

Toast to Forrest McDonald

Remarks by Stephen M. Klugewicz

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Thanks, John. I also want to thank Roger Ream and Bill Campbell for giving me a few minutes to pay tribute to Forrest tonight—actually, to pay tribute to Forrest and Ellen, for the two are indeed inseparable.

I am Steve Klugewicz, director of education at the National Constitution Center. I have also worked at ISI, as executive director of the Collegiate Network, and at the Bill of Rights Institute. But my greatest claim to fame is that I was a student of Forrest McDonald.

You will have to forgive me for getting personal tonight, but this is a very personal moment for me. This is a moment I have been imagining and looking forward to for seven years, when this book project was conceived, and as I stand here I am fully cognizant of what a rare opportunity I have—to thank both publicly and personally one of my mentors. And not just my mentor but a man, who along with my father and a beloved Catholic priest-friend of mine, is one of the three men I have most admired in my life.

Forrest is certainly the most brilliant man I have ever known.

I also want to thank Ken Cribb, Jeff Nelson, and Jed Donahue of ISI and ISI Books, for making *History, on Proper Principles* a reality. This tribute is not only long overdue, but I fear insufficient in light of the great man it honors.

Let me tell you a little about how this book came to be. This project began with a phone call to me from Bruce Frohnen in 2003, when I was working for Victoria Hughes at the Bill of Rights Institute. I had recently earned my Ph.D. under Forrest, and for some reason known only to Bruce he picked me as the one who was to take charge of this project. Bruce, in his direct way, said something like, “Steve, you and Lenore Ealy ought to edit a book of essays in Forrest’s honor. Here are some people who should contribute to the book.” (He named names.) “And ISI should publish it.”

Well, we decided we ought to get the McDonalds’ blessing before we commenced the project. I called down to Coker, and Forrest answered on his phone—his rotary phone. Knowing that the McDonalds don’t like hoopla about themselves, I tentatively pitched the idea to Forrest, not knowing what to expect as a reaction. (Forrest hates talking on the phone anyway, so I am always a little nervous when I call the McDonalds. I always hope that Ellen answers.) Well, I spoke to Forrest, and his response was, “I’d be tickled!” And that was that. Ellen asked simply that the essays—with the exception of

the introduction by Lenore and me—be not about Forrest or his work but be essays in the field, on subjects that are of interest to Forrest. And so they are. Ellen suggested a few other scholars who might contribute to the volume; Lenore and I contacted them, and all eagerly accepted the chance to thank Forrest and Ellen in this way.

This is the first book I have edited. I was warned that my biggest challenge as an editor would be to keep our contributing scholars on schedule. (We all know that academics aren't timely people.) Well, I can honestly say that this turned out to be the easiest part of the job. I don't think any of our contributors ever missed a deadline. In fact, it was they who occasionally pushed Lenore and me! As I mentioned, this project took seven years, but the responsibility for the delay was largely mine. OK, I have a couple of excuses: my wife bore three children during those seven years and we moved house six times. Still

Our contributors' timeliness and the fact that they have not and will not earn a penny from this project speaks to their character and is a testament to the depth of their gratitude—nay, their love—for the McDonalds. Indeed, I have been struck over the years by how many lives the McDonalds have touched. I have stumbled across such people from time to time for the last decade.

Now, the McDonalds won't tell you about all the people they have helped. So I will.

The McDonalds paid for my membership in professional organizations when I was a graduate student. They gave money out of their own pocket to fellow grad students—who like me had no money—so they could do research in archives in distant states. The McDonalds fought departmental political correctness on behalf of their students; they lobbied for them—when deserving— to get departmental awards and outside fellowships. They put in recommendations for me and for others for participation in outside programs, for membership in professional associations, and, yes, for jobs.

A common complaint in graduate school—one that I often heard from fellow graduate students—was how long it took for one's dissertation director to return reviewed draft chapters of a dissertation. Well, when I was writing my dissertation in Maryland, I would send each chapter to the McDonalds down in Alabama—by U.S. Mail, as the McDonalds don't have a computer—and I would invariably have the carefully-reviewed chapter back in my hands within a week or so. This alone speaks volumes about how much the McDonalds cared about their students. The role of mentor, teacher was to them a solemn duty.

We saw this in the History department at the University of Alabama every day. By the time I arrived there in 1995, Forrest's status was such that he did not have to teach students if he didn't want to. Isn't that the goal of every academic these days? To avoid teaching? Yet Forrest not only taught a course on the Founding and one on the Interwar Period to undergrads, but he taught a writing course—a writing course, the bane of university teachers!—to graduate students. That writing course deservedly became quite famous at Alabama.

So, if you expected that I would talk tonight about Forrest's contribution to our understanding of American history, how he affected the historical profession itself, or how we should interpret and make sense of his oeuvre, well, you will have to buy the book, in which Lenore and I talk about this in the introduction.

I do, however, want to mention one outstanding characteristic of the McDonalds—both in regard to their personal and professional lives. That is their utter and complete integrity. If the McDonalds tell you something, you know it is true; if they write something, you know it is right. Their integrity has also been manifested in how they have treated others. They had no ideological litmus test for graduate students or other scholars. Rather, they

judged students and fellow academics on of the quality of their scholarship. That was the McDonalds' sole criterion.

Let me conclude. You all have had chance to walk tonight through Signers Hall, that remarkable room which in my opinion is the highlight of the Constitution Center. I enjoy walking through the Hall at quiet times here at the Center, when the visitors haven't yet arrived or have left for the day. As I stroll among these men who gathered in that room across the street during those hot summer months of 1787, I often think about how they might still be talking in the next world, continuing amongst themselves the conversations they had here. I imagine that, as in 1787, they shut the windows so that interlopers are not privy to their conversation. But I also imagine that one day, a long time from now, another, who is truly a man of their time and intellectual ability, who understands them better perhaps than they understood themselves, will join their conversation. Yes, I imagine Forrest McDonald being the only one deemed worthy of entering this special corner of Heaven, this select brotherhood, in whose mighty company he will surely be most welcome.

Thank you.