

**Joyce Appleby**  
**President**

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## Joyce Oldham Appleby

A remarkable alchemy permeates the historical imagination of Joyce Appleby. Combining the study of social practices with that of intellectual history, Joyce has forged a distinctive vision of American ideas and ideals. She has elaborated on the complex mind of eighteenth-century Euro-Americans, elucidating their optimistic, buoyant liberalism and their embrace of the market and consumption. Her understanding of American republicanism distinguishes Thomas Jefferson and his followers from their radical British forbears, whose discomfort with finance and luxury set them at odds with the market and its major beneficiaries. A contributor in her own right to English history, her interpretation indeed commands authority. This breadth and depth of learning, this ease of transatlantic passage, has made Joyce a perceptive interpreter of seventeenth-century English thought, of the American colonial and postrevolutionary mind, and of its most towering intellect: Thomas Jefferson.

Joyce's first book, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton University Press), appeared in 1978. It examined how seventeenth-century Britons contemplated trade and commerce, and how they came to respect the obscurity and amorality of market forces. The book did what neither British Marxists nor conservatives had thought to do. Joyce found out what one of the first, most commercial people made out of a precarious and seemingly fateful universe. In her own life as well as with her sources, she is an interrogator of texts and people, a trait perhaps best learned in her years as a reporter. In *Economic Thought* she queried both the obscure and the great, merchants such as Nicholas Barbon who wrote the odd treatise and none other than John Locke. She found an aggressive individualism, an optimistic materialism where earlier historians had seen only a mindless mercantilism or a godly, even fearful, Puritanism. Predictably, she further tilted the picture. Locke came out a stodgy bullionist, and lesser mortals emerged as the forerunners of Adam Smith.

Joyce's essays have appeared in just about every important Anglo-American historical journal, among them the *William and Mary Quarterly*, the *Journal of American History*, the *American Historical Review*, and *Past and Present*. Perhaps most comfortable with the essay genre, she has used it to reveal the popular sources of American capitalism, focusing on its heirs as well as on the disinherited. In other essays Joyce has examined the nature of the urban public realm, reassessed the "agrarian myth," and commented on the social roots of early American democracy. Joyce also wrote a penetrating essay devoted to the immense changes that have occurred in American historiography since the 1960s, namely its democratization.

Although not a child of the sixties by age, Joyce was shaped by its rebellious spirit. Understanding through first-hand experience what had been decreed as appropriate for women, she possesses the conviction that the recent democratization of the historical profession has been for the good, and that it should be further deepened and widened. Her own career is a testament to these changes. To encourage an even greater inclusiveness, Joyce has initiated for the World Wide Web the History News Service (<http://h-net2.msu.edu/~hns/>), which invites historians everywhere to contribute essays that give historical context to contemporary events. From voting campaigns to nuclear freezes, from writing books (even for school children) to writing her Congressional representatives, her critical stance as both citizen and historian is of a piece.

To values and politics identifiably left of center, Joyce attaches a fascination with democracy and capitalism and the extraordinary, complex mind-set that encouraged the development of each. At the same time, she probes the fault lines of commercial life, using a theoretical sophistication associated with the market's detractors. She sees the social construction of self-interest, detects the ideologies of its beneficiaries, and spots political power at work where once only ideas or blind forces were presumed. Joyce is no detractor of modernity or capitalism, however. She historicizes both to better explicate their vitality and appeal as well as in their American setting the need for constant reform.

Long before becoming a historian, Joyce was shaped by a western childhood. Her father's good fortune in holding a steady job during the 1930s also meant that the family moved frequently following his company's transfers. She changed schools almost every other year, traveling from Nebraska, where she was born in Omaha in 1929, to Texas, to a ranch in Arizona, ending finally in Pasadena, California, where Joyce attended high school. In 1950 Joyce graduated from Stanford University. A decade later she decided to become a historian, and in 1959 Joyce received her master's degree from the University of California at Santa Barbara; she earned her Ph.D. in 1966 from the Claremont Graduate School. But before history, writing had been her first passion, and a competition to be a guest editor in an issue of *Mademoiselle* landed her a job in New York and an apartment in Greenwich Village. Having other careers before becoming a historian may partially account for the novelty and insightfulness of Joyce's reading and writing. She has worked as a feature writer and reporter, done sales and marketing, and in her transient childhood was taught by her mother to do everything with the same pride as if you would be in that place, or that job, forever.

