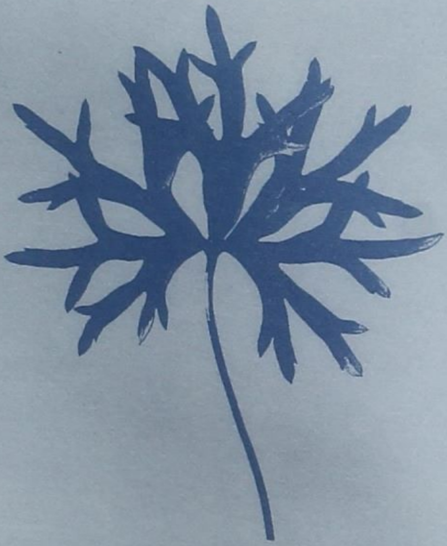
# The
# Walter Capps
# Memorial
# Lecture



The Walter Capps Memorial Lecture was established by the Federation of State Humanities Councils in 1999 to honor the memory of Walter Capps, teacher, writer, public servant, and humanist in the deepest sense. In dedicating this annual lecture to its former chair, the federation honors Walter and the humanistic values his life so splendidly embodied: a belief in heartfelt dialogue; an ability to evoke and create meaning through personal stories; a faith that the exchange of such stories creates understanding and empathy in those who hear them; a commitment to include all voices, especially those not often heard; and the promotion of civility in public and private life.

# WELCOME

THE WALTER CAPPS
MEMORIAL LECTURE

IN HONOR OF THE MEMORY
OF WALTER CAPPS,
TEACHER, WRITER, PUBLIC
SERVANT, AND HUMANIST

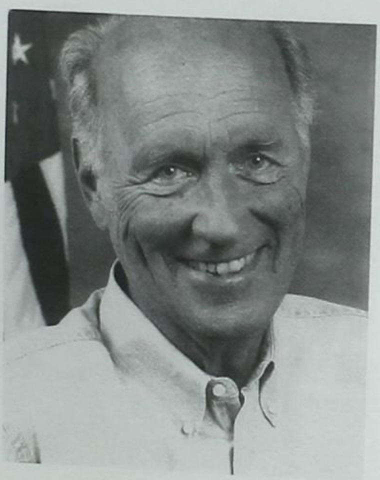
# Welcome

*Congratulations on* your selection as the Walter Capps Memorial Lecturer. On behalf of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, we're pleased to present you with this album to mark the honor of your selection and to tell you a bit about the man the lecture series itself honors.

When we were trying to select a fitting symbol to give the lecturer, Mas Masumoto, the first Capps lecturer, suggested that, given the kind of man Walter Capps was, an album rather than a customary certificate or plaque would be more appropriate. This album contains voices and stories, and Walter valued voices and cherished stories. We hope that it gives you a sense of where you fit in relationship to Walter and the ever-growing number of Capps lecturers who have come before you, a sense of where you fit in this modest slice of history. We also hope it feels friendly, open, and informal, like the man it memorializes.

> This album contains voices and stories, and Walter valued voices and cherished stories. We hope it will give you a sense of where you fit in relationship to Walter and the ever-growing number of Capps lecturers who came before you, a sense of where you fit in this modest slice of history.

Walter Holden Capps was barely into his first term as a congressman when he was killed by a sudden heart attack in October 1997, at the age of 63. His life was



rich with accomplishments and especially enriched by the humanities. He was a professor of religious studies at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California for 33 years, the author of 14 books and scores of articles, a member of Congress from California's 22nd district, creator of a nationally known course on the Vietnam War, and a member of the California Council for the Humanities for six years, its chair for three, and chair of the Federation of State humanities Councils from 1983-85.

There are many reasons why the Federation of State Humanities Councils might wish to bestow Walter's name on its first annual lecture series, but I believe that the reason we have chosen to honor Walter Capps with this memorial lecture is because Walter was not just an inspirational teacher and a renowned scholar of the humanities. In Walter, we honor a true practitioner of the humanities.

> Walter practiced the essential public activities that the humanities stand for: the speaking and the deep listening of dialogue; the attempt to create meaning through the stories we tell about ourselves, our families, our communities, and our nation; the search for the humanities that connect us to other people, other times.

