

## **Resolution on the retirement of Howard M. Solomon**

Adopted by the Faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering

At the end of his first year as an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburgh, Howard Solomon informed his parents of his intention to change his then majors of English and Psychology. Instead of pursuing a course of academic study that would prepare him for law school, he was now interested in pursuing rabbinical studies. If Howard had stuck to his original majors and pursued a career in law, no doubt, by his temperament and by his being influenced by early-to-mid 1960's idealism and social justice, he would have become a civil rights or human rights lawyer. And, if Howard had decided to pursue rabbinical studies, no doubt, he would have become a well-respected religious leader. As a jurist or as a rabbi, he would have been a spiritual and temporal descendant of the Biblical Solomon.

However, upon his return to the Pittsburgh campus the next fall, a professor of medieval history so inspired Howard that the sophomore chose to take more and more courses in History. We at Tufts are indebted to that unknown colleague at the University of Pittsburgh who, by example and by mentorship, instilled in Howard Solomon a passion for teaching and scholarship. Indeed, for more than three decades, Howard--as a teacher, scholar, mentor, confidante, administrator, and pillar of conscience--became and has remained one of the most admired and beloved members of the History Department and of Tufts University.

Born in the western Pennsylvania city of New Castle during the early years of World War II, Howard was one of four sons. His parents owned a Kosher butcher shop in the self-described "Little New York City," and Howard, as a student in the city's public schools, was exposed to the strengths and shortcomings of the nation's mid-twentieth-century ethnic and religious pluralism. After graduating from high school, he enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh, receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in History in 1964. Howard then began his graduate work at Northwestern University. With interests in medieval and early modern European History, Howard chose not to study political and diplomatic history, the then staple of much historical scholarship. Instead, he became immersed in the emergent fields of the "new social history" and "history from below," fields which stressed the lives of ordinary men and women. As a dutiful graduate student he went to Paris to conduct research in French archives. Although Howard had witnessed the changes in American higher education and the beginnings of student radicalism on campuses such as Northwestern, nothing had prepared him for what he was to observe in Paris during May of 1968. While he had come to France to study seventeenth-century French idees and practices d'etat, he was witness to the students' protests of May 1968. In recalling the events swirling around him, the words "La parole, le pouvoir... la meme chose" ("Speech, power... the same thing") were to become permanently etched in his memory. For Howard's personal creed has always stressed the power of the word, written or spoken.

Upon his return to the United States, Howard left the environs of the "Second City" and ventured east to accept a position in the History Department of New York University. Hired first as an instructor, he was promoted to assistant professor in 1969 after he was awarded his Ph.D. degree from Northwestern. Life in New York City (not his hometown "Little New York City") was a heady intellectual and social experience for him. Again, he would witness an event that would have profound meaning for him in June of 1969, following dinner with a female colleague. Howard was walking through Greenwich Village when he personally witnessed the confrontation between New York City police officers and male patrons of the gay bar, The Stonewall Inn. The image of young males, many of whom were males of color, others of whom were dressed as "drag queens" caused Howard to stop and watch the physical confrontation as gay males fought back against those officers seeking to raid the gay bar.

Howard's experiences in Paris in 1968 and in New York in 1969 broadened his conceptions of social and political empowerment and protest and would reveal how such themes would impact his subsequent teaching and research. In 1971, he joined the History Department as an assistant professor, as a replacement for Dr. Nancy Roelker, the first woman faculty member in the department. Joining a department of highly regarded gentlemen professors who, save one, were more traditional in subject matter and style, Howard would become one of the department's first proponents of the "new social history." In addition, Howard elevated the sartorial splendor of the department, as he wore stylish two- and three-piece suits, which certainly, as Dan Mulholland remembers, was not in keeping with the "dress code" of younger Tufts faculty during the early 1970s.

