



IN MEMORIAM

Peter Marris
Professor Art & Urban Planning
UC Los Angeles
1928 – 2007

Peter H. Marris died of cancer at his home in Guilford, Connecticut on June 5, 2007, at the age of 79. His death will be noted by the many planning scholars who respected his work. To those of us who knew him personally, Peter will be mourned because he was also a kind, tender man who gave much of himself to the community of which he was long a part.

Born in London, Peter served in the military and returned to study Sociology at Cambridge. While still a young man, he served as a British colonial officer in Africa, an experience which always influenced his scholarly work and led to his lifelong interest in the people of that continent. He joined the Institute of Community Studies in London in 1955, and later also worked at the Centre for Environmental Studies there. In his early years as a scholar, he published studies on widowhood in London, slum clearance in Nigeria, the lives of African businessmen in Kenya, higher education policy, and poverty programs in the United States. He was a professor of urban planning at UCLA from 1976 through 1991, and also was a lecturer in city and regional planning at UC Berkeley and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

As he matured, Peter returned often to the themes he had initially explored in his earliest studies, deepening his analysis, reinterpreting the meaning of his field observations, and critically analyzing social, economic and urban policy in light of the experiences and emotions of the people whom he has studied. In *Dilemmas of Social Reform* (1968) he and co-author Marin Rein enumerated obstacles to change encountered in community development programs of the Ford Foundation and by the President's Commission on Juvenile delinquency. By demonstrating the many ways in which well-meaning and generously funded programs fail because of the complexity of human organizations and the challenges of urban environments, Marris and Rein were among the first authors developing what became one of the major themes of policy analysis by the seventies. In *Loss and Change*, (1974) he insightfully drew parallels between the personal losses of widows and the displacement of communities by urban renewal. In *Meaning and Action: Community Planning and Conceptions of Change* (1982), Peter drew upon American and British case studies to explore relationships between the ways in which we formulate and state complex social problems and redefine the problems as we become disillusioned by the ineffectiveness of our attempts to solve them within the limitations inherent in public policies and complex organizations.

Later in his life, Peter developed the theme of his early service as a colonial officer in a well-crafted novel, set in Africa, entitled *The Dreams of General Jerusalem*. In his fiction, Peter again explored the societal dilemmas that he explored in most of his scholarly writings. Those who knew him well also could recognize in his characters an honest portrayal of the most confusing and painful experiences of his own life.

An insight into the workings of Peter's can be gleaned by noting that all of the scholarly works mentioned above dealt with themes that were intertwined with one another and that recurred in all his writings. Each of these important books was reissued in revised form years after it was initially published. The new editions contained new sections and refined analysis even though they had been favorably reviewed, widely read and frequently cited when first published. His particular style of scholarship consisted of continually asking questions and reformulating them; and continually shaping and reinterpreting his answers to them. Throughout his life, his scholarship became steadily deeper and his ability to communicate complex notions was refined. He did not use computers or statistical models, yet the insights that came from his work were fresher and more penetrating than those his friends and colleagues could produce with enormous data sets, statistical tools, and mathematical models.

As his friend and colleague, I had the opportunity to watch that unique mind at work in many settings. At UCLA, for example, Peter led a seminar in which at the start of the term doctoral students explored with one another the unrefined kernels of their concepts for dissertation research. As the term went on, through repeated presentations and collegial interactions, class members refined their concepts and developed their research designs. On several occasions I attended the seminars at the invitation of my own dissertation advisees who had enrolled. He suggested strategies for data collection and analysis for each of them that seemed feasible and realistic, enhancing the value of their research to the field and to policy making. He seemed quite comfortable suggesting that students use data or analytical approaches that he himself had never used in his research, and he quoted authors whose writings I associated with at least half a dozen disciplines. Though his knowledge was both deep and broad, he was focusing on helping the students and not at all on demonstrating his familiarity with the literature.

Peter was a quiet man whose modesty was absolutely genuine. His personal relationships with colleagues and students there were utterly lacking in pretension or posturing. He was a patient listener and his gentle suggestions as to how to improve an essay or where one might consider going for vacation were genuinely meant to be helpful and they almost always were. He accepted public speaking engagements and professional leadership opportunities with sincere reluctance. As department chairman in urban planning at UCLA he had little patience for bureaucracy, rules, and paperwork. From the first day in office he looked forward to the end of his tenure, but while responsible for leading the Department he focused sharply on the shared values of the community and insisted that senior administrators treat students, staff, and junior faculty with respect and that they be fairly supported.

Peter was married to the distinguished architectural historian and feminist Dolores Hayden. The family moved to Connecticut in 1991 where Peter lectured in sociology at Yale for over a decade together, Peter, Dolores, and their daughter, Laura, welcomed their friends into their home with warm informality, sharing their poetry, their quilt collection, and their ideas about cities and social institutions. Peter will be missed by all who knew his writings and benefited from his teaching and scholarly advising. Those of us who knew him personally will also remember with fondness his quiet warmth, the depth of his thinking, and his unique ability to link the intellectual lessons of his work with the humanity of his daily life.

Martin Wachs