



Roger C. Cramton

May 18, 1929 – February 3, 2016

Roger C. Cramton, former dean of Cornell Law School and the Robert S. Stevens Professor Emeritus of Law, died February 3 in Ithaca. He was 87.

Cramton began teaching law in 1957 as an assistant professor at the University of Chicago Law School and then at the University of Michigan Law School, teaching ethics and torts. He became dean of the Cornell Law School in 1973, following work with the Administrative Conference of the U.S. and the U.S. Department of Justice.

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon appointed Cramton as chairman of the Administrative Conference of the United States, an independent federal agency dedicated to improve federal administrative procedures. In 1972, Nixon appointed him as assistant attorney general in charge of the Office of Legal Counsel in the Department of Justice, a role “much like that of chaplain to the pope,” according to the late Cornell law professor William Tucker Dean. Prior to Cramton’s appointment, the post was held by future Supreme Court Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, and Cramton was succeeded by future Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia.

As Nixon’s Watergate scandal began to intensify in late 1972, Cramton was advising the president on ethics and constitutional presidential parameters. “Here [Cramton] infuriated President Nixon by concluding that withholding appropriated funds was unlawful, and his tenure at the Department of Justice ended,” wrote Dean, in a retirement dedication to Cramton.

Within days of Cramton’s departure from the Justice Department, Cornell President Dale Corson called him. Cornell was conducting a Law School dean search. Following a campus visit and meetings with faculty and students, Corson offered him the job, and Cramton became dean in

spring 1973. Cramton was a transformative law dean, greatly increasing the scholarly impact and national reputation of the faculty.

As Dean, Cramton was outspoken on the Watergate scandal gripping the country, believing Nixon should resign. “We are in a situation of loss of leadership, paralysis of government, drift, that’s going to continue for three and a half years,” he told *The Cornell Daily Sun* in the summer of 1973.

“[Nixon] is a just a remnant; he has the trappings of power. The guards bow and scrape around the White House and the helicopters carry him around to one or another presidential haven. He is unable to speak in public except to a hand-picked audience. He is unable to hold a press conference. He is a prisoner within the White House,” said Cramton. Nixon resigned in August 1974.

In addition to his work as Cornell’s law dean, President Gerald Ford appointed Cramton as the first chairman of the Legal Services Corporation, the single largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans in the nation, a post he held from 1975 to 1978. He was succeeded as chair by Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Along with numerous scholarly articles, Cramton also published with co-authors two leading teaching books in the field of law: *The Law and Ethics of Lawyering* (4th ed. 2005) and *Conflict of Laws* (5th ed. 1993). He also created The American Legal Ethics Library, a unique collection of state ethics codes accompanied by narratives on the law of lawyering of the respective states.

Roger Conant Cramton was born May 18, 1929, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and was raised in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. He received his A.B. degree, magna cum laude, from Harvard University in 1950 and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He earned his law degree from the University of Chicago Law School in 1955, where he served on the law review and was elected to the Order of the Coif.

He is survived by his widow, Harriet; his children, Ann Kopinski (Don), Charles ’78, J.D. ’83 (Debbie), Peter ’80 (Catherine), and Cutter (Dawn); two sisters; 11 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren.

*Written by Eduardo Peñalver (Chair), Blaine Friedlander,
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