It's not just that he was humane or humanistic, though he was certainly both, but rather that Walter practiced the essential public activities that the humanities stand for: the speaking and the deep listening of dialogue; the attempt to create meaning through the stories we tell about ourselves, our families, our communities, and our nation; the search for the human ties that connect us to other people, other times.

His practice of the humanities is nowhere better illustrated than in the course he became nationally known for, Religious Studies 155, Religion and the Impact of the Vietnam War. I want to tell you how that course came to be.

Walter was a fellow at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions and in 1977 became its program director. The center, which had hosted many workshops on the Vietnam War while it raged, decided to do one last workshop on the war, now that it was over. Walter looked down the list of prospective invitees and noticed that the list included not a single veteran of the war. This was 1977, barely two years after the war's ignominious end, and no one wanted to talk to or listen to Vietnam veterans. Walter started calling around and located Shad Meshad, who had started the first center for Vietnam veterans by going down to the Santa Monica pier and approaching veterans, whom he said he could identify by the lost look in their eyes. Walter persuaded Shad and another vet, Frederick Downs, Jr., to come to the workshop.

For most of the first day, all the policy experts talked and talked about the war. The two vets were silent. Walter tried to draw them out, but it was difficult. Finally, during a break, they told Walter that they couldn't talk about the war the way everyone else was doing. That's OK, Walter said, tell it in your own way. After the break, Fred Downs pounded the hook at the end of his right arm into the green felt of the polished conference table and began to tell the startled audience about the Vietnam War he had experienced.

What Walter heard that day was so searing, so powerful that he knew that the war was not finished, not in any way that was important to the soul of the country. So he decided to teach what came to be called simply the Vietnam class. More important, he decided that the main substance of the course would be not lectures, but the first person testimony of people who had participated in that war.

The university was reluctant to sanction such a course, but in 1979 he was allowed to offer the class on a trial basis. The response was stunning. Within a few years, the course had to be offered in the largest auditorium on campus. Nine hundred attended. More enrolled. The class was profiled on "60 Minutes."

Walter later applied the same principles in a new course he called the Voice of the Stranger, from the admonition in the 23rd verse of Exodus that reads, "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." As he had once invited Vietnam vets to speak, Walter now invited AIDS patients, blind people, disabled people, homeless people, people pushed to the margins of society into the heart of the university.

Walter Capps' life is an example of humane public service; an example of the use of the humanities to encourage people, especially people at society's margins, to tell their own stories, no matter how painful or unwelcome; an exemplar of the belief that first-person testimony can lead an audience both to empathetic understanding and the desire to help. These are the qualities we honor in Walter Capps, and these are the qualities the federation has pledged to honor in the annual lecture devoted to his memory.

Again, they trusted him with their stories. And again, students responded.

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In the pages that follow, you will hear Walt's voice in brief readings read by colleagues at a memorial service on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the voices of people who loved him, from the memorial service held in the Santa Barbara Mission. I want to close with two small incidents that broke me open on my way home from the service because they'll tell you something about how Walter was regarded and how his legacy lives.

A stewardess on the plane saw a poem I had written and said, "Is that for Walter?" (Not Rep. Capps, not Dr. Capps, but Walter). "Yes", I said. "Walter's the only person I've ever voted FOR," she said. "You know, not against the other guy, but really FOR. Did you know him personally?" I nodded. "Oh, I'm really sorry, really sorry."

Later, driving from the San Francisco Airport toward the Golden Gate Bridge, I approach a stoplight and see a sight we've all seen before: a middle-aged guy on the median strip with a sign that says **"VIETNAM VET. WILL WORK FOR FOOD. PLEASE HELP."** Only this time, I don't put on my I-don't-see-you face and look straight out through the windshield. I pull out a couple of bucks and offer it to him. "Good luck, brother," I say. The guy's eyes fill. My eyes fill. Now the car behind me offers him something. Maybe the car behind him. That's for you, Walter, I thought, that's for you.

We know your lecture will be worthy of the man for whom it's named. Thank you and congratulations.

James Quay

James Quay
Executive Director
California Council for the Humanities

# Biography

*Born and raised* in Nebraska, Walter Capps received his bachelor of science degree in the humanities from Portland State University in 1958 and two years later a bachelor's of divinity from Augusta Theological Seminary. Walter then went to the Yale Divinity School, where he obtained a master's of sacred theology. He was awarded a second master's degree from the Yale Graduate School and his doctorate from Yale in 1965. In 1997 he received an honorary doctorate from Uppsala University for his distinguished contributions to the study of religion.

