

Ward, John William (21 Dec. 1922-3 Aug. 1985), educator, was born in Boston, Massachusetts, the son of John Joseph Ward, a physician, and Margaret Mary Carrigan. After attending Boston Latin School, he entered Harvard College in 1941, but his studies were interrupted in his sophomore year by service with the U.S. Marine Corps that included participation in the Normandy and south of France landings. Returning to postwar Harvard, he concentrated on American history and literature, influenced by the teaching of Perry Miller and F. O. Matthiessen, worked summers in the Quincy shipyards to pay his way, and received the B.A. in 1947 (listed under 1945). In 1949 Ward married Barbara Carnes; they had three children.

Henry Nash Smith drew him to the University of Minnesota to work in the new field of American studies; there he earned his M.A. and Ph.D. in 1950 and 1953. Modeled on the method of historical insight found in his mentor Smith's pathbreaking study *Virgin Land* (1950), Ward's doctoral dissertation was published in 1955 as *Andrew Jackson, Symbol for an Age*. It soon became one of the most popular readings in history courses on the Jacksonian period. By the 1990s Oxford University Press had sold over 250,000 paperback copies of the book, and two generations of college students were caught up in the clear and dramatic presentation of Ward's three themes and symbols for understanding Jackson's popularity and cultural power: nature, providence, and will. Jackson the westerner was a man close to nature, unpretentious and one with the common man. The heroic soldier and frontier leader symbolized the guiding hand of providence in American expansion. His achievements, born of determination and pluck, exemplified the triumphant theme of individual will.

Ward taught at two institutions. In 1952 he began teaching at Princeton University as an assistant professor of English, strengthening the Special Program in American Civilization, which, as an associate professor of history, he chaired from 1960 to 1964. Amherst College, having developed an outstanding American studies curriculum and faculty, invited Ward there in 1964 as professor of history and American studies. Judging himself to have been an "excellent" teacher at Princeton, Ward found himself challenged at the smaller college to pay more attention to "the development of the young" in a time of academic unrest and change. Because of his enthusiasm for learning and, increasingly, for teaching he was successful with Amherst students, particularly with the exchange and testing of ideas in seminars; he chaired the history department from 1967 to 1970 and received an endowed chair in 1971. Meanwhile his instructive scholarship and insights into American cultural history and life were exhibited in essays on such themes as the meaning of Charles Lindbergh's flight, the problems of individualism and community in America, and the role of intellectuals. By the time these were collected in 1969 as *Red, White, and Blue: Men, Books, and Ideas in American Culture*, Ward was widely recognized as a leading figure in humane studies. His intellectual stature was endorsed by two Guggenheim fellowships and two Fulbright lectureships in England.

Ward's qualities of intellectual integrity, vigor, clarity, and empathy led the trustees in 1971 to choose him as the fourteenth president of Amherst College. The signal event of his eight-year tenure, indeed of the college's modern history, was the introduction of coeducation in 1975. Ward steered the college toward this innovation with strong faculty support for several years but in the face of considerable alumni anger and opposition because in their view he had abandoned an all-male institution. He was already suspect among some alumni, in a college always tuned to alumni opinion, because he, like Alexander Meiklejohn before him, was not himself an Amherst man and because he earlier had protested as a private citizen against the Vietnam War. In May 1972 he, his wife, and Amherst students were among 470 protesters arrested for trespassing at the nearby Westover Air Force base. Despite the controversy, Ward retained presidential tact and skill, and the college fared relatively well during nationally troubling academic times.

Throughout his term he was committed to racial justice and tried to help an increasing number of black students become full participants in the college's life. The faculty supported him until 1979 when a financial crisis about sustaining high faculty salaries loomed, and he declared that professorial pay could not be expected to equal that at leading research universities. He lost faculty support and resigned.

In 1978 Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts appointed Ward to chair the Special Commission to Investigate Corruption in the Award of State Building Contracts in the Commonwealth. The result of the Ward Commission's hearings and findings from 1979 to 1981 was the creation of the Office of Inspector General and the establishment of new procedures to stop corrupt practices. Dukakis declared that Ward's findings "helped do away with . . . practices that cost . . . taxpayers billions of dollars through bribes, illegal campaign contributions, and cost overruns." In July 1982 Ward moved into the presidency of the American Council of Learned Societies, an umbrella organization over many academic societies devoted to the advancement of humanistic studies. He died in New York City.

As historian, social critic, and college president, Bill Ward questioned and examined the recurring tension in American life between the ideas of individualism and community. He believed that academic life is the realization of community through shared inquiry and that the best in American individualism is captured when Mind is exercised to its fullest. He possessed and spoke for a piety about the importance of ideas and a playfulness in their use that his friend Richard Hofstadter called the twin qualities of the modern intellectual.

Wilson Smith. "Ward, John William"; <http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-00965.html>; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000. Copyright © 2000 American Council of Learned Societies. Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.