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GABRIEL A. ALMOND
1911–2002

A Biographical Memoir by

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WITH THE PASSING OF Gabriel Almond on December 25, 2002, shortly before what would have been his ninety-second birthday, the profession of political science lost one of its most talented, creative, disciplined, influential, and widely respected members. At the time of his death, Almond, a professor emeritus at Stanford University, was still actively involved in a number of research projects and remained vitally interested in public affairs.

Gabriel A. Almond was born in 1911 in Rock Island, Illinois, and was raised in Chicago, the son of a rabbi. Though he lived a secular life, his religious background can be seen in many ways, from his frequent references to biblical events and biblical themes to the deep moral commitments that infused his work. His last work, finished just before his death, was on religious fundamentalism.

THE CHICAGO YEARS: 1928-1938

Throughout his scholarly life, it was Almond's good fortune to be, as he put it, in the right place at the right time—a pattern of luck that began in his undergraduate and graduate years at the University of Chicago. By the middle of the 1920s, under the leadership of Charles E. Merriam, the Chicago Department of Political Science had

become the creative center of a behavior-oriented and interdisciplinary movement in political science, a movement that later spread through the entire discipline in the two decades after World War II. Merriam surrounded himself with superior students who became his colleagues and would translate their mentor's message into novel theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of politics. Best known among them still today are Harold F. Gosnell and Harold D. Lasswell. Their influence on Almond is unmistakable in his post-World War II work on the role of public opinion in the making of American foreign policy, on the psychological appeal of communism, and on his masterful and influential study—in collaboration with Sidney Verba—of the "civic culture" in five nations.

Almond's intellectually rewarding career began in 1928 with his entry as an undergraduate to the University of Chicago, where he encountered a faculty that was working at the discipline's research frontiers as well as a cohort of bright fellow graduate students who became innovators in different fields of specialization and leaders in the profession.

In his senior year Almond took Lasswell's course on "Non-Rational Factors in Political Behavior" and, clearly under Lasswell's guidance to judge from its voluble title, wrote a senior thesis on "Developmental and Equilibrium Analysis of Balancing Power Processes." He also collaborated with Lasswell in a joint study of people on public relief. The study, a truly pioneering work, was based on a sample of case records as well as personal interviews with relief clients that Almond conducted while working as a casework aide in the Stockyards district of the Unemployment Relief Service. It led to Almond's first published article (with Lasswell) in *The American Political Science Review* for August 1934, under the title "Aggressive Behavior by Clients Toward Public Relief Administrators: A Configurative Analysis." This first

publication exemplifies Almond's lifetime work as a social scientist: concern for real people and real societies, with all their problems, potentialities, and conflicts; the skill to observe and study them systematically through carefully gathered data; and the skill to make sense of the data through more general and abstract theorizing. Many years later he described the translation of everyday events at work into systematic social science data: "As I sat there day after day writing complaints on three-by-five slips of paper, it occurred to me that I was witnessing human behavior, and that perhaps it was interesting and researchable" (2002, pp. 2-4).

Lasswell also encouraged Almond's Ph.D. dissertation on the elite of New York City, one of his mentor's interests. Of his New York adventure Almond once recalled, "I went to New York . . . bringing my University of Chicago culture with me. . . . Making contacts with the New York City elite . . . presented some problems. . . . I had, in some sense, to give false credentials to get invited to a dinner or a social occasion as a graduate student working for a Ph.D., and what I really was interested in was . . . seeing at first hand what their [the elite's] attitudes and their values were." His good intention to be a "participant observer" could not be sustained. "I just couldn't take it [like tea with Emily Post, he often recounted in good humor] and at the same time do a full day's work at the New York Public Library."[1]

The story of Almond's tribulations as a Ph.D. thesis writer has a unique aftermath. While he successfully defended the dissertation and received the degree in 1938, the work was not published until 60 years later, under the title *Plutocracy and Politics in New York* City (1998). The reason for this enervating postponement was that when in 1944 Almond included a number of chapters on the psychological aspects of wealth, Professor Merriam refused to recommend its publication, concerned about offending some of the major

New York donors to the University of Chicago. As Almond has ruefully written, including the chapters "would have given me the claim of being a political psychologist as well as a political sociologist."[2]

With the Ph.D. baton in his briefcase, Almond joined the faculty of Brooklyn College in 1938, at a time when jobs in academe were difficult to come by. He later remembered the "boredom" of having to teach five sections of the conventional course in American government for 15 hours per week. He remained at Brooklyn until World War II, which rescued him by bringing him to Washington for government service.

