

THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RICHARD A. CLOWARD: REFLECTIONS BY A CLOSE FRIEND

Alex Gitterman

Alex Gitterman was a long time colleague of Richard and Frances. He taught with Cloward at Columbia University. He is currently on the faculty at the University of Connecticut. Alex was active in organizing the Memorial Service for Richard and most helpful in the compilation of this issue.

Most social workers knew and will remember Richard as a brilliant scholar. He is probably the most widely read social work scholar in the profession. His books are sold in colleges and also in commercial bookstores throughout the world. Richard and his co-author (and wife) Frances Piven's contributions to contemporary issues in American society include:

Why Americans Don't Vote

The Mean Season

The New Class War

Reagan's Attack on the Welfare State and Its Consequences

Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail

The Politics of Turmoil: Essays on Poverty, Race and the Urban Crisis

Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare

These are not ordinary books. Richard and Frances' books have shaped sociological inquiry, political debate, and social welfare programs. They are classics that endure the test of time. *Regulating the Poor*, for example, was first published in 1971, translated into Italian and German, and received the C. Wright Mills Award. Updated to include the decades of the 70's, 80's, and 90's, the book has sold well over one million copies.

Most social workers also knew and will remember Richard as a social activist and program developer. What distinguishes Richard from almost all other scholars was his social activism, his unflinching commitment to the poor and the oppressed. His scholarship informed

and was informed by his experiences on the front lines – whether organizing for welfare rights or voter registration. He cared and understood; then he mobilized and empowered. He made a significant and lasting contribution to poor people's lives. He embodies the spirit of Jane Addams and the other settlement pioneers. Richard and Frances were a two-person settlement house. When poor people were denied their entitlement, the Cloward/Piven settlement house mobilized them into a welfare rights movement. When poor people were disenfranchised from the political process, the Cloward/Piven settlement house mobilized a national voter registration drive. Richard devoted his career to fight against social injustice – to trouble the comfortable and to comfort the troubled. He was our social conscience, our collective voices crying out against social injustices and for social reform.

For scholarly and activist contributions, Richard (and Frances) received honorary doctorates and numerous awards: the Council on Social Work Education's Significant Life Time Achievement Award (2001); the National Association of Social Worker's Life Time Achievement Award (1999); first recipients of the Political Sociology division of the American Sociological Association's Lifetime Achievement Award (1995); and more recently, the Distinguished Career Award in Practice of Sociology, American Sociological Association. They also won the Society for the Study of Social Problems prestigious Lee/Founders Award (1991) for distinguished contributions to the study of solutions of social problems.

Some social workers had Richard as a

teacher. In the classroom, Richard inspired almost five generations of social work students to broaden their socio-cultural, policy, and political perspectives. When other senior colleagues searched for ways to minimize their teaching workload, year after year Richard steadfastly taught six to seven courses. Why? Because he cared about educating social work students and was deeply committed to broadening their theoretical lenses. When students completed a course with Richard, they were transformed – they were different and the world they lived in became different. A clear and more sophisticated perspective replaced narrowness of vision and naiveté. His teaching brilliance was recognized when he received two teaching awards at the School as well as the Herman Stein Award for Excellence (Mandell School of Social Work, Case Western Reserve University).

Only a few of us have had the privilege of being Richard's close colleague and close friend. I am deeply grateful to have been Richard's colleague at Columbia University School of Social Work from 1966 to 2000 (when I left for the University of Connecticut School of Social Work) and his very close friend for the last 30 years. I held Richard in the highest professional and personal regard. While Richard had a distinct public persona, it was not easy to get to know the private side of Richard. I would like to share a few things about the personal side of Richard.

Richard was raised by a social activist mother and a minister father. By the time Richard applied to the University of Rochester, he was already determined to make a difference in people's lives. In his college application, he requested assignment to interracial housing. He roomed with an African-American freshman by the name of Mark Battle (who later became a prominent social worker). Before long, Richard and Mark, along with another student, developed an interracial day camp and shortly thereafter founded a settlement house known as Hubbell House.

A year after graduating from college, Richard completed his formal social work education in 1950. His first job was as a group work supervisor in a settlement house. Then, after a three year stint as a chief psychiatric

social worker in an army prison, Richard earned his doctoral degree in sociology from Columbia in 1958. In 1954, at Lloyd Ohlins' suggestion, Herman Stein recruited Richard to the faculty. Richard was committed to broadening the primarily psychoanalytic educational focus of the School by introducing socio/cultural aspects of social work practice. Richard chose to teach in a school of social work rather than in a sociology department because of the profession's commitment to the integration of theory, research and practice.