In Joyce's second book, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York University Press, 1984), she explicated the voice and vision of 1790s radicals—French, Irish, and American critics of big money and the oppression inflicted by elites. She admitted the pull of the market, yet chronicled its injustices, speaking as both citizen and historian, reminding us about the unfinished work of reform, the legacy of eighteenth-century visionaries who had championed the idealism of Jefferson. Once again, Joyce historicized liberalism and capitalism. Where earlier historians saw cause to decry the market's rise, and to claim that negative position for American republicans, she heard past voices speak with optimism and courage about the new economic order, which spawned opportunity for some and hardship, even slavery, for others. Although her work illustrates the strength and interrelatedness of democratic and commercial institutions, Joyce never forgets to chronicle the oppression.

Taking out time to be a wife and mother also betrays the presence of a conservatism that balances the radical, critical voice. Joyce did her historical career at her own pace. Still in the midst of raising her children, she decided late in the 1950s to “abandon the ordinary, housewifely role prescribed for me” and go to graduate school. She wanted to discover if she had the capacity to do something bold. When she burst on the scene in the mid-1970s with a set of important articles (and later with her 1978 book *Economic Thought*, which won the Book Prize of the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women), her children were nearly raised. Much of Joyce’s cutting-edge work has been done while raising three children, staying close to them and their children through life’s journey. This commitment to the personal and the traditional complements rather than stifles her historical imagination.

In 1959 Andy Appleby and Joyce married, and they made history and teaching their common life’s work. They were immensely good companions, peers in learning and humor. Andy’s sudden death at age 51 from a massive heart attack left Joyce bereft, and with less reason to remain at San Diego State University, where she had been since 1967 and where she and Andy had both taught.

In 1981 Joyce moved to UCLA. A good move, it channeled her energy and sense of duty. She never misses a graduation and few if any classes, where, it is said, she is a superb and witty lecturer, a rigorous but kindly graduate mentor. In 1993 Joyce received UCLA’s Distinguished Professor Award. So basic is university life to her being that she lives across the street from the campus. She has chaired her department, conducted searches in various fields, and won grants for the university to develop new core curriculum.

Joyce is a most American person. Perhaps only a first-generation American from New York like myself can say such a thing and know what it means. Her worldliness, her unabashed enjoyment of life, and her enormous empathy evokes a Nebraska-like quality. She is so untortured about knowing her loves and likes, so guiltless about her enjoyment of people, books, ideas, films, works of art, theories, and texts as daunting

as Kant or Peirce or as esoteric as the philosophy of science. She devours the stuff, hashes it over with you (even if you are clueless), forms a judgment, then perversely alters it to see if the opposite makes more sense or changes her mind just to get your goat. Natural curiosity in other mortals becomes in Joyce the opportunity to produce a historians' reader on matters of theory. True to her delight in pedagogy, her book *Knowledge and Postmodernism in Historical Perspective* (Routledge, 1995, with coeditors Elizabeth Covington and David Hoyt) was edited with her graduate students.

When living on various occasions in Great Britain, this natural curiosity made Joyce like an anthropologist among the natives. She steeped herself in British history and became highly proficient in the art of lamb roasting. Since the mid-1970s she has written on Anglo-American themes, actually practicing the much praised but seldom tried art of comparative history. In 1990 Joyce returned to England, this time as Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford University. When reading a letter from Joyce about driving on High Street during her first three weeks there, I was made weak with laughter and fear for the locals. With her insatiable eye for detail (and self-irony), she described her consternation when she discovered that the English persistently parked in either direction, "so I might well turn into a street, properly on the left, and confront a parked car facing in the opposite direction."

