

Edward L. Miles – Scholar, Humanitarian, Bon Vivant, Teacher, Mentor and Friend (1939-2016)

Prepared by the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington, May 10, 2016

The world has lost an extraordinary scholar in marine affairs, climate impacts, and environmental management. The nation has lost a pioneer in applied, interdisciplinary regional climate impacts science. We – members and alumni of the Climate Impacts Group – have lost our founder, director emeritus, colleague, mentor and, above all, dear friend.

Edward Lancelot Miles died at his home in Seattle, Washington on May 7, 2016, from complications of Lewy Body Dementia. He was 76.



Ed's impact is wide-ranging, both personally and professionally. He had an unstoppable curiosity and powerful intellect, which he aimed at understanding and addressing some of the world's most complex science, technology and environmental management challenges. Ed's exuberant spirit elevated everyone around him, and his remarkable leadership skills were critical in bridging some of the serious chasms that too often exist between the realms of science and public policy. Ed was an outstanding mentor for graduate students and early career scientists seeking opportunities to work in the challenging space where science and policy intersect. He will be remembered for his high expectations, demand for excellence, and the independence he provided to those who worked for him.

One could characterize Ed's long career as always being ahead of the curve in identifying and tackling the large resource issues facing our global commons. A native of Trinidad, Ed studied history and political science at Washington, DC's Howard University, graduating in 1962. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Denver in 1965, studying international relations, sociological theory, and comparative politics. He augmented this perspective by committing years of study to the physical and natural science behind the issues he tackled, first as faculty at University of Denver, and, from

1974 to his retirement in 2010, at the Institute for Marine Studies, now the School of Marine and Environmental Affairs, at the University of Washington (UW).

“*While others shun thorny problems whose multiplying vines weave through many disciplines, Miles searches out these tangled webs, harnesses the strength of the best-qualified scientists in the various disciplines and seeks solutions.*”

– [Seattle Times](#), 1997

In the course of his career, Ed developed and provided incisive advice on a diversity of complex issues such as: the allocation of the electronic spectrum in outer space, the Law of the Sea Convention, regional oceans and fisheries governance (e.g., as chief negotiator for the Micronesian Maritime Authority, Federated States of Micronesia), global tuna management, sub-seabed disposal of high level radioactive waste, and the effectiveness

of international environmental regimes. Ed's "only" criterion was that a problem be "juicy" – complex, difficult and requiring the combination of the natural sciences, the social sciences and law for its solution. "My choices are made on whether the problem is large, interdisciplinary and significant. Does it matter? And if the answer is yes, then I'm willing to take risks." ([Seattle Times](#), 1997)

In the early 1990s, Ed turned his attention to global climate change, serving as lead author for marine policy in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's second global assessment. During this time, Ed recognized a major gap between the scale of information being produced and the actual needs of decision-makers. He also saw barriers to integrated problem solving in the separation between the physical, natural, and social dimensions of the assessment process. Seeing opportunity to address yet another "juicy" problem, Ed proposed a new approach to understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change that would (1) focus at the regional scale, (2) integrate multi-disciplinary approaches in a single working group, and (3) work in partnership with external stakeholders in order to understand and address institutional and management realities. After considering the Mekong and the Indo-Pacific as places to launch this effort, Ed realized that he had a perfect candidate in his backyard—the Pacific Northwest's Columbia River basin.

The Climate Impacts Group was established in 1995 as the embodiment of Ed's vision for a regionally-based integrated science and policy approach to addressing climate risks. Under Ed's leadership (1995-2010), the Climate Impacts Group became renowned for its use-inspired climate impacts science and for its role in helping the Northwest become a leader in climate resilience efforts. The early success of the Climate Impacts Group also led to the creation of a national program focused on regional co-production of decision-relevant climate impacts science (the NOAA Regional Integrated Scientific Assessment (RISA) program). Today there are 10 RISAs across the country working to increase our nation's resilience to climate impacts. In recognition of this and Ed's many other contributions, Ed was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 2003, among the first African-American members of that body. He was also a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, on the Board of Directors for the Union of Concerned Scientists and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Ed's deep study of climate issues led him to the emerging problem of ocean acidification. Ed was among the first social scientists to recognize the inherent environmental and societal threats, and took bold steps to quickly advance understanding of this issue. Ed's early work in this arena motivated an ocean acidification research agenda spanning natural science, social science and policy. Ed served on the Washington Blue Ribbon Panel on Ocean Acidification, convened by Governor Christine Gregoire, which established Washington State as a leader in governmental response to ocean acidification, ultimately leading to the creation of the Washington Ocean Acidification Center at UW in 2014. In retirement, Ed planned to focus even more intently on ocean acidification and the associated suite of environmental stressors now facing the ocean. It's a testament to his foresight and early action that, just this month, a group of 250 ocean acidification experts from around the globe met in Hobart, Tasmania to further an international ocean acidification research and response agenda.

Ed wasn't afraid to be "the skunk at the garden party" when his work showed him that a difficult issue needed to be raised. Throughout his career, Ed distinguished himself by his willingness to speak the truth as he saw it, from raising difficult issues about regional and institutional climate vulnerabilities to pointing out the inadequacies of existing legal and institutional structures for

reducing risks to the global commons. He had an incredible memory, with the ability to quote at will from past seminars, science papers, conversations, or arguments. He also had incredible interpersonal dexterity; an innate ability to herd independent, established (and sometimes cranky) academic cats; and incredible diplomacy – knowing what ought to be said, what didn't need to be said, and what mustn't be said.

Thinking back to 1995, when Ed's focus on sub-national climate impacts began, our region has come a long way. The Northwest is now recognized as a national hub of action on climate resilience, and the UW as a global innovator in applied, interdisciplinary, use-inspired climate impacts science. Ed would be eminently satisfied, we think, of his broader impact on all of us – his students, colleagues, friends and family. For years, Ed exhorted us to put on "climate spectacles" in order to identify society's real challenges, and to think outside the disciplinary boxes of our training while probing the depths of that same disciplinary knowledge. After all these years, looking at the world through climate spectacles doesn't seem so strange anymore. For that we thank you, Ed.

At the request of the Miles-Karpov family, if you, or others you know, wish to make a gift in tribute to Ed Miles, please consider donating to the Ed Miles Memorial Scholarship Fund (UW School of Marine and Environmental Affairs), and/or the Climate Impacts Group Innovation Fund (UW Climate Impacts Group). Gifts can be made online at the UW Foundation website, via check, or via a securities transfer. For online giving, please click on the following links to access these two funds:

- [Ed Miles Memorial Scholarship Fund](#): *In support of students studying the effects of climate on environment and society*
- [Climate Impacts Group Innovation Fund](#): *In support of science-based efforts to build climate resilience for ecosystems and communities.*

If you prefer to send a check or make a gift of securities, please contact Kyle Funakoshi in the College of the Environment at kyfu@uw.edu or 206-221-6808.

For more information about Ed:

- [Public website for memories and stories about Ed](#).
- [Keynote Address](#), UW Science and Policy Summit, 2011 (video).
- [Profile](#), Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2006 .
- [Interview](#), National Academy of Sciences, 2004 (audio).



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