

President David Adamany: A Eulogy

By Keith A. Morrison, Professor and Former Dean, Tyler School of Art

Dr. David Adamany, former President of Temple University, died recently, as President Richard Englert informed us. When I asked President Adamany what he preferred to be called, he explained that he was raised in a small, egalitarian Wisconsin town (the kind I recalled fondly from times spent in that state), where everyone went by first name. So, he said, call me David. And during his presidency and after I called him David. I cannot claim to have known him well, but he was my friend.

David Adamany had an acrimonious relationship with Tyler during much of his presidency. But that was before my time. I can understand why many in Tyler resented him, including friends and colleagues I admire and respect. Some said he was rude and some said he made unilateral decisions about Tyler. The animosity between the president and Tyler was so intense that had I known I would not have come to Temple. Perhaps by the time I came the war between the president and Tyler had diminished to a smolder, with each weary side hoping for a truce. But whatever the reason for what some said was his mellowing, I found no animus in David Adamany's treatment of me. And I take people as I find them.

One of the things that attracted me to Tyler, in addition to admiration for the school's enviable reputation, was that the president, David Adamany, had made an art school a top priority and had obtained funding from the state legislature to build the new Tyler building. I was impressed, for it was highly unusual to find a president of a university who made art a top priority

Following a search for dean that lasted several years, during which President Adamany fought with Tyler, even rejecting recommended candidates I was told, the president appointed me. But at no time while I was dean did David Adamany and I have friction. Some of my colleagues in administration complained that he micromanaged, was mean spirited, intruded and criticized their operation; but I never suffered those experiences. At no time did he intrude in my administration of Tyler.

President Adamany made promises to me to improve the budget, faculty and staff in Tyler and he kept all of his promises. He informed me soon after I became dean that he had requested and received from the state legislature an increase in the budget for the new Tyler building. He promised me the addition of many faculty and staff positions and an increase in the Tyler budget, which he did over two years. He appointed all 12 new tenure track faculty candidates I recommended and all 10 new technical staff appointments I proposed. He funded all of these new faculty and staff appointments at salaries I requested, and did so without question. He approved all faculty promotions and retentions I sent forwarded. He approved requests I made to raise salaries of some faculty and staff that I found to be underpaid. He approved my request that the university allocate to Tyler student lab fees the university received, which, I was told, was unprecedented. He raised the overall budget for Tyler significantly while I was dean. President Adamany gave Tyler everything I asked of him and more.

President Adamany was kind to me even when I was no longer dean. In 2005 Tyler's national (graduate) rank was 23rd (tied with Columbia University, as I recall). In 2008 the Tyler national rank had improved to 14th, then said to be the best rank in the history of Tyler -- or of any school or college in the history of Temple University for that matter. I was on leave and out of the country when the new national rankings were published. David, having retired and become a trustee, contacted me. He told me the good news and thanked me, saying that it was my vision and addition of many talented faculty and staff members that was to be credited for Tyler's new rank. I appreciated that coming from him.

Although President Adamany did not intrude in my administration he sometimes called to ask how things were going. Occasionally the conversation would turn to his personal taste in art: painting and prints were his passion. He loved painting, but said he didn't have enough money to buy the ones he wanted, so he purchased prints, which he thought were no less beautiful but more affordable. Off campus at lunch or over a drink, we talked about one artist or another whose work interested him. At administrative gatherings in the Rittenhouse Square apartment Temple provided him I saw his collection of prints on the walls. I recall it being a large collection of American modern and contemporary prints of the highest caliber. And I remember seeing some large prints from his collection in an exhibition of important contemporary prints at the Philadelphia Art Alliance.

As I recall, he may have had in his collection prints by or of the stature of artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, Ellsworth Kelly, Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, Alex Katz, and Ben Shahn. He had prints by African American artists too, such as Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden and perhaps John Biggers, if I recall correctly. He told me he began to collect African American prints when he was President of Wayne State University, where he became more conscious of African American art because of his concern for African American students, and even more so working with the wider African American community as CEO of the Detroit Public Schools. He said that as president he wanted his art collection to reflect the diversity of the students in the university he served. He asked if I knew where he could buy a Charles White print and I gave him some leads. I introduced him to prints by Elizabeth Catlett, an American-born Mexican artist (in part because of the coincidence that she was previously married to Charles White). He said that looking at his African American prints in solitude had given him insight to African American points of view that he may not have known without art. I imagine that all of his collection inspired his understanding of art's importance to humanity and education. I think he believed that the personal experience, imagination and intuition to be found in art were indispensable parts of the highest human intelligence.



