DANIEL J. BOORSTIN

DANIEL J. BOORSTIN, historian, teacher, prize-winning author, museum administrator, and Librarian of Congress from 1975 to 1987, died in Washington, D.C., on February 28, 2004. The cause was pneumonia. He was eighty-nine years old.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Boorstin graduated *summa cum laude* from Harvard University in 1934. During the next three years as a Rhodes Scholar, he studied law at Balliol College, Oxford, where he won first class honors in jurisprudence and civil law and was admitted as a barrister-at-law of the Inner Temple. In 1937 he returned to the United States to become a Sterling Fellow at Yale Law School, where he received a Doctor of Juridical Science degree in 1940.

That year he met his future wife, writer and editor Ruth Frankel. He was teaching legal history at Harvard in 1941 when his first book, *The Mysterious Science of the Law*, was published. In the preface, he noted that 'the encouragement of Miss Ruth Frankel has been of the greatest help.' After their marriage in April 1941, she became his active collaborator and principal editor. Many of his books are dedicated to her, including each volume in his two trilogies. She is the co-author of their popular, two-volume, high school textbook, *A Landmark History of the American People* (1987).

It was at the University of Chicago, where he taught from 1944 until 1969, that Daniel Boorstin developed a reputation as a leading historian of American culture. As a distinguished professor who loved debate and emphasized the importance of both originality and clear writing, he was a popular teacher not only at Chicago but also around the world, including the University of Rome, the University of Kyoto, the Sorbonne, Trinity College (Cambridge), and the University of Geneva.

In 1969 Smithsonian Institution Secretary S. Dillon Ripley persuaded Boorstin to leave the University of Chicago to become director of the Smithsonian's Museum of History and Technology,

now called the National Museum of American History, Behring Center. He held the post of senior historian from 1973 until 1975, when President Gerald R. Ford nominated him as the twelfth Librarian of Congress.

Boorstin brought new intellectual energy to the Library of Congress. Viewing the library as a 'multimedia encyclopedia' that took all knowledge for its province and a whole nation for its audience, he opened up the institution to the public, to scholars, and to new constituencies. In 1976 he approved the creation of the American Folklife Center. In 1977 he created the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, an office to promote books and reading nationally and internationally. By choosing an emphasis on a driving force in his life—the book—he pointed out that 'the computer can help us find what we know is there. But the book remains our symbol and our resource for the unimagined question and the unwelcome answer.' Through his leadership, in 1979 the Library of Congress and the Kennedy Center opened a Performing Arts Library at the Kennedy Center. The next year he established the Council of Scholars, a new link between the Library of Congress and the world of scholarship.

Boorstin also paid attention to the Library's Capitol Hill buildings. The Library's move between 1980 and 1982 into its new James Madison Memorial Building was a highlight of his administration. To make the public aware of the library's unparalleled motion pictures, he obtained private support to open in 1983 the Mary Pickford Theater in the Madison Building. With help from his friend Architect of the Capitol George White, in 1984 he persuaded Congress to appropriate $81.5 million for the restoration of the library's two oldest structures, the Jefferson (1897) and Adams (1939) Buildings. Never afraid of controversy, in 1986 Boorstin directly confronted Congress about its plans to make drastic cuts to the library's budget. His eloquent plea, which earned him the sobriquet of 'an intellectual Paul Revere,' resulted in the restoration of a substantial portion of the sum that had been cut. During

Boorstin's administration, the library's annual appropriation increased from $116 million to more than $250 million.

As Librarian of Congress, he never missed an opportunity to introduce his institution to as wide an audience as possible. For example, he opened the Jefferson Building's giant bronze doors to the public for the first time in many years and installed picnic tables on several outdoor plazas. One of his first efforts was characteristic and has become part of the Library's own institutional folklore. In 1976 he held a press conference to describe a discovery he had just made in a wall safe in his office: the contents of Lincoln's pockets the night he was assassinated. Not surprisingly, the items immediately went on public display. Today they are the most popular items seen by tourists who visit the 'American Treasures of the Library of Congress' exhibition in the Library's Jefferson Building.

