

Reflecting on the Legacy of Howard L. Reiter (1945-2012)

In the months since Dr. Howard L. Reiter's death (January 10, 2012), we take a moment to reflect upon his life and work. Dr. Reiter was Professor Emeritus and former chair of the Political Science Department at the University of Connecticut, and served as President of the New England Political Science Association 2010-2011. Dr. Reiter's scholarship and teaching focused on American Politics and particularly electoral politics, of which he has numerous publications. Dr. Reiter is known for his generous mentorship, committed leadership, and enduring friendship. In what follows is a mere glimpse of the ways in which Howard has left a profound impact on us both personally and professionally. I would like to thank the contributors for taking the time to publically share their reflections on Howard and his work, and to Dr. Mark Brewer and the *New England Journal of Political Science* for their labor and commitments to creating space in this journal for us to remember Howard.

Allow me to begin with my story. Howard hired me in 2008. Sitting in the interview and still a graduate student, I was uneasy and unsure how to read Howard. He was calm, cordial, matter of fact, and serious. I had read some of Howard's work prior to the interview and remember thinking: *wow, we are very different scholars--what could we possible talk about?* I had categorized Howard as a "conventional" American Politics scholar. I, as a transnational feminist political scholar, could only imagine that we spoke very different academic languages, if we could speak to one another at all. I remember blabbering nervously about my work to him and the steady nod of his head as I spoke—*he's just humoring me*. Over the next couple of years, Howard and I would engage in many conversations in the hallway (our offices a couple doors apart) but none of them academic. Our conversations were always refreshingly about the weather, things to do in the area, our families, and the very real and meaningful: *how are YOU today*.

Unfortunately, as time progressed our conversations increasingly became about his health. Howard always amazed me with his ability to keep his positive spirit, smile, and calmness amidst the craziness and depletive demands of cancer. When Howard left us, he left a substantive hole in our academic halls as well as within our hearts. One day, when Howard's office was being cleaned out, I got an urge to look at his personal library of books. While perusing them, I was taken aback. Howard had many feminist, postcolonial, and radical internationalist political texts with notes in the margins! *He knew my language.*

I am thankful for the conversations we had because they remind me that the details of daily life are intertwined in our work. We don't have to hide or belittle them in order to be a serious scholar; it is what makes us serious scholars. I am particularly grateful that I leafed through his books because they taught me that we are always more than our academic locations. Because of Howard I know scholars can and do share a common language despite our seemingly vast differences. We all have our distinct roles in knowledge production. However if we are committed to a larger political project, then we do the necessary work to not only *speak* to one other but to *hear* each other. I will cherish Howard's "silent" insights about life and academia, as well as his fervent smile amidst great adversity.

Dr. Heather M. Turcotte

Assistant Professor of Political Science and Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies

University of Connecticut

Howard L. Reiter was a wonderful friend and an outstanding political scientist. I believe his professional life in many ways mirrored his personal life. Happily married to Laura, accessible to graduate and undergraduate students and mentor to others, insightful and analytic in

approach while empathetic and supportive in person, Howard left a legacy few can hope to match. He chose in his extensive body of published work to take on the more fundamentally important of social questions. These he addressed in an insightful and creative manner, if not always within the bounds of conventional thinking, which I take to be a product of his extraordinary intelligence. He will be sorely missed by those who knew him, although my expectation is that the published work he left behind will continue to make an indelible contribution to our understanding of how a democratic society operates and, alternately on occasion, just how it might be improved.

Dr. William Crotty

Thomas P. O'Neill Chair in Public Life and Professor of Political Science

Northeastern University

I was lucky to work with Howard on one book. That experience told me a great deal about what a knowledgeable and humble man he was.

Two experiences in particular were revealing. We met at an APSA meeting to explore the possibility of doing an analysis of change within the Northeast. I had read Howard's work for some time and felt more than a little intimidated by his depth of historical knowledge relative to mine. After some discussion we both realized that an analysis would have to cover over a century to convey the full range of change that had occurred. That prompted me to confess my unease with my historical knowledge. At that point Howard made one of the more generous and gracious statements I have ever heard from an accomplished academic. He said: "Look, I know a lot but tend to include too much and write too much. You write shorter books like I want to write. You ride herd on me about relevance and length and I'll fill in history when we feel like it

is necessary.” It was a humble statement from an accomplished individual who was still interested in learning more about the craft of writing. As we progressed he did just what he had said, reviewing drafts and carefully suggesting historical events that I needed to include and responding to suggestions to shorten some sections. His focus on what we wanted to achieve and lack of ego were impressive.

