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A Tribute to Lewis H. LaRue

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James Boyd White*

Lash has been a good friend for many years, and it is a pleasure to have this opportunity to reflect about him. I well remember our first meeting, in the late 1970s. He had been to a meeting in Wisconsin—the first meeting of the Critical Legal Studies Conference, as I remember—and stopped to spend the night in Chicago on the way home. We had corresponded a couple of times, but never met, and what a pleasure it was to meet him: full of intelligence, openness, and laughter, with a moral center and a deep sense of human limitation. We talked and laughed by the fire until late in the evening. This was one of those occasions when you meet someone for the first time and just know that you will be friends.

A year or two later, Lash joined a National Endowment for the Humanities faculty seminar I was directing, again in Chicago. This seminar was a great experience for me, and I think good for the other participants, who were a stellar group, including, among others, Lash, Jim Elkins, Fran Olsen, Craig Lawson, Peggy Kniffin, and Peter Teachout. We read together books by Homer, Thucydides, Plato, Swift, Austen, and Burke, as well as legal texts, trying to put them all together with a set of questions that would run across these fields. The conversation was wonderful, and Lash was right at the center of it: always informed and thoughtful, alive and good humored. He did much to give shape and direction to the whole process in which we were engaged, to the benefit of all of us; and in doing so he gave me the gift of confidence in the work I was doing, at a time when that was necessary. I think perhaps nothing marks a great teacher so much as what Lash demonstrated: the capacity to make others feel confident in the value and workings of their own minds. For this I am and always will be deeply grateful.

In the twenty-five years from that day to this, we have talked, in person, on the phone, or by mail, over and over, and, as anyone who knows him would expect, about the widest range of topics—from rhetoric to mathematics to evidence to linguistics to the Greek language and the dialogues of Plato. What stands out in these conversations, as in his writing, is an essential (and rare) quality: he is constantly thinking about what matters to him on the merits, because it is interesting and significant and important to him, not for instrumental or ulterior motives. He is an independent mind and person, making his own way through the world. He means what he says, and he says

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what he means. His criticisms, from which I have frequently benefited, can be demanding and tough, but his generosity and loyalty are even more remarkable.

I know I am not the only person who owes a comparable intellectual and personal debt to Lash, and who feels grateful, as I do. I can only imagine with some envy what it would be like to have him for a colleague year after year, as the practical and intellectual problems that confront a law school arise in all their vigor. I am sure he was a constant force for wisdom, maturity, and moral quality. Even at a distance, I have benefited enormously from the constant stream of ideas he produces. A remarkable man. I am lucky to have him as a friend, and his colleagues and students at Washington and Lee are lucky too.



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