Daniel Boorstin served with distinction until 1987, when he decided to retire to continue his writing on a fulltime basis. A man of unquenchable curiosity and great energy, Boorstin wrote more than twenty books; at last count, his work had been published in thirty-two languages. He had a broad but deep historical perspective and a remarkable ability to synthesize large amounts of material. He never hesitated to generalize, a trait that sometimes brought criticism from an academic community that accused him of over-generalizing and in the process avoiding the conflicts and unhappy side of American history. He was a graceful writer who loved short, powerful sentences, such as the opening line of the second volume of *The Americans:* 'America grew in the search for community.' Other examples from *The Americans* include: 'America began as a sobering experience. The colonies were a disproving ground for utopias.' 'Perhaps never before in a civilized country had physical and intellectual experience been so clearly synonymous.' And, 'American genius was less for invention or discovery than for experiment.'

In one of his most influential and frequently quoted books, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1964), he argued that

the mass media invent events and create illusions that distort the reality of national experience. In the introduction he clearly describes both his overall goal and conclusion: 'In this book I describe the world of our making, how we have used our wealth, our literacy, our technology, and our progress, to create the thicket of unreality which stands before us and the facts of life. I recount historical forces which have given us this unprecedented opportunity to deceive ourselves and to befog our experience.'

Daniel Boorstin proudly characterized himself as an amateur—someone concerned about knowing for the sake of knowing. In response to critics, he pointed out that he was trained as a lawyer, not a professional historian, and that his books were written for the general public, not for historians. And he found his audience—becoming one of America's best-selling and most popular cultural historians and commentators.

Technological and social change were important underlying themes in nearly all of Boorstin's books, in particular how new technologies shaped everyday life and experience. In *The Americans*, for example, he considered topics such as Americanisms, food, newspapers, department stores, travel, refrigeration, higher education, mail delivery, packaging, sewage systems, American humor and even 'the decline of the book.' His two trilogies are noted for their exceptionally informative (and digressive) bibliographic essays.

His first major trilogy consisted of *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (1958), which won the Bancroft Prize; *The Americans: The National Experience* (1965), winner of the Parkman Prize; and *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (1973), which won both the Pulitzer Prize and the Dexter Prize. Then, according to his wife, Ruth, he pinned a map of the world to a prominent wall in his home study, and began work on a second trilogy, this one concerned with the history of the world. Its volumes are *The Discoverers: A History of Man's Search to Know His World and Himself* (1983), a main selection of the Book of the Month Club; *The Creators: A History of Heroes of the Imagination* (1992); and *The*

Seekers: A History of Man's Continuing Quest to Understand His World (1998).

Boorstin favored bow ties—and unconventional ideas and approaches. He was a natural showman and excellent speaker whose wit, wry sense of humor, and contributions as a cultural historian were widely appreciated. These traits and accomplishments helped him achieve his basic mission as Librarian of Congress: raising the visibility of the Library of Congress and its importance for members of Congress, the American public, and the world. Elected to the American Antiquarian Society in 1969, he attended the April 1970 semiannual meeting at Winterthur Museum and remained a good colleague and valued advisor on library matters throughout the remainder of his life.

At the public memorial service, his predecessor, Librarian of Congress James H. Billington described Boorstin's fruitful years as Librarian of Congress and his brilliance as an historian. He called Boorstin 'a key figure—along with his friends Dillon Ripley and Roger Stevens—in the cultural coming of age of our nation's capitol, and a matchless chronicler of the uniqueness, the innovative spirit, and the everyday practicality of our shared American experience.'

In addition to Ruth, his immediate survivors include their three sons, Paul, Jon, and David, who make their livings through literary activities or in the performing arts, and their six grandchildren.

John Y. Cole

ARTHUR FRANCIS SCHRADER

Arthur F. Schrader came of age in the folk revival of the 1940s and 1950s. He loved folk song and international folk dance, getting good tastes of both while serving with the United States Army in Europe during World War II. His army experience wasn't all singing and dancing, however. He fought with