



IN MEMORIAM

Nathan Edward Cohen
Professor of Social Welfare, Emeritus
Los Angeles
1902-2001

Born in Derry, New Hampshire, Nathan E. Cohen grew up in the Boston area, and graduated from Harvard University where he went on to receive his Ph.D. in experimental psychology in 1934. He remained in Boston during the years of the Great Depression, engaging in group work in its impoverished areas. From that time his subsequent professional and academic career centered on social work. His lifelong dedication to social justice inspired his leadership of the profession of social work in the pursuit of helping individuals through the improvement of the societal conditions under which they live. Uniquely influential in all strains of social work, he played a key role in the development of a more activist community organization specialty.

His first academic post was as professor of social work at Columbia University where he also served as associate dean for three years. In 1958 he joined the faculty at Western Reserve University and also served for a time as vice president. While there he led a group of students to Selma, Alabama, joining with Martin Luther King, Jr. in the historic march there.

He came to UCLA in 1964 where he served as dean for a time and as professor until his retirement in 1967. He served on numerous Academic Senate and University committees, including the Council on Academic Personnel, (then the Budget Committee). He was an indefatigable contributor to the Professional Schools Seminar Program in the College of Letters and Science. Among his many educational contributions to Social Welfare, perhaps his most outstanding was the founding and nurturing of its Ph.D. program, serving as its first chair during its fledgling years. He was revered by students as teacher, mentor and role model, and many sought his counsel and inspiration long after graduation.

His scholarly contributions throughout his career were numerous, and in addition to many seminal articles, include his classic book, *Social Work in the American Tradition*, in which he limned the development of the social work profession from colonial times to the twentieth century within the context of the historical changes in the broader society and in social welfare policies. While at UCLA he co-authored an important study of the precipitants of the Los Angeles Watts civil disorders.

Even in his retirement he continued to serve UCLA on several committees; as president of the UCLA Emeriti Association; and on several dissertation committees. He was instrumental in the creation of the PLATO Society and with his wife, Sylvia, after they moved to Berkeley, founded a similar organization, the Association for Lifelong Learning.

His enormous capacity for bringing people with disparate interests together for constructive action was among his greatest talents. The chief such accomplishment was creation of the largest organization of professional social workers in the world. Before 1955, there were seven different organizations of social workers covering those who worked in areas such as schools, psychiatric facilities, medical settings, and community organizations. Nathan E. Cohen was a crucial force in gathering them into a group that was large enough to be heard, the National Association of Social Workers. In 1955 he became their first president. Today there are over 155,000 members.

He is survived by his wife Sylvia, daughter Susan, sons David and Edward, and 11 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren.

Jeanne M. Giovannoni