Walter moved to Santa Barbara in 1964 with his wife, Lois, when he was appointed to the newly established department of religious studies at UC Santa Barbara. Santa Barbara is where all three of his children were born.

Walter taught courses on monasticism, taking nearly 100 students each quarter to monasteries throughout California. Later, he taught courses on mysticism, religion and politics in America, religion and civic life, and his last lecture course, the ethics of Jesus. For more than a decade, he took great pleasure in organizing, under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities, summer seminars on the study of religion for high school, college, and university teachers. Walter was instrumental in developing UC's Washington, D.C., Center, a place where students could study, conduct research, and become involved in important internship programs.

Throughout his life, he was an unrelenting advocate and defender of the humanities as central to a liberal education. He served as a member of Advisory Committee for the National Humanities Center (1977-1980), a member of the American Association for the Advancement of the Humanities (1980-1982), chair of the California Council for the Humanities (1983-1985), president of the National Federation of State Humanities Councils (1985-1987), and from the floor of the House of Representatives, a powerful voice in support of the humanities and the arts.

Walter's teaching won him national recognition. In 1987 the American Academy of Religion, the largest professional association for the study of religion in North America, gave him its Outstanding Teaching Award. The Santa Barbara chapter of the National Students Honor Society Mortar Board named him Professor of the Year four times. Immaculate Heart College awarded him the Corita Kent Peace Award in 1989, and in 1992 he received the President's Award from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley. He received 13 grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, one major grant from the Lilly Endowment, and 14 grants from the Laucks Foundation. And he received eight UC Santa Barbara grants for innovative projects in undergraduate instruction.

In 1978 Walter instituted a new undergraduate course titled the Impact of the Vietnam War. It was the first course in the nation to examine what he called America's "unfinished war." The new course attracted only 30 students, but by the late 1980s it was the biggest draw on campus, with 800 and

900 students enrolling each semester. Between 1978 and 1996, more than 14,000 students took the course. That number is just short of the entire undergraduate enrollment of UCSB for the 1997-1998 academic year.

Walter invited military and political scientists to speak to his students and, most daringly, Vietnam veterans. For veterans, such as Wilson Hubbell and Charlie Plumb, it was the first opportunity to talk about their experiences. Army nurses came and told students about routine decisions they had made in the field that they were not allowed to carry out in hospitals back home. Many of the veterans broke down in the classroom as they related their most intimate memories. Students invited their mothers and fathers to the class. For almost everyone, it was the first time they had spoken about their experiences to sons and daughters.

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For veterans, Walter's course was the beginning of a profound process of healing. For students, the course bound generations together in a new understanding of the meaning of the war to the nation and to their own identities. Walter and his students became involved in the politics of veterans' affairs, the recognition of post-traumatic stress syndrome, the creation of a network of Vietnam veterans centers, and the building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Each year Walter would take a group of students to Washington, where they traced the names of those thousands of young men and women who had died.

The course became a model for offerings at other universities and brought Walter national attention. Reporters frequented the class, and segments of the course were broadcast on television stations nationwide, with "60 Minutes" featuring it three times. In 1988 Walter went to the Soviet Union with veterans of the Vietnam War to meet and talk with Soviet officials and Soviet veterans of the war in Afghanistan. In 1991 Walter was among the first group of American educators to go to Vietnam.

He wrote more than 100 published articles, research papers, and essays during his career in journalism. He was invited to give lectures at 50 universities and colleges throughout the United States, and he delivered countless public addresses to professional and civic organizations, governmental agencies, and business organizations, and he spoke in churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions. His first book, *Ways of Understanding Religion* (1970), set out the classic approaches to the study of religion since the end of the 19th century. It was followed by *Ways of Looking at Religion* (1972). He also wrote two books on religion and psychology, *The Religious Personality* (1970), which he co-authored with his brother, and *Encounter with Erikson* (1976).

In 1976 he edited and published a collection of papers from a conference on the religious traditions of Native Americans. This undertaking brought together the work of a new young generation of scholars who have since gone on to distinguish themselves. He was fascinated by the new theologies emerging in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. He explores those new ideas in *Time Invades the Cathedral: Tensions in the School of Hope* (1972), and in *Hope Against Hope: Moltmann to Merton in One Theological Decade* (1976) examines the work and thought of Ernst Bloch, Jurgen Moltmann, and the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, a man whose thought would continue to inspire Walter.