THE WAR YEARS: 1941-1946

Wartime Washington was a beehive of social scientists, and Almond became one of the hundreds of bees who found themselves in the dozen or so agencies that were in need of "intelligence." The demand for intelligence as a governmental function on a large scale was something radically new. That the Chicagoans would be in the forefront of the social scientists arriving in Washington should not come as a surprise, and the nation's capital became something of a replica writ large of the interdisciplinary movement that had been nursed at the University of Chicago. Once again, Harold Lasswell was for many, whether from Chicago or elsewhere, a kind of advance man who facilitated their migration into the new agencies. Through Lasswell's intervention Almond obtained a job in the bureau of intelligence within the Office of Facts and Figures (later the Office of War Information). Lasswell, as Almond recounts, thought of the bureau as "a really major research effort, both here and abroad, that would guide American information and activity. . . . In particular, he wanted to have a monitoring

of the media in the country and abroad. He wanted to have a regular surveying of opinion and attitudes relating to the war."[3] Though the agency's emphasis shifted from informed social science research to easily available news reports as sources of intelligence, Almond continued to work for the reduced operation. His job was to help in setting up a content analysis code. Almond also headed a small unit assigned to collect information about Germany, Italy, and occupied Europe. "Beginning with a knowledge of German, I began to think of myself as a European specialist, and as a comparativist during these middle years of the war." While, from the point of view of his interdisciplinary education and orientation, Almond once again found himself in the right place at the right time, he seems to have considered his government experience as not rewarding. "I can't say," he told an interviewer, "that our morale, as contributing to the war effort, was particularly high."[4]

Much more exciting and rewarding was his work in postwar Germany for the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. The major purpose was to study, by way of survey research, the effect of strategic bombing on the population's attitudes and behavior. The Almond team's special assignment was to retrieve documents dealing with the air war and interrogating police and Gestapo officials but also survivors of the German resistance. In this connection Almond came to be in contact with American social scientists, especially the scholars who were experimenting with and applying probability sampling in survey research. Some of them had come from the National Opinion Research Center; others later migrated to the University of Michigan and formed the Survey Research Center. Once again, Almond had come to be at the right place at the right time; he later referred to this unusual experience as "a form of postdoctoral training."

RETURN TO THE ACADEMY: 1947-1963

Almond was appointed to the professorate at Yale in 1946, where he also became a member of the Institute of International Studies, one of the first of such research groups in the country with an interdisciplinary orientation. Once again, he found himself in an intellectually stimulating environment. His first major book, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, published in 1950, quickly established him as a leading practitioner of a behavioral political science. Immediate evidence of the work's importance came when the journal *World Politics*, then only in its second year, asked a well-known social psychologist to review it and gave him the unusual space of more than 10 pages for doing it. One of the study's major themes is the periodic swings of American public opinion toward international affairs—from idealistic to cynical attitudes, from a support for withdrawal to support for intervention, from optimism to pessimism. Much influenced by the then current attempt to explain politics and society in psychosocial terms, but also distancing himself from the then fashionable but nebulous notion of "national character," Almond formulated the concept of mood. By mood Almond meant a rather pliable and formless reaction to an ambiguous context that was particularly pronounced in foreign affairs. He argued, however, that the pervasive and destructive nature of mood swings, especially among the lower social strata, which feel powerless, is offset by attentive publics among elites. Attentive publics is another then novel concept that Almond introduced into discourse about the relationship between public opinion and public policy formation.

When the institute moved to Princeton in 1950, Almond, now tenured, followed. About this time began his longtime and deep commitment to the interdisciplinary activities of

the Social Science Research Council that launched on a national scale what had begun in Chicago as the behavioral movement in political science. Quite apart from this involvement (treated below), his own research of the early 1950s culminated in the innovative *Appeals of Communism*, published in 1954; a book that remains, even today, a masterful treatment of the topic. Based on a wide range of data—opinion polls conducted in this country and abroad, depth interviews with former communists, and content analysis of relevant documents—the study employed whatever methodologies and relevant theories were available at the time, securing for Almond the recognition of having been one of the first practitioners of political psychology, long before it had become a field of study in its own right. Almond remained at Princeton until 1959, when he moved back to Yale, and from there, four years later, to Stanford, where as chair from 1964 to 1969 he effectively rejuvenated an old-fashioned Department of Political Science.

TOWARD A COMPARATIVE POLITICS: 1951-1963

With the coming of the 1950s, Almond would again be the right person at the right place at the right time. It was a time of much ferment in the social sciences, especially his own home discipline of political science. The major foundations—Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford—had become aware of the need for social science research and for the training of social scientists. The Social Science Research Council, then headed by the political scientist Pendleton Herring, became a major agency for promoting new developments in the social (now increasingly named "behavioral") sciences. In the fall of 1953 the Political Behavior Committee of the Social Science Research Council, under the leadership of David Truman and Pendleton Herring, asked Gabriel Almond to organize a new SSRC committee to work on bringing the

behavioral approach to the study of comparative politics. At that time the subfield of comparative politics was limited largely to the study of the major Western European states with an emphasis on constitutional and structural/institutional arrangements. Gabriel quickly organized the new Committee on Comparative Politics with a double mandate: first, to mobilize all the powers of the modern social sciences—including, in particular, the insights and findings of sociology, anthropology, and psychology—for the comparative study of political systems; and second, to expand the range of comparative analysis to include the non-Western world, in particular, the new states just emerging from colonial rule. A majority of the members of the initial Committee on Comparative Politics were specialists on the newly independent states and such non-Western countries as Japan, Turkey, and Iran.

