

# In Memoriam

Everett Ladd had a deep understanding of the American people and an abiding faith in the soundness of their judgments. He wrote eloquently about those judgments in more than 20 books and hundreds of articles. He valued the opportunity *Public Perspective* provided him and others to write about the core beliefs of Americans. He would be pleased that David Gergen, Amitai Etzioni, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Ben Wattenberg, as well as former students John White, Regina Dougherty Rodgers, and Carlos Elordi, honor his memory with their contributions to this issue.

As a young political scientist, Everett foresaw not only the growth of the polling business, but also the enormous attention that would be devoted to it. He became executive director of the Roper Center in 1977 and accelerated the development of an archive of polling data available to scholars, journalists, students and other interested individuals who wanted to understand public attitudes on myriad topics. By the 1960s, the archive contained some 36,000 questions from national surveys alone. Today, that number tops 325,000. Like George Gallup and Elmo Roper, Everett believed that polls, properly used, could amplify the public's voice. Sure, he would say, Americans often got facts wrong. But their larger judgments about the direction their society should take were almost always on target.

Everett's judgments about the American people *were* sound. In 1979, at a time when the Carter presidency was in serious trouble, he wrote a colorful commentary that put the polls of that time in proper perspective. "The key question is not, of course, whether Americans are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with national performance. They are, and it could not have been otherwise. Only a nation of idiots could look at the events of the last 15 years—a period that has seen massive protests at colleges attended by the country's most privileged youth, the tragic war in Indochina, the assassination of one president, the virtually forced retirement of another, the de facto impeachment of a third, and the near political collapse of a fourth, seriously disruptive inflation, economic growth lagging way behind that of the two preceding decades and say, 'Gee isn't it all terrific!'" He argued that there was no crisis of confidence in the land, no malaise affecting the American spirit, but deep concern about the performance of elected leaders and core institutions. He believed that the public's criticisms of the Carter administration were a way of telling officials to perform better. His diagnosis was correct.

## Everett C. Ladd



Peter Morenus

"Perform better" was counsel he would give often. He urged the polling business to do a better job. He worried about the proliferation of polls, rising refusal rates, tensions between the requirements of good polling and good journalism, and problems in election polling. In the pages of *Public Perspective*, he stepped up to the plate on controversial topics—deliberative polling, election poll performance, and the validity of surveys about sex.

Everett was a patriot, and he believed in the resiliency of our democracy. His love of country could be seen in his frequent reminders about the strengths of our democracy. If he were alive today, he would acknowledge the familiar complaints about presidential elections—too much money in campaigns, low voter turnout, voter alienation—and then he would correct popular misimpressions about those areas. But he would also remind us that the 2000 election will be the 54th consecutive national election "in which Americans have gone to the polls freely—a record of democratic participation that is unmatched.... We lose sight of this sometimes amidst the complaining.... In fact, our system of choosing leaders works remarkably well. Is there any alternate system in any other democracy that we should want to put in its place?"<sup>1</sup>

His last book, *The Ladd Report*, debunked the argument that civic America was in decline. He argued that "we have allowed our persistent anxieties about the quality of our citizenship to blind us to the many positive trends that have been occurring." Civic America is being "renewed and extended, not diminished," and the new era, he argued, would see more but different participation.

Everett was always a loyal friend. He was devoted to the University of Connecticut (and its basketball teams) and a true friend of the polling profession.

—**Karlyn H. Bowman**  
**American Enterprise Institute**

<sup>1</sup>From an essay written by Everett Ladd about the 1996 election.

Contributions to the Everett Carl Ladd, Jr. Fellowship in American Politics may be sent to the University of Connecticut Foundation, 2131 Hillside Road, U-3206, Storrs, CT 06269-3206.