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His *Silent Fire: An Invitation to Western Mysticism* (1978) introduces readers to the fundamental interpretive problems of mysticism. In *The Monastic Impulse* (1983), he seeks to understand how monasticism became the traditional source for much of the religious creativity of Western Christianity. His *Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience* was first published in 1982 and then revised in a new edition in 1990. He edited a collection of readings directly related to his class, *The Vietnam War Reader* (1991). In 1989 he completed his *Thomas Merton: Preview of an Asian Journey* and in 1990, he published *The New Religious Right: Piety, Patriotism and Politics*, the result of nearly five years of extensive fieldwork. He worked on his final book, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (1995), when he was running for Congress. Several other works are currently in production. They include a series of articles on Vaclav Havel and a book-length manuscript titled *Finishing the War: The Moral and Spiritual Challenges of Vietnam*.

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Walter was a consummate teacher and scholar, but also a model university citizen. Throughout his career, Walter gave long hours of service to the University of California. From 1971 to 1977, he was the director of the Institute of Religious Studies and organized the research unit affiliated with the Department of Religious Studies. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Walter had been deeply involved in the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, and it was quite natural for him to encourage the center's move to the UC Santa Barbara campus shortly after the death of the center's founder, Robert Hutchins. Walter served as the director of the Robert M. Hutchins Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions from 1980 to 1981, where with the support of Deborah R. Sills, now associate professor and chair of religious studies at California Lutheran University, he organized conferences and lecture series on California politics, democracy and civic society, the environment, the American and global economy, and technology and nuclear disarmament.

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# EXCERPTS

Excerpts from the
Memorial Service for
Walter Capps
Santa Barbara Mission
November 3, 1997

# Excerpts

**Somehow he knew, more than anyone, I firmly believe, that every encounter he had, every exchange, every interaction, could be one of meaning.**

### Daughter Laura Capps

*In college my friends* would tease me about my close relationship with my father and I agree that the frequency of his telephone calls and visits to Berkeley were almost embarrassing. Every month or so he would make his way up and somehow finagle giving a lecture, doing research at the Graduate Theological Union. We'd spend a few hours, if we were lucky catch a Cal football game, he'd help me with a paper, eat some pea soup, and be on his way.

In Washington, before he got there on his own, he'd visit me with regularity, to test things out and make sure I was fine. I never discouraged these visits, for I knew, as I feel with intensity now, that those were the moments which made me the luckiest daughter alive.

While we are still in a state of shock, we are comforted by the knowledge and a tangible memory of all that he cherished. My dad was a person of moments. Perhaps his greatest wisdom rests in this: He felt the power and pricelessness of each and every moment with one another. Somehow he knew, more than anyone, I firmly believe, that every encounter he had, every exchange, every interaction could be one of meaning.

The last time that I saw my father—it was just last Friday—in the Capitol, unexpectedly, I drove with my mother there in hopes to see him for lunch. Even though I'd just seen him the night before, he quickly dropped what he had on his schedule to do and raced from his office to where we were, in the Rayburn room, near the House floor. When he got there, he had us engage in a rather conspicuous three-way hug, overjoyed that his two ladies had joined him. He marveled, as he did regularly, that the three of us were in the nation's capitol together. He said something like, "think of all we did to get here, Lois, and imagine that we get to be here while our daughter works just down the street." This sort of excitedness was such a normal routine with him, that it was easy not to pay attention to the words, to say, "C'mon Dad. People are starting to watch. Let's get on with things."

But the impact of his marvel at everyday experiences is deep within me. It'll carry us through his absence and inspire us to do the same. For Walter Holden Capps, every single interaction was one of special meaning. Whether lecturing in Campell Hall, chatting in the check-out line of Ross Dress for Less, filling the Santa Barbara Rehabilitation Center with his piano music, teaching in the halls of Congress or greeting folks at the Lompoc farmers' market, my father made sure that everyone he spoke to he connected with. This was natural for him, It was his way and it was his magic. And he was magically, madly, deeply in love with our mother.

One of the powerful lessons my father taught me was a lesson of basic humanity. He would say, time and time again, that before we are Americans, before we are Californians, before we are Democrats or Republicans, Christians or Jews, before we are female or male, young or old, privileged or wanting, we are humans first.