I first met Richard when I was a college junior at Rutgers University in 1958. Richard was a guest speaker in a criminology course. He sat on the desk, loosened his tie, and spoke for two hours without a single note. He spoke with passion about delinquency. The class was enthralled. When he completed his lecture, I jumped up from my seat and started applauding. My classmates followed suit. Finally, we heard a scholarly academic who had passion, who applied abstractions to the real problems of people, who had soul. What an unbelievable role model!

I never suspected on that memorable day that one day I would become his junior colleague at Columbia. In the Fall of 1966, as a newly hired faculty member, I mobilized my courage and introduced myself to Richard as the college junior at Rutgers University who led the standing ovation. Richard remembered the class; he was cordial, but seemed distant. At that moment I, like many others, mistook his shyness for aloofness. I could not imagine that such a polished speaker who spoke with the passion of a preacher and the elegance of a poet could be interpersonally shy. And yet Richard was, at times, painfully shy!

After I reintroduced myself to Richard, it took him several years to remember my name. Generations of junior faculty who followed have experienced a similar fate. Richard was not into idle social chatter. If you had something significant to discuss, he remembered you. I guess for several years I didn't have anything significant to say.

My family moved from the city to the suburbs in 1971, and I discovered that Richard and I lived just two blocks from one another. We began to drive to work together, and he

finally learned my name (it is significant that he remembered the name of my attractive wife from just one meeting). Richard and I began to forge a special friendship. And we became closer over the next 30 years. I grew to love Richard as if he were my older brother. In our years of friendship, these are a few things I learned about Richard.

First and foremost, Richard was in love with Frances. He spoke about her with the deepest affection and respect. He loved everything about her – her intellectual brilliance, her vision, her social activism, her beauty, her sexuality, her gardening, her gourmet cooking, and most of all, her companionship. His love for her was fully deserved as she was always there for him, including the bad times and the illness.

Second, Richard loved his children and his grandchildren. He was proud of his children's accomplishments: a public health social worker, a computer expert, a veterinarian. He also grieved the death of one of his sons. Richard did not always know how to express his emotions. Yet, when they had trouble, his pain was obvious. Richard's style was to keep his feelings to himself.

Third, Richard had a tough time fighting his inner demons. He had a tough exterior, but beyond the gruff facade was a deeply sensitive and compassionate man. He took friends' and poor people's troubles onto his shoulders and suffered for and with them. He felt so deeply that he looked for ways to numb the pain in ways that at times seemed self-destructive. Yet, Richard always bounced back and was proud of his resilience. Lung cancer dared to get him, but during that battle he held on to his dignity, his intellect, his hair, and his striking good looks.

Fourth, Richard had a wonderful sense of humor which he reserved for only his closest associates. It was wonderful to see Richard laugh. It was therapeutic to see Richard laugh. When Richard was a social work student, he was placed in a settlement house and his field instructor was Robert Vinter. They developed a very close friendship. Robert went on to become an accomplished social work academic. When he was the Dean of the University of Michigan's School of Social

Work, Richard wrote him the following playful letter in the winter of 1971:

Dear Robert,

*As the years pass, I have increasingly come to see that such tranquility as I enjoy owes much to the fact that I see you so infrequently. But now, as fate would have it, I find it necessary to risk that tranquility by putting myself in touch with you. The reason, Lord knows, is not of my doing, but on behalf of a young man who, in his innocence, wishes to attend your program. The matter causes me much regret, for I fear for his future should you decide to admit him. However, having done what I could do to discourage his application, I now have no choice but to honor his wishes and press his cause, for he is a most able and talented person, and one whom I greatly admire. Moreover, he is Puerto Rican and it is time you had something besides mid-western WASPS in your program. I think often of your wife, and of her travails. Sincerely,
Richard.*

What wit, what beautiful use of language.

Fifth, from his experiences as a social worker in the army, Richard developed tremendous respect for direct social work practice. At Columbia he became a courageous champion for maintaining its historical centrality at the School. He was pained by the outcome of the struggle and how he was treated over the last 15 years by the School.

Each time Richard gave my son, a public policy instructor, a newly published book, he inscribed the phrase: "Keep fighting." That is his message to all of us – to keep fighting against social injustice; to continue the struggle with passion and skill. Without Richard the struggle for a more just society will be much lonelier. I miss our conversations. I miss his keen political analysis. I miss our "boys talk." I deeply miss his friendship.

Hanging on the wall of a colleague's desk there is a saying which reads: "We live as long as we are remembered." If this is true, Richard still has a very, very long life left to live.

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