for today's neoconservatives, not just because they pushed for what he regarded as an ill-advised war with Iraq. As the University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer, twice a fellow at Harvard, explains, "Sam was—above all else—an American nationalist who was deeply worried in his later years by both transnational elites and hyphenated Americans with a deep attachment to a foreign country. The neoconservatives, of course, have a pas-

sionate attachment to Israel. I know from conversations with him that he thought that this was not in the American national interest, and it worried him a lot." Sam thought that the rise of Hyphen Man and Davos Man—a term he coined referring to the yearly gathering of the global elite in Switzerland—made it harder to formulate a foreign policy that served America's interests.

The key to Sam's success as a public intellectual was that he asked big questions and gave contrarian answers. A few years ago, over dinner with Sam and Nancy on Martha's Vineyard, my wife asked how he decided what to write about. Sam answered that he looked for important, real-world problems—the relationship of the military professional to the democratic politician; the problems that arise when political participation outstrips the institutional capacity of a state; the gap between the promise and the reality of democracy; the roots of the spread of democracy around the world in the 1970s and 80s; the increasing roles of religious and ethnic identities in the post-Cold War world—and then tried to make sense of them in a systematic way. Unlike most academics' unerring sense of the capillary, Sam had a nose for timely and important issues. Since America is a thoroughly liberal country, anyone who takes positions outside the Hartzian consensus, as he frequently did, is bound to attract a lot of attention.

His appearance could be deceiving. I first saw him in the mid-1980s when he spoke at a seminar series organized by University of Chicago sociologist Morris Janowitz, whose *Professional Soldier* was the ying to Huntington's yang in the field of civil-military relations. Having read snippets of *The Soldier and the State's* muscular prose, I imagined Sam to be a large, barrel-chested man, an academic John Wayne coming to shoot it out with his intellectual rival. Imagine my

surprise when a slight man with a nasal voice, who spoke in the cadences of a high-church Episcopalian cleric, stepped to the podium. I would learn that Sam's was a different type of strength.

He was not easy to get to know. When I went to Harvard as a postdoctoral fellow, Sam initially seemed inscrutable. Another fellow and I discovered that we had both been weighing our chances of being renewed for a second year by how Sam reacted when we saw him in the hall each morning. When he greeted us by name, we thought we were shoo-ins. More often he just mumbled in our direction and we despaired of a second year. Of course, neither was indicative of what Sam thought of us; how he acknowledged us was just a function of whether we had caught him when he was busy, which was most of the time.

Working with Sam was daunting because he was so good at so many things, as I learned when I returned a few years later to his new John M. Olin Institute of Strategic Studies. I recall one assistant spending an entire week trying to make sense of the many financial accounts that sustained the institute's various activities. Sam patiently listened to her report and then pointed out that she had overlooked a grant that no one had used for nine years but in which there remained \$2,150. He was right to the penny without ever having consulted a spreadsheet.

That administrative acumen is even more impressive given that while he was running the institute, Sam was simultaneously teaching and writing bestselling books like *The Clash of Civilizations*, almost as if the various compartments of his mind had on/off switches.

But given all of his accomplishments, Sam remained strikingly modest. He rarely talked about his own work and was more often content to listen to others. One of the high points of his week was the Olin Institute's Tuesday

lunch seminar in which fellows or visitors presented research in progress and then defended it in vigorous debate, often led by Sam himself.

He was extremely supportive of his students, and they repaid his favor with fierce loyalty and deep affection. In addition to Betts, some of the more prominent include James Kurth of Swarthmore, Donald Horowitz at Duke, Eliot Cohen of SAIS, Stephen Rosen of Harvard, Steven David of Johns Hopkins, Francis Fukuyama of SAIS, Scott Sagan at Stanford, Aaron Freidberg at Princeton, Peter Feaver of Duke, Minxin Pei at Carnegie, Fareed Zakaria of *Newsweek*, and Gideon Rose of *Foreign Affairs*.

But Sam was broadminded. The list of scholars who were not his students, but whom he nonetheless took under his wing, constitutes a who's who of leading thinkers of international relations and comparative politics. They include, Mearsheimer, Jack Snyder at Columbia, Barry Posen at MIT, Tom Christensen at Princeton, and Stephen Walt at the Kennedy School, among many others. Some of these beneficiaries of Sam's largesse were ideologically and intellectually close to him, others were not. It didn't matter. He respected those whom he thought were trying, as he was, to understand the weighty issues of the day in a rigorous yet relevant way.