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We are humans first of all and above all. It is an idea that all of us can comprehend but it is an idea that guided my father's actions day by day from the five-minute exchange with the elevator operator to the concept of helping us learn the lessons of the Vietnam War.

He connected with me in a way which I know will never be matched, yet will never be over. I truly believe my father was too good to be true. Nearly every morning I would come to work and there'd be an e-mail message waiting for me, despite the time change, from him. Sometimes long, but usually quick. In closing, I'd like to share with you a poignant yet typical one he sent me this summer.

Monday morning. You OK, Laura? Nice Sunday evening, we, all four, the Mooser, Todd, and Julie, watched dusk come last night. First star, then next stars, then bats swarming. Then birds no longer chirping, with planes flying. Waited for the owl, but no owl, then raccoons stirring. Pretty matchless.

My only problem here is I had a blood vessel break in my right eye, which is now red, but nurse said it was OK. Patriotic eyes, red, white, and blue.

So glad it is good news to....{ } Laura, it is simple stuff, maybe too simple to be worth everything. But so much of life is dispositional, not simply attitudinal but dispositional. Like David Gardner once told me, "If you think you can or if you think you cannot, you're probably right." It sounds too slick, but one side of it is definitely true. When you get down on yourself, you're being injurious to your own self. In other words, nobody can be Laura Capps better than Laura Capps and this is all you have to be. Your mom and I send baskets of love.

Well Dad, we love you too.

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## Daughter Lisa Capps

*Five years ago,* on a day that Nathan and I were married, my dad and I stood in the back of this magnificent mission. Just before the ceremony started, I remember saying, "Hey Dad, don't you think this aisle is kinda long?" And he replied, "Yes, but just look at all of these family and friends. We can do it, don't you think?" And as I stand here looking at all of you, dear family and friends, I know we can do it.

In a beautifully paradoxical way, I feel him giving us strength and cheering us on, as we face the pain of his loss. One of the most comforting images for me goes back as far as I can remember and carries into the present, the most recent time I was in Santa Barbara, and it's of waking up to the sight of my dad typing away in his office to the smell of Swedish coffee and the crumbs from whatever member of the breads family he'd slathered in jam first thing. He loved his work. It was a constant source of energy and joy. One of his invaluable gifts to me and to all of us is a sense of the strength of ideas–their power to generate love, to cultivate what is sacred, to bridge time and space, and to bring people together.

Throughout my childhood, my dad spent many weekends taking me to swim meets up and down Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties. At the meets, while the other parents secured their places in the bleachers, he'd find a grassy space not too far from the pool and set up his typewriter to work on his manuscripts. I let him know when I was about to race and without fail, when I stood on the starting block, amidst the

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cries of "Go!" and "Kill 'em!," I'd hear my dad's voice: "Take it easy, Lili! You can do it!"

On the way home, he'd tell me about the various people he was thinking and writing about: Martin Luther, Thomas Merton, Hildegard of Bingen, and Alexis de Tocqueville. For him these great hearts and minds were not confined to dusty texts or lofty academic dialogue. They were traveling companions, conversational partners. One of his favorites, whose spirit he possessed, was the father of the Danish Folk School movement, Nikolai Grundvig, known as "the Happy Dane." He introduced many of us to Grundvig, appropriately, while eating meatballs and pastry and listening to sweet music. Rather than seeing life as a preparation for eternity, Grundvig believed that man's entire earthly life was a God-given gift with value in itself. My dad showed us that.

He called forth the sacred in everyday life. He experienced the splendor of the human spirit in all of God's creatures, from the bluebirds to the Poor Clares singing morning prayers, to the UCSB basketball team striving on the court, to gardeners' careful tending of the roses in front of this mission, to his grandson's sense of wonder when a train passed through town. Many people have noted that Walter Capps was an atypical congressman. Well, he was an atypical academic as well. When I first started college, I wondered whether my dad lacked some of the rigor of the professors and scientists I encountered. I have since realized that what set him apart was the impetus and focus of his work: the human capacity for love and compassion and the full realization of every human spirit. This is not typical academic fare.

His diverse works, on liberation theology, mysticism, religious fundamentalism, and the impact of the Vietnam War, center on a common theme: that there are no substitutes for the indelible and unquenchable bonds by which human lives are linked. Loving and caring for one another is at the core of what deserves our greatest respect. There's nothing my dad cherished more than loving and caring for his family. When he went on trips, he'd inevitably leave later than scheduled and he'd return sooner than planned. When he came back, ecstatic to be in his home, with his love and his children, he'd explain "It just didn't make sense to be away."

