

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

EDGAR EUGENE ROBINSON (1887 – 1977)

Edgar Eugene Robinson came to Stanford in 1911. He quickly assumed a position of leadership in its affairs as teacher, innovator, and administrator; by the time he had retired in 1952, he had left indelible marks upon the institution as well as upon hundreds of Stanford students. Robinson was born in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin April 5, 1887, the son of George Edgar and Lydia Margaret Bender Robinson. He died at his home in Palo Alto September 7, 1977. A member of Phi Beta Kappa, Robinson earned his A.B. degree in 1908 at the University of Wisconsin; he held appointments as Fellow and as Assistant in History at his alma mater while working on his A.M. degree which was conferred in 1910. He taught at Carleton College during the 1910-11 academic year and in 1911 accepted an Assistant Professorship at Stanford. He devoted the remainder of his life to scholarship, teaching, and administration at Stanford.

Stanford had graduated its first twenty classes when Robinson joined the faculty. Aside from the Quad, there were only eight other buildings on campus. The student body numbered just over 1600, the faculty, 130. The History Department included three professors, two associate professors, and two assistant professors (including Robinson).

For the first dozen years Robinson taught primarily early American History, the Westward Movement, and the History of the Far West, as befitted a former student of Frederick Jackson Turner. More and more, however, his interests turned to the study of American political parties and to presidential leadership. After the publication, with Victor J. West, of *The Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson, 1913-1917* (1917), Robinson brought out *The Evolution of American Political Parties; A Sketch of Party Development* (1924). The book was reprinted in 1971. His *The Roosevelt Leadership, 1933-1945* (1955), was an outgrowth of a J. Brooks B. Parker award made with the object of producing a contemporary appraisal of Roosevelt's presidency. By the time he wrote this volume he had developed positive views about political leadership, views informed by his study of English and American political history. Believing that leaders should propose carefully reasoned programs and then enlist support for them among the electorate, Robinson deplored F.D.R.'s experimental approach to economic and political problems. The book was reprinted in 1972 following the re-issue in 1970 of two of Robinson's related publications, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932* (originally published in 1940) and *They Voted for Roosevelt* (first published in 1947). Robinson's long-time interest in Herbert Hoover eventually flowered in *Herbert Hoover, President of the United States*, with Vaughn Davis Bornet (1975). Hoover epitomized Robinson's conception of presidential leadership and this volume elaborated this conception and implied that Hoover's failure to win re-election in 1932 represented the country's repudiation of a method of leadership best suited to a democratic republic.

Robinson's scholarly interests were accompanied by a lifelong commitment to liberal education. When during the 1910's and 1920's Stanford reviewed its free elective system, Robinson played a leading role in establishing what was known as the Lower Division in which

students during their first two undergraduate years were required to devote a considerable portion of their time to liberal studies. Then in 1923, following the recommendation of a sub-committee of the Lower Division Committee, the faculty approved the adoption of a new, three-quarter interdisciplinary course, "Problems of Citizenship," to be required of all Lower Division students. Robinson became Director of the new course and instruction commenced in 1923. By 1935, following much study and planning by committees of the History Department and of the Lower Division, the "History of Western Civilization," offered within the History Department, supplanted "Problems of Citizenship" as a course required of all Lower Division students. Meanwhile, in 1929 Robinson had become Executive Head of the History Department and in that post he exercised close over-sight of the now course and its staff of instructors for the ensuing seventeen years. There can be no doubt that it was the single most influential course ever offered at Stanford; nor can it be doubted that Edgar Robinson was the most influential figure in the development and operation of the course.

Robinson's contributions to the Independent Study Plan at Stanford were equally remarkable. He was a member of the original committee, chaired by Lewis M. Terman, which established the program in 1925; in 1928 he succeeded to the chairmanship of the committee, a position he held for the next sixteen years. The innovation was designed to "provide special opportunities for students of exceptional ability" to plan programs of study both more comprehensive and intensive than those of average students. During the life of the plan - a precursor of honors programs so popular in the 1960's and '70's - hundreds of Stanford students became involved with individually tailored programs of study and writing guided by departmental advisors. As university enrollment increased Independent Study did much to ameliorate the otherwise unfavorable effects of larger numbers.

Robinson had rare gifts as a speaker. From the outset of his career at Stanford, he was in great demand on the lecture platform locally, regionally, and nationally. In the classroom he used these gifts in ingenious ways to arouse student interest. In the seminar room, as well as in the lecture hall, he stimulated and provoked inquiry and discussion among his students that extended far beyond the seminar in time and place. Understandably, he attracted a large number of graduate students who earned their doctorates under his direction; many of them helped to perpetuate the Frederick Jackson Turner influence evidenced in Robinson's teaching.

It was inevitable that Robinson would become involved with public events on the campus. First serving as the Chairman of the Committee on Public Exercises in 1921, he was periodically relieved of this responsibility only to be recalled because his talents were needed. In a typical year, Public Exercises under his chairmanship sponsored one hundred programs including university convocations, the popular Tuesday Evening Series, several other series, and special events.

It was also inevitable that a man of Robinson's talents and commitments would be drawn to the Commonwealth Club of California. He joined it in 1913 at the age of twenty-six, and was the founding chairman of a section on international relations as early as 1918. Later, he served the Club in many other significant capacities, notably as President for two years, 1935 and 1936.

There is so much more that might be said about Robinson at Stanford: his service on the Board of Directors of the Hoover Library on War and Peace; the organization of the Institute of American History under his direction and its sponsorship of conferences and summer seminars

for secondary school teachers of American history; his leadership of the History Department as Executive Head for twenty-three years; his role in attracting gifts to the university for a wide variety of programs and functions; the honor of holding one of the first endowed professorships at Stanford-the Margaret Byrne Professorship of American History dating from 1931 -and as the honored person of the third such endowed professorship to be established at Stanford, the Edgar E. Robinson Professorship in United States History (1945); and the substantial number of contributions he made to his academic discipline: publications not hitherto mentioned include *American Democracy in Time of Crisis* (1934); *Independent Study at Stanford* (1937); *The New United States* (1946); *Scholarship and Cataclysm* (1947); as co-editor with Paul Carroll Edwards, *The Memoirs of Ray Lyman Wilbur, 1875-1940* (1960); and as editor and contributor, *Powers of the President in Foreign Affairs* (1966). Robinson was also a visitor on the faculties of the universities of Minnesota, Michigan, Yale, Columbia, Oregon, and California. He was a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Great Britain and a member of the American Historical Association- he was President of the latter's Pacific Coast Branch in 1918. His alma mater conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws upon him in 1942.

Edgar Eugene Robinson, who served under the first five Stanford presidencies and continued his professional activities during two more, was a mainstay of the university for over forty years. The full impact of his many and varied contributions to the academic excellence, vigor, and development of Stanford are beyond precise calculation. He was, as an editor of the Palo Alto *Times* recently put it, "an old style academic giant." We therefore honor the memory of Edgar Eugene Robinson - pioneer professor, vigorous scholar, inspiring teacher, educational statesman, able administrator, cherished friend, and a loyal and devoted advocate of Stanford's passion to realize the dream of the founders to become a university of high degree.

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