



## IN MEMORIAM

Gerald Berreman  
Professor of Anthropology, Emeritus  
UC Berkeley  
1930-2013

Gerald Berreman died at the age of 83 on December 23, 2013. A native of Portland, Oregon, he joined the Department of Anthropology as an Assistant Professor soon after completing his Ph.D. at Cornell University in 1959 and remained on the faculty until his retirement in 2001. His distinguished career featured a 41- year study of caste, gender, class and environment in and around the Indian village of Sirkanda and the urban area of Dehra Dun. His later work explored how lower- caste individuals in Northern India could escape the stigma of belonging to the so- called “untouchable” class. With a lifelong interest in South Asia and the Himalayas, he also worked on environmental and development issues in India and Nepal.

Gerry was stationed from 1953 to 1955 at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, just when the US Supreme Court abolished race segregation in public schools and in the military. It was also the time of the first rumblings of the Montgomery bus strike that led to the American civil rights movement. Those years determined Gerry’s broadly comparative theory of social inequality that allowed him to compare caste relations in India, the American South and South Africa during apartheid.

In 1968 Gerry Berreman published a powerful diatribe in *Current Anthropology* under the title, “Is Anthropology Alive?” It was written in response to an acrimonious plenary meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Pittsburgh in 1966 over a resolution he had co- signed with many other noted anthropologists, including Michael Harner, Kathleen Gough, and Eric Wolf, to condemn the United States’ role in the Vietnam War. The president- elect of the Association rejected the resolution on the grounds that it did not “advance the science of anthropology” or “further the professional interests of anthropologists.” Michael Harner rose to protest that if “genocide was not in the professional interests of anthropologists,” then perhaps we ought to quietly euthanize the discipline. Well, almost those words. Consequently, the chair was voted down and the resolution to condemn the war was presented, amended, and passed.

Gerry persisted in exploring and exposing the pernicious influences of military and C.I.A. involvement in professional organizations and in research and granting foundations. In the 1960s he was involved in the University of California’s Himalayan Border Countries Research Project until he learned the extent of the project’s funding by the US Defense Department and he resigned. David Price recounts this history in his ode to Gerry – “One who Railed Against the Machine” – in a recent issue of *Counter- Punch* magazine. Soon after Gerry resigned from the project he wrote to Senator J. William Fulbright, explaining why he had withdrawn from the Himalayan project and how the Pentagon was manipulating anthropological research. Like other whistleblowers, Gerry suffered the consequences, when he was forced to defend himself before the Indian External Affairs Ministry in New Delhi to convince them that his new research, funded by the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, was free of any association with US intelligence agencies like the CIA. Gerry’s article, “Bringing it All Back Home,” in Dell Hymes’ game- changing, heavily Berkeley-

inflected volume *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972), "did indeed rage against the machine, against US imperialism abroad and entanglements in the Cold War."

Gerry's scholarly writings were influenced by just about every social movement of the 1960s to the 1990s - the US civil rights movement, the anti- Vietnam War movement, the Free Speech movement, the feminist movement, the anti- nuclear movement, and the anti- apartheid divestment movement during which he and hundreds of Berkeley students and faculty were arrested.

In a more personal vein, Gerry Berreman was a kind and a just man, and truly egalitarian. His masterful theoretical and methodological contributions shaped and transformed generations of Berkeley graduate students, among whom I was extremely lucky and extremely grateful to have been numbered. He was also one of the funniest people you would ever meet in Kroeber Hall. In his memorial ode to Gerry, Michael Harner described him as a secular shaman, a man who saw through the many masks of lies and deception – the snarky masks of racism, the righteous masks of genocide, the imperious masks of academic vacuousness at its worst. What was Gerry's mask? Harner suggests it was his humor, sharp, absurdist and deployed, when needed, as a weapon. He concluded: "Most of us are teachers. As such our most immediate responsibility is to our students. We must show them by our example that humanity is not incompatible with science, that science without humanity is a monster and social science without humanity a contradiction in terms... If as teachers we concern ourselves exclusively with the technical proficiency of our students and reject responsibility for their moral sense, or lack of it, then we may someday be compelled to accept responsibility for having trained a generation of willing executioners, willing to serve in a future Auschwitz... If we do not act, our science will die as it did in Germany in the 1930's and 1940's, and with it [will die] truth and reason."

Gerry demanded an anthropology that was adequate to the experience of the times which, then as now, is a time of war. Unconventional times required unconventional anthropology. He dismissed neutrality in social science as illusory, and argued that "passion was not incompatible with reason and that both must go hand in hand with courage."

He urged us to read Goffman to learn how to observe the intimate minutia of social interactions, but also to take up C.W. Mills in learning how to translate individual woes into larger social and political issues, and he taught us to follow Robert Redfield in placing ourselves squarely on the side of humanity and to be "unashamed to wish mankind well."

Gerry called for a methodology that combined rigor and insight, verification and intuition, accuracy and empathy, replicability and human relevance. He taught us that the best qualitative method was rooted in extensive, explicit, perceptive, handwritten field notes that were self- analytical, self- critical, reporting of research procedures, contexts, careful documentation of sources, of the bases for inferences, and documentation of the ethnographers theory of society and his biases.

Above all, he taught us to resist selling our souls to what he called the anti- human forces in society in exchange for any personal or professional advantage. He lived by those teachings. During the Vietnam crisis, his dignified method of non- cooperation was apparent. He not only opposed the war but he refused to train Peace Corps volunteers going to India "because he believed that a nation which was annihilating a people in one country cannot be truly interested in doing good to another," according to his longtime Indian colleague, the poet and folklorist Ved Prakash Vatuck. Where others in his situation chose power, money, and comfort, Gerry "put his life on the line to voice the fears and hopes of the downtrodden."

Gerry was delighted when he was awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Stockholm, Sweden, in 1974. He wrote me a postcard saying that this was the apogee of his career for he was awarded that doctorate for doing and saying things that had made him a pariah in his own department of anthropology. The award stated that Berreman had "been a courageous spokesman for a practice of social science which remains independent and critical in its stance toward political interests." Ved Vatuck, praised Gerry for having "supported the freedom of Indians, and the freedom of Vietnamese, Cubans, Black peoples and Brazilian Indians."

Gerry is survived by his wife, Dr. Keiko Yamanaka, a member of the Ethnic Studies Department at UC Berkeley; daughters Janet Berreman of Albany, Calif., and Lynn Holzman of Santa Barbara, Calif.; a son, Wayne Berreman of Berkeley, Calif.; eight grandchildren; one great- granddaughter; and a brother, Dwight Berreman of New Jersey.

Nancy Scheper- Hughes  
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