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With you, thankfully, I ache with the loss of my father and friend. I know that life on this earth will never be the same. But at the same time, with all my heart, I trust that he will show us new ways of being together. And for that, I'm grateful. Thank you.

## SENATOR ROBERT KERREY

*Lois and Lisa, and Todd and Laura,* I'm very sorry that you must suffer this terrible loss, the worst loss of your lives. Walter was your husband, he was your father, he was your storyteller, he was your piano player, he was a serious man with a serious smile and a serious sense of humor. A man who could quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer one moment and Ole and Lena the next.

Walter was a paradox. He was an intellectual with an adventurer's heart. Gary Parrot, a SEAL teammate of mine, saw Walter circumvent the order of a Capitol policeman who was controlling pedestrian traffic during the 1989 inaugural festivities and he said, "This man is an operator. He could be in the teams." And it's true.

It was also true that he could comprehend the rare and confusing discussions about the why of life while his feet continued to trod the path of we mortals. He was one of them, one of the high priests and professors with knowledge and he was one of us, one of the people who suffer and weep and laugh our way through our existence. He could walk in our shoes and remind us where our shoes were taking us.

Shoes were important to Walter. Not shoes as fashion statement or shoes as providers of functional comfort, but shoes as refuge. Whenever Walter was faced with a question he could not answer, he said he would look down at his shoes. He would look down, he would bow his head humbly, shuffle uncomfortably and say, "I don't know. That's a difficult question."

He would look down at his shoes as he brought us together, together to tell our stories to his class on the impact of the Vietnam War on our country. Veterans of the war who said "yes" stood with veterans of the jail who said "no." Americans stood with Vietnamese. Men stood with women. All stood to face a thousand young students who sat across the gulf made by our differences. We stood and spoke. We told our stories. We surrendered our secrets because we trusted Walter. We trusted his judgment would be kind. We trusted he would hear us, that he would value our words and our troubled spirit. Walter's gift was that he saw spirit where others saw physical characteristics. He did not just see black and brown and white, he saw more than fat or skinny, beautiful or ugly, old or young. He did not see the things or experiences that make us different. He saw the thing that made us the same.

> ...he's looking down at his shoes, looking down and praying that his considerable legacy of reconciliation and celebration and sincere, big-hearted effort to bring us together will spread to those we meet, spread like a smile across his welcoming face.

Ted Williams, I am told, stood at home plate with a baseball bat in his hands, waiting for the pitcher to deliver, knowing he could see the seams of the high-speed ball as it traveled toward him. His vision was a gift and with it he was a formidable hitter, the last to safely hit four times out of ten. Walter Capps' gift was that he could see the seams of our souls hurtling through space toward our destiny. He stood at home plate with nothing in his hands, waiting patiently for us to deliver. He did not hit our pitches. He caught them, caught the ball and tossed it gently back. Then, instead of a sermon or a rational explanation, he would look down at his shoes—and we, in rapt imitation, would do the same. We looked down at our shoes, bowed our heads, stopped our talking, listened, joined him in silent prayer, without being asked or told.

Walter was a paradox. Born and reared on the high plains in the pre-Kinsey era, before public confessions were the order of the day, he learned to keep his troubles to himself and yet he invited us to tell our troubles to him. He was a paradox: a deeply religious man who believed that life in the next world was more glorious than life in this one. He left the tenured, sunny world of UCSB to join the temporal, compromising world of the Congress. He joined "the people's house," where laws are written by imperfect men and women whose fondest hope is that their law will make a more perfect union. A paradox of a man who loved the sound of the crude tuba as much as the sophisticated symphony, who read auto mechanics as easily as Tolstoy, who listened as closely to the man who pressed his clothes as he did to the man we know as president. He was a good one.

I believe he's listening to these words of praise and love right now. And hearing them, he's looking down at his shoes, looking down and praying that his considerable legacy of reconciliation and celebration and sincere, big-hearted effort to bring us together will spread to those we meet, spread like a smile across his welcoming face.

To Lois, to Lisa, to Todd and Laura, you know better than we what a rare and wonderful gift he was, and you know he would want our grief to be short-lived. You know that this will be easier said than done. All our lives are reduced by the loss of him, but nowhere near as much as we gained from knowing him.

