

---

**Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison  
On the Death of Professor Jeffrey Allen Steele**

Jeffrey Allen Steele age 71 passed away on Saturday May 5, 2018, in Madison.

He was born February 15, 1947, in Berkeley, California where his father was in graduate school at UC-Berkeley. Jeff graduated magna cum laude from Carleton College in 1969 and subsequently earned a master's degree in teaching from Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1971. A man of great conscience, Jeff served two years of alternative service at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston from 1971 to 1973. Jeff married Jocelyn Carol Riley in Northfield, Minnesota, on September 4, 1971. The two of them traveled in Europe for thirteen months from 1973-1974 on a Thomas J. Watson Travelling Fellowship. Subsequently, Jeff earned an M.A. (1977) and Ph.D. (1981) in English from Harvard University.

Jeff was a popular and committed teacher. He began teaching in the English Department of UW-Madison in 1981 and taught there for thirty-seven years. An entertaining lecturer and nimble discussion leader, he taught a wide range of courses in nineteenth-century American literature and culture. His courses focused not only on canonical literary figures such as Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, and Henry James, but also, in his signature course on American women writers, lesser known authors whose cultural and literary importance Jeff helped to establish in his scholarship. He especially relished teaching the Introduction to Modern Literature course for students outside the English major and was Director of the Introductory Courses Committee for four years. The University of Wisconsin twice honored him with a Distinguished Teaching Award, including the James R. Underkofler Excellence in Teaching Award, given each year to four teachers in the statewide UW System. As a critic and literary historian, Jeff played a significant role in bringing critical attention and appreciation to women writers who had been long neglected. In particular, he became a leading scholar of Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson's friend and co-editor, who had been almost forgotten. Jeff helped found the Margaret Fuller Society and served as its president for many years. He also served on the Advisory Board for the Society for the Study of American Women Writers. His books include *Unfolding the Mind: The Unconscious in American Romanticism and Literary Theory* (1987), *The Representation of the Self in the American Renaissance* (1987), *The Essential Margaret Fuller* (1992)— a Choice "Outstanding Academic Book"—and *Transfiguring America: Myth, Ideology, and Mourning in Margaret Fuller's Writing* (2001). This last book was praised in *The New England Quarterly* as a "landmark book in Fuller Studies." He published numerous articles on Margaret Fuller and her contemporaries, as well as essays on the politics of mourning and on nineteenth-century racial stereotypes. To honor Jeff's memory and his scholarly contributions to Margaret Fuller studies, the Margaret Fuller Society is devoting a special issue of its journal to him.

Jeff was a committed citizen of the English Department. Forthright and thoughtful, his colleagues frequently elected him to the department's most important committee, the Advisory Committee. Jeff was such a knowledgeable and astute interviewer that he was frequently chosen to serve on hiring committees, and top job candidates often cited his penetrating questions as a reason they chose the University of Wisconsin-Madison over other universities. Beyond the department, Jeff served on the Executive Committee of the Teaching Academy for eight years and was a faculty affiliate of the Women's Studies Program from 1988-96. From 1989 to his passing, he was a member of the American Indian Studies Program.

Jeff was a sensitive and affectionate and at times curmudgeonly soul, who was our friend and colleague. Many of us got to know Jeff over spicy food at the Vietnamese restaurant at Gorham and Henry streets. He hosted a Super Bowl Sunday party for many years, where members of the department could share their support for the Packers, or just enjoy the banter and the food. The highlight of the event was always Jeff's chili and the array of hot sauces set beside the simmering pot.

Jeff was a kind of polymath. He saw the depth of interest in everything. Jeff was a Cub Scout and Boy Scout leader for many years and taught dozens of boys how to tie knots, to fish, and set up a sturdy tarp. He was a collector and relished studying, finding, organizing, and cataloguing African masks, fish and frog decoys, lures, American advertising trade cards, coins, and more. To the chagrin of the fire marshal, his office was so packed with books that students had to wedge themselves between stacks of books during office hours. He was a long time member of the Midvale Community Lutheran Church and was active as a Bible study leader and a narrator of many cantatas there. A scholar of the emotions and their literary and musical expression, he was a knowledgeable student of hip hop and rap as well as classical music and jazz. His was an ecumenical imagination.

Jeff did not retire. He expected to recover from congestive heart failure and to continue teaching. "I'll never retire" he insisted, when the subject arose. Few knew of his heart problems; his death seemed sudden and came as a shock to his colleagues and students. Jeff loved his family dearly. He and Jocelyn have two sons, Brendan Riley Steele and Doran Riley Steele, and three precious granddaughters. Those who got to know Jeff and Jocelyn knew that theirs was a special marriage, one of true minds. The two met in their first week at Carleton College. They spent their entire adult lives together.