While working on the book I was doing research on the dissent within the Republican Party as conservatives began to dominate during the 1960s. As I read the newsletters of the Ripon Society I became aware that Howard had written a great deal for the Society. His arguments were important expressions of the moderate unease about where the party was going. In my draft of that section I included quotes from him from the newsletters. I then sent him the draft. Much to my surprise when I got them back the material involving him had disappeared. After I figured out what was missing I insisted that most of it be included. In our conversations I realized that he just didn’t want to call attention to himself. Again, I realized what a humble scholar he was. His goal was the story and he wanted as little attention on any role he played as possible.

The experience with Howard was rewarding and instructive about the need to set aside your own ego. I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to work with him.¹

Dr. Jeffrey Stonecash
Maxwell Professor of Political Science
Syracuse University

¹ Dr. Stonecash's piece also appeared in the July 2012 issue of *PS*.

It is with deepest sympathy that I remember the life of Howard Reiter and his contributions to my life, during my time at the University of Connecticut. It is through his willingness to read my research, turn around comments within short days, and concern about my staying focused on my research that I felt empowered to work towards my professional goal. From Howard, I learned even more than anything the significance of sensitivity and thoughtfulness—sharing a card with someone for her birthday, sending a note to say you found something that she may like, or simply beginning each return email with a “thank you.” Through his taking time to show people that they matter, a characteristic that I truly admire, I feel that Howard has left an imprint upon me, and many of us, to share our time with others in ways that are meaningful and lasting in our memories: the Power of the Human Spirit.

Dr. Shayla Nunnally

Associate Professor of Political Science and the Institute for African American Studies,
University of Connecticut

In every way, Howard Reiter embodied the turn of phrase originating with the Scottish poet Robert Burns—‘a gentleman and a scholar.’ He was, indeed, an outstanding scholar as well as teacher and mentor to many over a long and stellar career. He also exhibited leadership at a key time in the recent history of the Political Science department at UCONN, and did so with an equanimity and grace that left a profound mark on me, and many others. Passing through for just a few years as a student, I certainly did not know him nearly as well as many others. Still, he was such a profoundly decent and honorable man that I am left with very fond remembrances of him, and deep sadness at his passing.

Dr. Michael Butler

Associate Professor of Political Science,

Clark University (UCONN B.A. and Ph.D.)

I am sorry that I never met Prof. Reiter, but I am familiar with his large contributions to our profession, especially to studies of Maine politics in which area I work.

In an important article published in 1977, Prof. Howard Reiter made a significant contribution to our understanding of electoral politics in Maine. His piece, "Who Voted for Longley? Maine Elects an Independent Governor," *Polity* (Fall 1977), examined the coalition that elected Independent James Longley over Democrat George Mitchell and Republican James Erwin in 1974. Reiter found that conservative Democrats in cities with significant Franco-American populations had joined large segments of the Republican Party to produce that outcome. His analysis showed that voter attachments to the parties in Maine were fragile, and readily subject to shifts during campaigns depending on the skills of the candidates. Following the 1970s, Maine elected a second Independent as governor, Angus King in 1994 and again in 1998, and nearly elected a third Independent in the 2010 gubernatorial race. While the dynamics of those races differed somewhat from the 1974 contest, Prof. Reiter's pioneering analysis continues to provide a benchmark from which we can understand Maine's statewide electoral battles.

Dr. Kenneth T. Palmer

Professor Emeritus of Political Science

University of Maine

Howard was amazingly generous to Barb and I. The same is true of Laura. We met in the mid-1980s. They knew that rural Connecticut was a “new experience” for a young family from the West Coast. So, they celebrated birthdays with us, showed us where non-Hollywood movies could be seen, and introduced us to restaurants they loved.

Part of the reason that it was always fun to be with the Reiters is that they were so warm to each other. They cheered for each other’s professional successes, smiled at each other’s jokes and faux pas, and passionately discussed the meanings of movies and the political significance of current events. The alleged chemistry of Spencer and Hepburn was nothing when compared to the endearing romance of Howard and Laura.

Professionally, Howard was an ideal colleague. He fiercely debated ideas at dinners, in hallways, and over the internet. Then, in public settings and before colleagues from other institutions, he would shower you with praise. I loved disagreeing with him about some obscure point of American history or about the implications of some esoteric social-science concept because he was so damn intelligent. But also because I knew that in the end he wanted me to enjoy success in the pursuit of my research and notions. No better fencing partner than he.

Howard was a remarkably rigorous scholar and an incredibly devoted husband. In both roles, he had few peers. And, of course, he was a true friend.