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## President Bill Clinton

*Dear Lois,*

Hilary and I were deeply saddened by Walter's death. He was such a special man: a teacher in the arena, a gentle spirit with a lion's heart. Perhaps because he came to public service late in life, he brought to Washington a unique blend of wisdom, independence, and a sense of humor. His combination of strong values and uncommon decency earned him the respect of his colleagues and the lasting affection of all of us who were privileged to know him.

Walter inspired those of us who worked with him to work harder, to stand together, and to reach higher. His death is a loss not only for you and your family but for our nation as well. I will miss him terribly but I will never forget him. His life was a great gift. We join Laura's many friends in the White House in keeping all of you in our thoughts and prayers.

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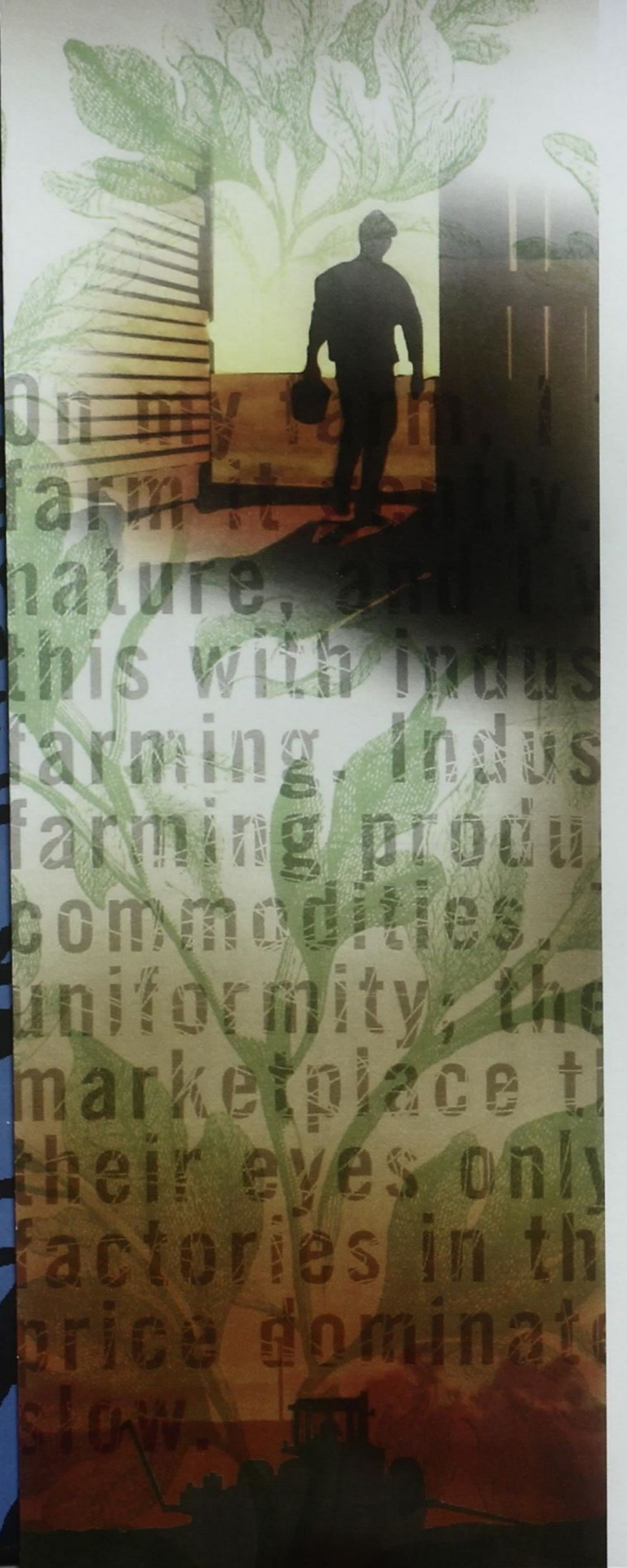
# LECTURE

First Walter Capps
Memorial Lecture
"Slow Farming and the
Stories that Bind Us"

David Mas Masumoto
Denver, Colorado
October 3, 1999


On my farm, I
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# Lecture

### David Mas Masumoto

*I am a farmer.* With that in mind, I want to tell you a little bit about my farm and about stories that I have to share with you. I'll begin by reading a little about the peach that I grow:

"Sun Crest is one of the last remaining truly juicy peaches. When you wash that treasure under a stream of cooling water, your fingertips instinctively search for that gushy side of the fruit. Your mouth waters. You lean over the sink to make sure you don't drip on yourself. Then you sink your teeth into the flesh and the juice trickles down your cheeks and dangles on your chin. This is a real bite, a primal act, a magical sensory celebration announcing that summer has arrived."