From his first days on campus until his retirement, Howard Solomon had stood out as a model professor. Quickly he gained the reputation as an engaging and dynamic lecturer. While teaching courses in medieval and early modern French History, his most popular course within a year was "Social Deviance in European History." Originally limited to fifteen students, the course attracted sixty-plus students in subsequent years. His early syllabi consisted of such pioneering and seminal works as Christopher Hill's World Turned Upside Down and Michel Foucault's Madness and Civilization. Howard may have been one of the first faculty members to use Foucault's works as course text. In so doing, he would win over several departmental members who were then skeptical of the importance of the French scholar's seminal work. In addition, he may have been one of the first male professors in the History Department and perhaps in the Humanities and Social Science Departments, to incorporate throughout his courses the experiences of European women of all social classes as historical agents. In true 1970s fashion, his course became known among undergraduates as "Nuts and Sluts." However undergraduates regarded the course title, they praised the course's contents. According to mid-1970 evaluations of Howard's teaching style and prowess, students indicated:

Organized lectures delivered enthusiastically...The only problem is that he says so much so fast.

[The course] went from individual occurrences to generalizations, which is teaching inductively--I think it made me think in a clearer fashion.

Having established himself as one of the department's best teachers, Howard also continued his scholarly activities. In 1972, Princeton University Press published his monograph, Public Welfare, Science, and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century France. The book is a study of the efforts of Theophraste Renaudot, who established the Bureau d'Adresse, one of the first state-supported agencies in Western Europe to concern itself with health and education concerns, with providing employment opportunities, and spreading news of technical and scientific advances. Public Welfare, Science, and Propaganda would be a combination of biography, intellectual history and social history. While Howard's own scholarly and research needs have changed since the mid-1970s, Public Welfare remains an influential work in the fields of the modernization of state services. While a graduate student in East Asian Studies at the University of Michigan in the mid-1980s, Gary Leupp recalls reading Public Welfare as a model for his own work on Tokugawa Japan. Not knowing Howard, Gary wrote a letter to him at Tufts and was more than pleased that Howard (in an era before the widespread availability and use of personal computers) responded with a "neatly typewritten letter" with additional references he should consult. "I very much appreciated his kindness to a random graduate student in Japanese studies," Gary recollected.

Such intellectual generosity is one of Howard's selfless acts of mentoring and advising and is reflective of his broad interests in Comparative History. While Howard was interested in the development of free medical care in pre-Revolutionary France, he was very much interested in health care in Twentieth-Century Socialist States. Thus, as a founding member of the newly developed program in Community Health, Howard was part of a delegation that visited health care facilities in the Peoples Republic of China in 1976.

As a popular teacher and tenured associate professor, Howard did the unthinkable--he became a university administrator. During the early years of the administration of Jean Mayer, Howard at the behest of then Dean of the Faculty, Bernard Harleston, was appointed to the newly created position of Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Academic Affairs. Seeking to bring about increased coordination of academic programming between the undergraduate colleges at Tufts, Howard made use of his talents as an intellectual bridge builder, someone who could bring about degrees of cooperation among departments and schools who sought to protect academic and disciplinary turf. In addition, he sought to establish better individual and collective relationships between students and faculty members. In 1979, he co-founded The Society for the Propagation of Internal Rejoicing at Tufts (known more popularly by its acronym, SPIRIT). For Howard, SPIRIT (then and now), was "an activity that gets students and faculty together outside the classroom." SPIRIT sought to address low student morale and esprit de corps (a seemingly perennial challenge) through community building campaigns. To counteract the tradition of naked quad runs during the fall-semester reading period, SPIRIT distributed ice cream cones to students during spring semester's reading break. To Howard Solomon, such activities are not frivolous ones. "We must," he has always maintained, "have a sense of humor about ourselves, a sense of the absurd.

I want to see people doing things with an air of 'healthy madness' because that is what breaks down the barriers between faculty and students."

After having served as Dean for four years and having shaped some of the continuing functions of that office, Howard stepped down. On one hand, he missed being a full-time member of the teaching faculty and believed that he had accomplished much of what he had envisioned. Ennui aside, Howard had more personal reasons for stepping aside. As a then-closeted gay male, Howard was no longer comfortable keeping his public and private lives separate. Indeed, with the beginnings of national awareness of the impact of AIDS on the gay community, Howard sought to make the personal, political.

