

Edward Whiting Fox

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Edward Fox was a gentleman and scholar. Born in Spokane, Washington and afflicted from his early teens by arthritis, he began study at Harvard University as an undergraduate in 1931. There he met Professor William L. Langer as well as his wife to be, Elizabeth Simon, who was Langer's research assistant and whom he married in 1935. Langer's fascination with European diplomacy interested Fox, but he decided it offered too narrow an intellectual compass. In contrast to Langer's German focus, Fox concentrated upon French history but did not thereby neglect classical and oceanic history or the link between domestic and international affairs. His study of world geography with Derwent Whittlesey also began at this time. Fox proceeded directly from his A.B. degree in 1935 to his Ph.D. degree six years later. He served as Assistant Dean at Harvard during World War II. Because of his international skills, he was appointed to the State Department by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and continued to work in the Truman Administration as Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Analysis (1945-46). He had direct contact with Secretary James F. Byrnes and developed an astute and abiding grasp of postwar diplomacy. From 1946 until his retirement in 1978, he was a member of the History Department at Cornell University. From 1950-52, he was a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton when Arnold J. Toynbee was in residence.

Fox's contribution to historical thought was not fully appreciated during his lifetime. He offered new and general theories about French political development at a time when the "Annales" school concentrated upon the microcosm of everyday life. He combined an interest in geography with a deep passion for history in a period when academic specialization had reached an all-time high. His research on France held enormous implications for other countries, especially 17th century England and colonial America. That "trading states" might behave differently from political-military and administrative monarchies was a paramount insight. These new historical syntheses were initially more to the taste of social science colleagues than to historians.

Briefly and synoptically, Fox held that geography— particularly the ease of oceanic or riverine communication— ultimately determined the political type of a society. Societies like England's in which few places are more than ten miles from a waterway which leads to the sea, are bound to engage in commerce as their major vocation. In contrast, France, more landlocked and with few easily navigable rivers, was predestined to develop an administrative culture and tradition depending upon resources from the political center. Only around Bordeaux and a few other trading cities like Nantes, would one find a rugged independence of administrative edicts from Paris. In principle, this

doctrine applied to other countries as well, illuminating liberal movements located in riverine constituencies, and administrative centralization in countries not interpenetrated with waterways.

Fox's view of historical development influenced his attitudes toward policy. Russia, that vast landlocked continent in which rivers ran the wrong way for trading purposes, was the logical embodiment of administrative centralization. The United States, penetrated with internal waterways and canals and increasingly dependent upon long distance and oceanic trade with Europe and other continents, was likely to be the exemplar of liberal and market forces, eschewing centralization. The Atlantic alliance of trading nations was in one sense a modern representation of the league of Hansa towns. Moscow could hardly join such a grouping. Could Russia become democratic? That depended upon developments in communications and transport technology that are only now emerging.

If Russia was likely to be centralized and authoritarian, Fox devoted much of his non-professional life to the promotion of understanding of Israel, a nation founded upon trade. Through his presidency of American Professors for Peace in the Middle East, he brought many American academics to Israel to learn about its problems and successes. He also was a founding member of the Society for French Historical Studies in the United States.

In between periodic bouts of arthritis, he was an avid squash player, with a well-nigh unreturnable serve. A keen oenophile, he found and savored underappreciated wines of the Rhone region, a testimony to his breadth of taste. Academically, he was equally at home with the ideas of Marxist social history as with religious studies, perspectives represented in the work of his children as well as of his sons-in-law. He was a charter member of the Willcox Group, a Thursday luncheon colloquium that fostered and embraced new intellectual currents from some of Cornell's best known professors. When his *Festschrift* was published in 1989, it was a veritable mosaic of historiography, written by individuals influenced by Foxian theory. These essays ranged from Greek philology through the anthropology of high altitude Andean societies, to commodity production in Malawi, to a geographic analysis of post-capitalist transportation in all modern states.

He was a brilliant teacher of Western Civilization and students learned much more than history from his classes. His extensive syllabus discussed required texts, reference works, how to take notes, and how to write an essay. His grading standards were exacting. He believed that an "A" paper could be read by a student to perfect strangers as an exemplary piece of writing and research. A "C" paper, on the other hand, would be read with some embarrassment in the privacy of one's dorm room to a roommate. Fox's influence is due to seminal publications like (in 1971) *History in Geographic Perspective: the Other France* and most recently, *The Emergence of the Modern European World* (1991). He edited the *Oxford Atlas of European History* (1957) and the *Oxford Atlas of American*

History (1962). He also was General Editor for the series, *The Development of Western Civilization* (Narrative Essays in the History of Our Tradition from its Origins in Ancient Israel and Greece to the Present) published by Cornell University Press. In 1989, Basil Blackwell issued a volume of essays in his honor under the title *Geographic Perspectives in History* edited by Eugene Genovese and Leonard Hochberg.

Walter LaFeber, L. Pearce Williams, Richard Rosecrance