

Reflections

Troy Duster

I regret that I am unable to attend today's festivities and provide a testimonial in person to the contributions that Gerry Berreman has made to the Berkeley campus, and to the intellectual life of both the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. Since there are so many people gathered to read papers that will undoubtedly make these points, I will just say a few brief things from another angle.

I first heard of Gerry through our mutual friend, Aaron Cicourel. They had been graduate students together at Cornell, and Aaron had told me that when I got to Berkeley, 35 years ago, I should look up this guy Berreman in Anthropology. That wasn't necessary. It was the 1960s in Berkeley, and Berreman and I would meet at anti-Vietnam war rallies, at countless planning committees and panels, at Teach-Ins on the relationship between the War and domestic racism—and then ultimately have our common fates ratified in that inevitable weapon of choice, the dreaded petition. There are only a few around who will remember this, but Gerry and I were among the 21 Berkeley faculty who signed a petition insisting that Berkeley faculty receive the same fate as students arrested for their anti-war demonstrations in Sproul Plaza. The story appeared in a prominent place in the local newspapers, and for a brief moment it appeared as though we might be known as “The Berkeley 21.”

The authorities ultimately backed away from that confrontation, and for at least one moment, “the good guys” won.

I tell the story mainly because it crystallizes something about Gerry's integration of his understanding of the world with his actions. Indeed, when I began to read his scholarly articles on social stratification in India, I was struck by the consistency of his position as a scholar, intellectual, and political being. Many of my colleagues in the social sciences had taken fine scholarly positions in print, but were rarely if ever seen “in print” when it came to local politics. Many other colleagues had taken fine positions on the vital social issues of the day, but it was not their scholarly specialty. Gerry combined the two, and this made him a particularly valuable ally. He could explain how and why the Dalits of India did not share the conventional wisdom put forward by the Brahmins, that there was a general acceptance of caste stratification because of the spiritual unity achieved under Hinduism. And in a flash, we could see the parallels between the ideologies of power in the two nations, and the sharp parallel to the ante-bellum South of the United States—the argument that “only outside agitators” were stirring up the otherwise complacent at the bottom of the social and economic order.

But again, others will say more (or have already said more) about his scholarly contributions and insights. So I will only say one last word about his tennis game! We have been tennis doubles players off and on for many of these years, although the pace has certainly trailed off. It may surprise some of you to learn that on the tennis court, Gerry has the flair of Agassi and the serve reminiscent of Sampras—Or is it the flair of Sampras and the serve reminiscent of Agassi? Well, once he retires, we will have the time to get back out on the court and sort this out.