By the summer of 1955 the committee had organized its first workshop, which examined the role of leadership in the political development of the postcolonial states. Almond recognized early on that among academics there was a great deal of untapped energy and specialized knowledge that could be brought together at relatively low cost to produce significant advances in the discipline. Although Gabriel was foremost an intellectual theorist and research scholar, he was also a man of action who had a keen sense of the state of the discipline and what organizational measures were likely to be most productive.

In addition to recruiting volunteer scholars, Almond sought additional foundation funds for a competitive program of grants to individuals for fieldwork. That effort supported 24 recipients, representing six disciplines, and produced research in 21 countries. The grants make possible such noteworthy studies as Edward Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*; Samuel H. Beer's *British Politics in a*

Collectivist Age; Seymour M. Lipset's *Political Man*; Fred Riggs's *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*; and Myron Weiner's *The Politics of Scarcity*.

It soon became apparent that a proliferation of ad hoc area-oriented studies would not produce the accumulation of knowledge expected of a science. At the beginning Almond suspected that comparative politics would benefit greatly by following the experience of American politics, which had achieved a breakthrough by focusing on the role of interest groups. However, there needed to be a more solid theoretical foundation for the analysis of political development. Building on the earlier social theorists who analyzed social change during the initial industrial revolution in Europe and on Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils's new work, *Toward a Theory of Action*, Gabriel crafted a heuristic theory for analyzing total political systems. He posited that all political systems consisted of a set of specific functions that could be performed by the same or different structures in different settings. This structural-functional formulation was the basis for *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (1960), which he edited with James S. Coleman. Gabriel did not insist upon a rigid application of his theoretical formulation, but rather encouraged others to use what they found most useful. Thus, the approach, in a loose way, provided the basis of one of the committee's most noteworthy projects, the nine-volume series of "Studies in Political Development" published by the Princeton University Press. Each volume examined political development from a different perspective, such as communications, bureaucracy, political parties, political culture, and the historical sequences of a set of general crises in development.

The committee produced more than 300 reports, ranging from books to articles and unpublished memoranda. It organized 23 conferences and cosponsored 6 others. It con-

ducted 5 summer workshops. In all its activities it involved some 270 scholars, with nearly 50 from foreign countries.

Gabriel had the extraordinary ability to recognize how people with different skills and area specializations, working with different concepts and theories, could still be brought together to produce a more general contribution to knowledge. He significantly advanced comparative studies through his ability to devise multiple models and to conceptualize typologies that would highlight significant factors for explaining differences among systems. He was thus able to bring order to the otherwise confusing world of political realities. As an intellectual leader he also had a remarkable instinct for judging when the stage was right for setting out in new directions. In the meetings of the committee he would tolerantly listen to the group discussion and then intercede to make first a general intellectual point, but then a proposal for action. He provided the leadership that fundamentally changed the character of comparative politics.

What is perhaps Almond's best known book, *The Civic Culture* (1963, with Sidney Verba), appeared during this period and had a significant impact on the comparative study of democracy. It was one of the first large-scale cross-national survey studies, and it examined the cultural roots of democracy in five nations. It opened the new field of comparative surveys and represented one of the first attempts to study cultural factors systematically in comparative politics. *The Civic Culture* spawned much additional research, some written to replicate it, some to present alternative positions, and some that went beyond it.

THE 1970S AT STANFORD

Almond's view of political change and development was broad and encompassing. In *The Politics of the Developing Areas* he proposed a broad analytical framework for identi-

fying the basic institutions and processes of social change; in *The Civic Culture* he used quantitative empirical analysis to consider the cultural components of democracy. In the 1970s he worked with a group of students at Stanford on an even broader approach. In *Crisis, Choice, and Change* (1973), Almond and his collaborators considered the role of leadership and strategic choice in political change. They turned to history, using seven historical accounts to consider the relative applicability of various approaches to political explanation. As Almond put it later, "We took . . . four distinctively different approaches to development explanation and . . . tried to use them . . . in historical contexts, not so much to generate a theory from these case studies . . . but as a demonstration of how these distinctive approaches fitted in together and had to be used together to get an adequate historical explanation on the historical outcome." As he put it, his work had now gone beyond an earlier focus on the social and psychological variables that explained the input side of politics to consider the performance of political systems—their productivity.[5] This expansive view of political explanation was carried over to his well-known textbook with G. Bingham Powell (1978), a standard work that has gone through numerous editions.