Dr. Ernie Zirakzadeh
Professor of Political Science
University of Connecticut

I am lucky to be in a profession I love, surrounded by colleagues who for the most part I like and admire. I can say honestly that there have been none I liked and admired more than Howard Reiter.

My first experience with Prof. Reiter was very indirect. I had an excellent honor student who was undecided between law school and graduate school. She chose the latter and went to the University of Connecticut. Before long, I was hearing from her that she had a professor and academic advisor who she particularly admired: Howard Reiter. My own experience with him would confirm her evaluation.

My first direct experience with Howard confirmed her impression. It must have been something more than twenty years ago when I presented a paper at a conference (Northeastern, I think). The panel in general and my own presentation went well. But afterward, I encountered Howard, who had been a discussant. He thought I had made an error in my paper, pretty serious from his point of view, and he pointed it out to me. For some reason, he felt that a private discussion of the error was better than pointing it out during the panel. Although I am sure I learned from his criticism, what I learned more was his combined power as a teacher and gentleness as a human being. When, as a discussant, I have found errors I might consider embarrassing to authors, I have sought to emulate Howard in the way I handled it.

Since that time, we worked together on numerous conference panels and we both wrote chapters in a book on the 2008 election edited by Bill Crotty. I remember that the subject matter for our chapters in the book was similar, both being about Presidential primaries. We had to discuss what we were doing and share drafts continually to avoid too much redundancy while making some reference to each other's work. Howard was again the consummate professional and gentleman, showing a pride of authorship without a false pride of authorship. He was open-

minded, helpful and generous, and it was a pleasure, as always, to work with him.

In the late spring of 2007, my wife Lynn and I had the good fortune to travel with Howard and Laura to China, as members of an APSA delegation. After a couple of weeks on the mainland, the four of us were part of a smaller group that went on to Hong Kong for a few days. I was certainly quite lucky to get to know Howard better and more personally. His unfailing courtesy, his quiet but ever present sense of humor and the pleasure he shared on the trip enhanced the experience for all of us.

I am so happy to have known him, and Lynn and I are among the many who will miss him.

Dr. Arthur Paulson
Chair, Professor of Political Science
Southern Connecticut State University

Unlike many in this symposium, I knew Howard only towards the end of his life. Yet even then his intellect, dedication to craft, and passion remained in full view. As a teacher, Howard was a bit of an acquired taste. His comments when critiquing an assignment could be tough to swallow; yet never did they pass his lips with malice. The sharp-eyed professor always zeroed in on flaws in our research designs and pushed us to refine our arguments. At times we felt angry and set adrift to fend for ourselves; but now, with hindsight, it is clear that in those moments Howard was showing us that we could find our own answers...that we could become independent scholars. I remember fondly my Monday nights with Howard and while I regret not knowing him in his prime, Howard Reiter still carried himself with a dignity, grace, and thoughtfulness of someone far younger in body and spirit. Thank you Howard.

Robert W. Wishart

PhD Candidate, Political Science Department

University of Connecticut

and Dr. Reiter's student Fall 2010

Howard was an outstanding scholar and a truly admirable human being. He was wise, witty, and always grammatically correct. He was a deep, big thinker with a wide range of intellectual interests. He was an eloquent speaker and keen political analyst. As a colleague in the political science department Howard enriched our intellectual life. As head of the department he was a model of reason and integrity, encouraging us to do our best. As a teacher he left behind a host of grateful students who aspire to pass on something of his intellectual legacy. He inspired students with his willingness to question orthodoxy and challenge dominant ideas.

Howard was in great demand as a speaker on American politics and not just in the United States. Throughout his career he lectured on American politics at universities and research institutes abroad, including Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, Venezuela and Yugoslavia. Many of these lectures were under the auspices of the U.S Information Agency and the Department of State.

Not content to just fly in and out of distant places, Howard spent longer periods of time as a visiting professor in the United Kingdom and Estonia, and as a Fulbright lecturer in the United Kingdom and Norway. Because of his world-class reputation in American politics he was selected for the prestigious Fulbright distinguished chair at Uppsala University in Sweden

for a sabbatical year. On all these assignments abroad he not only enlightened his hosts about American politics but he also tried to learn as much as he could about their perspectives. As a specialist in International Relations, I always considered Howard a model scholar of American politics because he was eager to understand the world beyond the United States.

Howard Reiter will be remembered as a friend, colleague, and political scientist par excellence.

Elizabeth C. Hanson

Professor Emerita of Political Science

University of Connecticut

Thank you, Howard, for sharing your life, labor, and wisdom with us. You are greatly missed and always remembered.