

Amy Kaplan, SAS

AUGUST 11, 2020

VOL 67 ISSUE 5 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-67-NUMBER-5](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-67-number-5))

DEATHS

PRINT



Amy Kaplan

Amy Kaplan, the Edward W. Kane Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, died peacefully at home in Philadelphia on July 30 of glioblastoma. She was 66.

Dr. Kaplan was born in New York City and raised in New Rochelle, New York. She attended Brandeis as an undergraduate, graduating in 1975, and she earned an MA in 1978 and PhD in 1982 in English from Johns Hopkins University with a specialty in late 19th-century American literature. She spent her early career at Yale and then at Mount Holyoke College.

She joined the faculty at Penn in 2002 as a professor of English. She was named the Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Endowed Term Chair in the Humanities in 2004 (*Almanac* February 10, 2004 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v50/n21/kaplan.html>)). She became the Edward W.

Kane Professor of English three years later (*Almanac* April 24, 2007 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/volumes/v53/n31/chairs-eng.html>)). Dr. Kaplan also served as chair of the English department from 2013 to 2016 and was a member of the history graduate group.

“Dr. Kaplan was a scholar of American literary and cultural studies, an extraordinary thinker and writer whose work on the culture of US imperialism transformed the field and will resonate for generations of scholars to come,” noted her good friend Judith Frank, the Eliza J. Clark Folger Professor of English at Amherst College. Dr. Kaplan’s students and colleagues testify to her intellectual courage, her lack of sentimentality coupled with tremendous kindness, and the way her work inspired them and shaped their own scholarship.

Dr. Kaplan was the author of *The Social Construction of American Realism and The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, and the co-editor, with Donald Pease, of the seminal *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, whose essays excavated the histories of expansion, conquest, and resistance that have shaped the cultures of both the United States and the countries it has dominated. She was president of the American Studies Association from 2003 to 2004, during the invasion of Iraq, and she used her platform to call upon scholars to continue to disrupt the narratives that the American empire tells about itself.

Her final book, completed right before her diagnosis, was *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance*, which is animated by the shadow history of her own life as a young Jewish intellectual in the 1960s. The book is a wide-ranging examination of the contested historical and cultural terrain that made many “come to feel that the bond between the United States and Israel was historically inevitable, morally right, and a matter of common sense.”

Among her honors and awards, she received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship and the Norman Foerster Prize for the best essay in *American Literature* in 1998 for “Manifest Domesticity.” She was a member of the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study.

Dr. Kaplan is survived by her partner, Paul Statt; her daughter, Rose Weiss; her mother, Eunice Kaplan; her sister, Lisa Kaplan (Leon Katz); her brother, Jonathan Kaplan (Alyssa); her stepdaughter, Molly Statt; her nieces and nephews, Toby Vandersall (Matt), Abby Katz, David Katz (Susean), Jeff Kaplan, and Traci Kaplan; and two great-nephews, James Solomon Vandersall and Solomon Ellis Katz. Charitable donations in her name may be made to the National Brain Tumor Society’s Race for Hope Philadelphia (<https://events.braintumor.org/race-for-hope-philadelphia/>) and to the Middle East Children’s Alliance (<https://www.mecaforpeace.org/>).