THE YEARS OF RETIREMENT

Crisis, Choice, and Change was completed at about the time of Almond's retirement from Stanford in 1976. In the oral history interview with Richard Brody at about that time, he described this comprehensive view of comparative politics as representing a "sense of closure as far as my own career is concerned." But his career was far from closed. In retirement Almond remained an active scholar and member of the discipline, rarely missing the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. His attention turned

to two main topics: the state of the political science discipline and a study of the role of religious fundamentalism in political life.

In a number of articles, brought together in *A Discipline Divided* (1990), Almond deplored the divisions in political science. What he believed to have been a more unified, though pluralistic, discipline was now—to use the phrase that became standard in the field to describe the unease he and others felt—seated at "separate tables," unable and unwilling to collaborate. He described the discipline as divided into two tendencies: "those who view the discipline as a hard science—formal, mathematical, statistical, experimental—dedicated to the accumulation of tested 'covering laws,' and those who are less sanguine and more eclectic, who view all scholarly methods, the scientific ones as well as the softer historical, philosophical, and legal ones, as appropriate and useful." Almond identified with the second school, because he thought that the "qualities of human culture and behavior" were not explicable by hard and fixed laws (1990, p. 7). It was not so much that he rejected a scientific approach; rather that he wanted a political science that was open to many approaches, a political science that was empirical and whose conclusions were open to testing and falsification. His objection was to premature closure in the name of overarching theories. Rational actor theory was his prime example of the latter. To Almond, politics was too important and too complicated to be encompassed in any particular approach; he wanted us all around the same table arguing it out.

Gabriel spent a large part of his retirement as a leader of a large-scale project on fundamentalisms sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The project took a very broad view of what is one of the more important religious and political phenomena of our day, funda-

mentalist religion. The project has the Almond stamp on it. It brought together numerous scholars, specialists in one religion or culture, to consider the more general subject of fundamentalist religions—just as Almond had brought together, many years earlier, numerous specialists to study the comparative politics of development. Almond and others provided an overarching framework within which comparisons could be made, but not one that obliterated the particularities of the many religions studied. The result was a massive outpouring of scholarship: 75 research papers and 5 volumes. The project culminated in an overview volume, *Strong Religions* (2003), authored by Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan. The book considers the role of fundamental religion most broadly, from its social roots to its political consequences. It does not simplify and reduce all to a single pattern, but allows one to see beyond the particularities of each of the forms of fundamentalism.

The book also reflects Almond's lifetime interest in religion and its role in social and political life. He was a student of the Old Testament and often cited its lessons in a modern context. His last paper, finished just before his death, was on "Foreign Policy and the Theology of Ancient Israel." Almond's early work with the Committee on Comparative Politics had been within the framework of modernization theory and its focus on the secularization of the world, but he had never abandoned his belief in the importance of religion.

Few scholars have had as broad and sustained an impact on political science. Almond's first publication was his article in *The American Political Science Review*, with Harold Lasswell, in 1934 on bureaucratic encounters in welfare offices. His last, *Strong Religions*, appeared shortly after his death in 2003. Seven decades of creativity is a record few scholars attain. The article with Lasswell represented an

innovative approach to citizen encounters with government, looking at the social and psychological micro-interactions of citizens face-to-face with officials. It was an approach that would be followed in many later works. And the article was about one of the most important substantive issues of that Depression era: how government provides assistance to its needy citizens. The last book, on fundamentalism, is on one of the most important substantive issues of the beginning of the twenty-first century. And it too will provide a template for further research in this important area.

It is fitting that in 2002, a year before his death, Almond published a collection of essays, *Ventures in Political Science: Narratives and Reflections*. At an age when many a scholar might collect a life's work of papers as a way of summarizing a productive career—and Gabriel's was surely productive during seven decades—he produced a set of insightful and relevant essays mostly written in his eighties.

Almond straddles Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction. He is neither a fox that knows many things nor a hedgehog that knows one big thing; rather he is a person who knows many big things. Almond was a producer of large-scale typologies and approaches who never abandoned close empirical work; a generalizer who accepted the variety of particular nations and cultures; an early user of quantitative approaches who never abandoned history. Some of Almond's schemas have been modified or replaced by others. Almond welcomed changes and modifications to his work, and assumed that others would move beyond it.

Seven decades of productivity: a long life, and a fruitful life. Gabriel Almond died on Christmas Day 2002, just before his ninety-second birthday. He was surrounded by his family at their annual reunion in Asilomar.

NOTE

1. American Political Science Association, Oral History Project. Interview with Richard Brody, 1976.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*

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