

Dr. Robert A. Slayton (1951-2023)



Dear Friends,

For those of you who did not receive the message I am forwarding to you from the Office of the Provost, I am heartbroken to relay the news of the passing of Professor Emeritus of History, Dr. Robert "Bob" Slayton. I, along with the members of the Executive Committee of the Retired and Emeritus Association, had the privilege of reconnecting with Bob Slayton again when he joined our committee in Fall 2023. I remember attending the signing party for his most famous book, *Empire Statesman: the Rise and Redemption of Al Smith*.

Bob lived for the last several years in an assisted living facility due to a neurological condition. To give you an example of this man's humility, when asked if he would like to join the the Executive Committee or just sit in on a meeting, he replied that he was not mobile and wasn't sure if he could be of help. I told him that those of us who are mobile can do the tasks that mobility requires, but that what we needed is his input of ideas and vision that a deep thinker can provide. We needed ideas for ways in which our Association can be relevant to the Chapman community. Bob joined our meetings by Zoom, and began e-mailing me with a variety of suggestions on how he could help raise the visibility of our Association with lectures he would provide by Zoom. If you read the entire message from the Provost about Bob, you gain an insight into this scholar's impressive publishing output along with his academic legacy and impact as a Professor of History at Chapman University. From my interactions with Bob, you also gain knowledge of the depth of his humility.

Here are some of Bob's ideas:

Lectures on What the Holocaust Was
The Rise of Nazism in Germany
The Ashcan School of Art
The Legacy of Al Smith

Additionally, Bob offered to contact a good friend to see if he would come out to speak to us. His friend, a USC professor, and Director of Hillel, could speak about anti-Semitism and racism in post-war America.

Bob's mind ever working, he cc'd me on an e-mail to the Chair of the History Department, sent on December 17, mentioning that he is a member of the Executive Committee of the Retired and Emeritus Association, that the committee members suggested to him that perhaps we could check out opportunities for advising, given our experience and expertise, and asking if it would be possible "for [him] to contribute either in the History Senior Thesis or the MA class in War and Society."

Meanwhile, Bob just finished writing a new non-fiction book. He also asked my advice on help promoting a novel he had previously written and self-published, *"For Ivan": A John Falcon Thriller*. I offered to help in any way I could and said I would order the book and read it first. I ordered the book over a month ago and received a message it was on back order.

The same day I received the notice of Bob's passing, an Amazon package arrived, addressed to me. I was expecting an inexpensive item from I ordered from Ebay. When I opened the box, Bob's novel I ordered, *"For Ivan"* was enclosed—written by this most humble and dear man now lost to us, but still alive in his words.

Robert Slayton's author page: <https://robertslaytonuniverse.com>

Sincerely,
Claudia Horn
Communication Chair
Retired and Emeritus Faculty Association of Chapman University



From the Office of the Provost
Norma Bouchard, Ph.D.

It is with great sadness that we share the news that Dr. Robert A. Slayton, Professor Emeritus of History, passed away on December 22nd, 2023. Professor Slayton taught at Chapman from 1988 to 2022. He retired in 2022, having spent his entire 34-year career as a university professor at Chapman.

Dr. Slayton was a nationally recognized scholar, and his scholarship brought great acclaim to the History Department, Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and Chapman

University. Throughout his scholarly career, Dr. Slayton explored entirely new fields with each monograph. This demanded a tremendous amount of time, dedication, and intellectual curiosity.

Professor Slayton, or Bob as his colleagues called him, was one of the pillars of the History Department. He cultivated the department's academic and scholarly rigor over the years and viewed the History Department as a family. He excelled at mentoring junior faculty: taking them under his wing, reading any written work that required a critical eye, and giving quality feedback on the road to publication and tenure.

President Daniele Struppa notes that Bob "was an old style intellectual, something that has become all too rare. He was committed to his work with unrelenting integrity and discipline. For me, he was a friend, and a trusted and wise advisor during my ten years as Chancellor. I will miss him deeply."

Dr. Slayton amassed a superior record in teaching and was always among the most sought-after instructors in the college whose mentorship of student research projects resulted in numerous award-winning senior theses. His passionate, story-telling lecture-style and the use of props and visuals in his teaching always captivated students. One particularly memorable lecture had him come to class dressed as Al Capone to teach about gang warfare in the 1920s. Bob loved what he taught, and students could tell.

His most acclaimed scholarly work was *Empire Statesman*, a biography of Alfred E. Smith, 1928 presidential candidate and the first Roman Catholic to run for the nation's highest office. *Empire Statesman* is widely considered the standard biographical work on this figure. His other works include *Back of the Yards* (University of Chicago Press), *New Homeless and Old* (Temple University Press), and *Master of the Air* (University of Alabama Press). His latest book, *Beauty in the City* (State University of New York Press) received a Gold Medal in the 2018 Independent Publisher Book Awards.

A few days before his death, Bob signed his tenth book contract for *Glamour and Grit: New York Movies and the City in American History* – a study of the urban-rural gap in American history as reflected in the changing nature of movies about New York – which will be published posthumously.

Bob also maintained an active career as a public intellectual through blog posts and essays and op-eds in high-profile publications for the educated public including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Orange County Register*.

Bob is survived by his wife, Rita.