There remain many insightful American thinkers, but few rival Sam Huntington in breadth and depth. And though many are decent, none manages to combine a great mind and a large heart as masterfully as Sam did. We will miss him. ■

---

*Michael C. Desch is professor of political science and a fellow at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. His most recent book is Power and Military Effectiveness: The Fallacy of Democratic Triumphalism.*

# Ecumenical Revolutionary

Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, one of the leading Catholic public intellectuals in America, parish priest, and editor of the religion and culture journal *First Things*, died

Jan. 8 at the age of 72. The author of several books of cultural and theological reflection, the most famous of which was *The Naked Public Square*, Neuhaus represented the religious conservative reaction to the cultural revolution of the 1960s and '70s. In his turn away from modern liberalism, his intellectual and political evolution mirrored that of millions of Americans who came to identify with conservatism and an agenda of reversing the excesses of the cultural Left. As a strong proponent of preserving, or in many cases restoring, the place of religion in public life, Neuhaus cultivated an ecumenical alliance that sought to undergird politics with a transcendent vision of order, which he came to believe was best expressed in Catholicism. A convert to the Catholic Church in 1990, Neuhaus was a passionate defender of the right to life throughout his career, though in his last decade he became a reliable booster of the destructive foreign policy of his neoconservative allies.

A civil-rights activist and Vietnam War opponent during his time as a Lutheran minister, Neuhaus was alienated by liberalized abortion laws from what he regarded as a different, second liberalism, a movement at odds with the liberal tradition. In a May 1997 *First Things* essay, "The Liberalism of John Paul II," he wrote, "By 1967 I was writing about the 'two liberalisms'—one, like the earlier civil rights movement, inclusive of the vulnerable and driven by a transcendent order of justice, the other exclusive and recognizing no law higher than indi-

vidual willfulness." As Neuhaus understood it, he had broken with modern liberalism to try to save the inclusive liberal tradition in America. He considered this to be the proper role of American conservatism.

Following the public split between his Center for Religion & Society and The Rockford Institute in 1989, an episode that Neuhaus and his defenders consistently misrepresented and used as an excuse to defame the staff of *Chronicles*, Neuhaus founded *First Things*. It was in those pages, particularly in his lengthy, broad-ranging commentary called "The Public Square," that Neuhaus advanced his arguments for the return of religion to public life. He proposed a symbiotic accommodation between Christianity and a liberal political order in which the former was necessary to sustain the latter.

Like many of his neoconservative friends, as well as many conservative Protestants and Catholics, Neuhaus remained a political liberal repelled by the rise of cultural liberalism. His basic liberal assumptions made charges that he and his fellow "theoconservatives" wished to establish a theocracy seem ridiculous.

In a 1996 *First Things* symposium, Neuhaus and his contributors entertained the possibility that the legalization of a grave moral evil in abortion, and particularly the antidemocratic nature of its imposition, might constitute grounds for considering the American "regime" illegitimate. In themselves, the symposium's strong pro-life

arguments and hostility to judicial tyranny were unremarkable in the context of 1990s culture-war debates. Questioning the legitimacy of the government and raising the specter of withdrawing consent from it over a question of moral principle—fundamentally liberal, contractarian arguments—was too much for several neoconservative members of the *First Things* board, who resigned in protest.

It became necessary to distinguish between the largely secular neoconservatives who objected to the symposium and the religious neoconservatives who defended it. The catchy but misleading neologism "theocon" was born. But the upshot of the controversy was that the theocons dropped any hint of radical critique of the government and became once again reliable neocon allies, as subsequent debates over the justice of the Iraq War would make clear. Far from posing the threat of a theocratic takeover of the country, as Neuhaus's former colleague Damon Linker hallucinated in *The Theocons*, Neuhaus and his fellows proved to be predictable apologists for the very secular policies of the Bush administration, which were notable neither for their attention to claims of transcendent justice nor for their respect for the dignity of the human person.

At his best in his pastoral role and in his meditations on religious life and the evils of the culture of death, Neuhaus deserves high praise. But he disappointed many of us who appreciated his intellect and erudition by failing to speak out against the Bush administration's crimes. Instead, he and his journal provided moral cover for policies that were clearly hostile to the first things that Neuhaus championed. ■