That's the kind of peach that I grow. But there's only one way you can grow that peach: You have to grow it slowly. I believe, however, that there is a generation that has grown up with fast food. And it suddenly occurred to me that if they have grown up with fast food, they must assume this food comes from fast farming. I farm slow, because I grow slow food.

On my farm, I take my time. I farm it gently. I work with nature, and I want to contrast this with industrialized farming. Industrialized farming produces commodities. They seek for uniformity; they grow for a marketplace that judges by their eyes only. You have factories in the fields where price dominates. But I farm slow.

**However, most of the humanities—and what I think we in this room as humanities councils and committees do—is by its very nature slow. And slow is OK; slow is fine. At the heart of the humanities, I feel it necessarily includes that slow ingredient of life, that human spirit to reflect.**

I bring all this up because I think in the humanities we have parallels with slow food and slow farming. We live in a world where speed is beginning to dominate everything. "Just in time" translates to "action without thought." We live in an economy where things are mass-marketed, where we have quick sales and fast returns, instant gratification. We live in a political system where we live sound byte by sound byte. Image is everything. Culturally, we're beginning to have a world where entertainment dominates. If you look at the entertainment world, they target passive audiences, where the public is almost told not to think, where the public increasingly relies

on gatekeepers who tell them which is the good book to read, the good movie to see, and those not to see. We bowl alone, we surf alone, and we create virtual communities, where we think semicolons are just good for e-mail winks.

However, most of the humanities—and what I think we in this room as humanities councils and committees do—is by its very nature slow. And slow is OK; slow is fine. At the heart of the humanities, I feel it necessarily includes that slow ingredient of life, that human spirit to reflect. The role of humanities in community life is, I think, to be a countervailing force to the speed of our society. It's OK to go wonderfully slow. As we "Proclaim the Humanities," which is the theme of this conference, I think it's important to have a vision of the whole. And I think part of that vision is to be able to see parts of your life that are in the past and in the future.

By slow, I don't necessarily mean it's endless discussion, though. I don't ponder a tree for an hour before I start pruning it. Farming doesn't work that way. However, I may take the time to walk around that tree, to understand the whole growth, the shape of that tree, before I start pruning. It's the trust that I have in my own skill, to prune, to shape, and I trust I'll get a harvest. I think that's something that humanities and farming also have. We have to trust ourselves that there's going to be a harvest later on with the projects that we produce.

However, I may take the time to walk around that tree, to understand the whole growth, the shape of that tree, before I start pruning. It's the trust that I have in my own skill, to prune, to shape, and I trust I'll get a harvest.

Humanities are done right when they are done slowly. When I write about my farms, I talk about the peaches that I grow. Now I begin to describe these peaches as microbrewed peaches, like microbrews that have shaken up the industrial beer industry. Let me elaborate a little: most peaches that you find in most supermarkets have been bred to have shelf lives of about four years. Their red lipstick color is designed to blind consumers. I call these Spam peaches where price drives consumers. But my microbrew peaches have that taste of family that can't be duplicated. It's distinctively local. And it's a process that I plan on having be complex, and I want it complex because it can't be copied.

Passion drives me with my hope that there will be a loyal following for these peaches. These peaches fit a marketplace for people longing for flavor and taste. I do know there is that marketplace and, wonderfully, people are willing to pay for that peach. But at the heart of my microbrewed peaches are stories. It's not simply a good-looking peach. It goes beyond that. And I think the same could be said for humanities projects, because through your work, you create microbrewed stories. They're often intensely local, have high community ownership, and the human voice matters.

Humanities work well when we crate microbrewed stories rich with the regional flavors and the complexity and diversity of our different parts of our nation and our different communities. These are stories that take time to be told and understood. They are grown slowly.

I'm honored to be the first Walter Capps Memorial Lecturer. What I have learned is that Walter grew up in Nebraska and worked on farms for summer jobs—he knew those voices and stories. Walter practiced slow humanities. He would have liked slow farming.

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