Along with this wry sense of humor, Joyce also possesses a quiet dignity and an almost invisible reserve of midwestern origin. Seeing her in England, having tea in the common room or hosting a Fourth of July party, made clear to me how very indebted our country is to her values and affect. Her ease at being in the world, her openness to the new or untried, her self-possession, and her unflappable poise and modesty can only be associated with the bearing, the *hauteur*, of democratic republicans. In deepest Wales she once got stuck driving in what turned out to be a local farmer's field, not a dirt road. Wheels spinning, cow dung flying, tracks deepening, she graciously and simultaneously apologized, flashing her broad, infectious California smile at her stunned, unintended host.

True to her egalitarianism, Joyce regards pretension at home and abroad as insufferable. Unfailingly charming to farmer and colleague alike, in her heart she does not suffer fools or knaves gladly. She regularly writes to tyrants, potentates, or politicians telling them of the errors of their ways. On behalf of the historical profession and its past, she is no stranger to Capitol Hill. In 1989, for example, she lobbied with the aid of Congressman Howard Berman's office for funding to create libraries in American history in cities around the world where there are universities with American studies departments. She did so not out of chauvinism but out of the conviction that understanding the history of democratic institutions might help a new generation of democrats become less error prone.

If your cause is just, you phone or e-mail Joyce Appleby. But be sure you know what you are talking about. Challenging Joyce in an argument risks the fate of the Titanic. You cannot see the depth of knowledge that lies in wait for you. You may forget that she has mastered two national historiographies and a goodly portion of the history of western political theory, speaks decent French and knows French history, and is no stranger to the history of science or religion. Evident in Joyce's seamless prose is the density and depth of her reading and her theoretical sophistication. She makes the clarity of the past seem like something she has arrived at effortlessly. When writing *Telling the Truth about History* with Joyce (W. W. Norton & Co., 1994, also with coauthor Lynn Hunt), perfection took on a whole new meaning. But the effects of Joyce's credo are evident on every page she has ever written or edited. That on occasion her coauthors may have balked or sulked in frustration never slowed Joyce's hand as it pounced on the delete key. Along with a disdain for hyperbole and excess verbiage, perfectionism operates in every aspect of her life. Joyce is her own harshest critic, but as friends of long-standing and family can attest, she also understands the necessity for forgiveness.

If you can tap into Joyce's streak of naïveté, there is a chance of winning an argument, otherwise you just have to get lucky. Challenge her to bet a bottle of champagne on an event's outcome. For reasons known only to the gods, Joyce always

loses. Clarence Thomas did get on the Supreme Court and the British Labour Party did lose the 1991 election. That Joyce thought it could be otherwise betrays a critically important aspect of her personality. In general, she thinks well of humankind, gives the benefit of the doubt, and so deeply believes in democracy that she can sometimes forget its lapses and inconsistencies. But she is a good sport (and she has an excellent wine cellar).

Thinking well about humankind requires irony and a cold eye. With limpid, terse prose, best sampled in *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 1992), a collection of revised essays, Joyce tells us about ourselves, about the historically contingent nature of our prosperity, and about our having invented "a liberal doctrine that removed the terror from history by teaching that all change is development." She weaves gender into her story and addresses the doubts and skepticism that have surfaced in the older democracies. She engages contemporary neo-Whig historiography respectfully yet critically.

Given all that Joyce Appleby has accomplished, she has received just about every honor, fellowship, and presidency that the historical profession can bestow. She has been president of the AHA (1997) and the Organization of American Historians (1991–1992), received a Guggenheim (1994–95), sat on the Council of the Smithsonian Institution (1994–97), and served on the editorial boards of *American National Biography*, the *American Historical Review*, the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, the *Journal of American Studies*, and *Studies in American Political Development*. She has been a member of the American Philosophical Society (1993) and of the American Academy of Art and Sciences (1994). Yet complacency never surfaces, as still more books and articles—largely on the theme of the first generation of Americans—are being planned. She is too critical, too testing of self, and too playful and interested in life ever to rest.

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