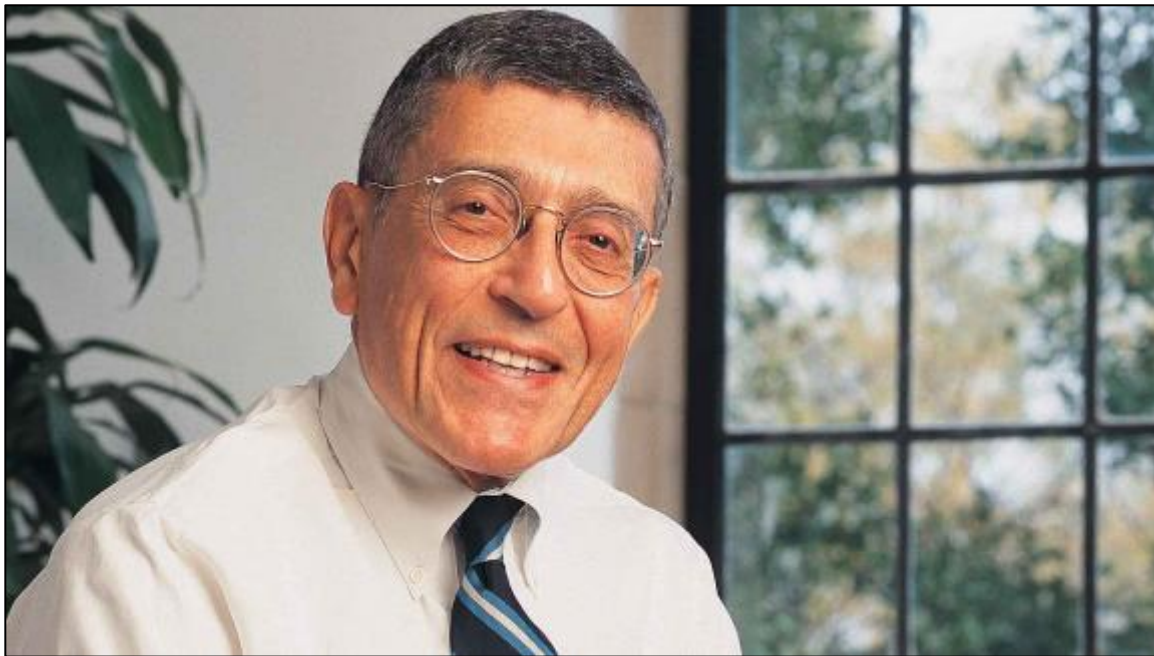
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I have known many university presidents across the land and abroad, some of whom are personal friends, but none of them, including ones who love and support the arts in their universities, and others who moved from university presidencies to high profile art museum presidencies — none of them — have impressed me as having the passion for art that David Adamany did. He was a private person and I suspect many may not be aware of his passion for art and his belief in its importance in a university, so I state it here.

The reason we have the new Tyler building is because of President Adamany's passion for art. If he offended some, I hope you can forgive him. Perhaps, as some say, he was autocratic and stubborn; but he meant well and thought he was doing the best for Tyler and art. We all have faults. If you disliked David Adamany for his faults I hope you can recognize his virtues, for some of those virtues served Tyler well. When David Adamany resigned some administrators in other areas of the university suggested that he may have made Tyler too high a priority, and that some of his agenda should be reconsidered. Others who had seemed supportive of Adamany's agenda were said to have become critical of it. I acknowledged to the new president that some may not have liked David Adamany, but that I was not one of them. My comments seemed not to have been met with approval. But I am not a fair-weather friend.

President David Adamany aspired to the highest standards for Tyler and Temple, even if others may have had good reason to disagree with some of his methods and decisions. He also demonstrated a commitment to social justice. I was impressed that his administration appointed racially diverse contractors. When I came the contractor and planning staff for the new Tyler building were African Americans. These minority workers disappeared from construction of the new Tyler building with the coming of a new administration. As President, David Adamany was mindful of the challenges of the surrounding community to retain their real estate, in face of lucrative new development as the main campus expanded. He told me that while he was president Temple would not seek to purchase real estate that neighborhood people wanted to keep. I admired that ethic.

David, I have many faults, but ingratitude is not one of them. Thank you for the many good things you did for Tyler. And thank you for the good things you did for me. I shall not forget you or your great accomplishments. Goodbye, my friend.



David Adamany, Temple's Eighth President