Returning to the Department, Howard served as Chair for three years. During his term, the department filled new positions in Central Asian and Japanese History. Howard's interests in Global History further expanded as he co-organized the "India and World Capitalism Conference" and co-wrote the initial N.E.H. grant which helped to establish the Tufts World Civilization Program. At the same time, Howard remade himself as a teacher. Still, one of the department's most popular lecturers, he began to abandon the lecture class and develop smaller, discussion-oriented and writing-intensive classes. Howard hoped that his students would hone their writing skills, by having the opportunity to write and rewrite papers to improve their writing skills and to discover their individual voices. Evaluations from his last classes attest to how he helped students write more clearly and more analytically. Before *Writing Across The Curriculum* became a popular mode of instruction, Howard was championing one-on-one tutorial relationships. Howard reworked courses such as "Social Deviance," re-titling the course "Marginality and Power," as the course dealt more explicitly with "sexual minorities." He created the courses "Sexuality, Gender and Economy in Pre-industrial Europe" and "The Historical Constructions of Sexuality," each of which focused upon sexuality and homophobia in the broadest and deepest cultural and historical contexts.

For more than thirty years, Howard has served as an important university resource. To many of his colleagues he has been a "guiding light." According to Jeanne Penvenne:

[Howard Solomon] was a beacon for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered identity long before Tufts developed its higher profile in this area. He began the fight when it was a more difficult fight and he has never wavered. ...His long history of political work, quiet counsel, and perseverance promoting tolerance and celebration of the diversity of sexual orientation within humankind is of itself worthy of note.

As a testament to his mentorship, advisory role and friendship over the years to gay and lesbian students, members of the gay and lesbian alumni/ae organization honored Howard with its first "Pride on the Hill" certificate. Anyone who had ventured into Howard's office could not help but notice how prominent a place the award from Pride On The Hill occupied.

Moreover, university administrators have long recognized his commitment, his evenhandedness, and how well-respected a member of the faculty he is. He has served on search committees for the first Vice-President of Arts, Science and Technology, for the University Chaplain, and for the Special Assistant to the President for Affirmative Action. He has served as Co-Facilitator of the Campus-Wide Dialogues on Diversity, Chair of the Committee on Committees and Chair of the Executive Committee of the Faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering.

While his accomplishments in and outside of the classroom have been documented, there are personal characteristics that must be acknowledged. Howard is a born wit--his Groucho Marx imitations broke up many a department meeting. His infectious smile, puckish good nature, and kind words brightened whatever room he entered. Moreover, he is known for his distinctive whistle that alerts those within earshot of his presence. Indeed, to paraphrase Toni Morrison, there will always be a lingering "Song of Solomon" in East Hall.

Howard has chosen a time that is right for him to retire. For the last several years he has been a faculty member at the University of Southern Maine, where he is teaching (and enjoying teaching) a student body that in terms of socio-economic status is markedly different (not better, but different) from that of the Tufts student body. In addition, he is the curator of the Lesbian and Gay Collection at the University of Southern Maine. He continues to speak and write on gay and lesbian issues, a form of scholarly and public activism he has come to enjoy. Howard and his partner David Rappaport will continue to enjoy life in Maine--now relieved of his commute to Tufts. They can enjoy home, pets, garden, and will entertain those visitors who venture "Down East." It is particularly noteworthy and fitting that Howard's retirement takes place in May 2004--his retirement takes place during another historical milestone--the granting of the right of gay men and lesbian women to marry a person of the same sex.

Howard Solomon will be missed, but will never be forgotten.

On behalf of the committee, I move that this resolution on the retirement of Howard M. Solomon be spread on the permanent record of this faculty and that a copy of it be sent to Howard Solomon.

Gerald R. Gill  
Howard L. Malchow  
Jeanne M. Penvenne

May 19, 2004