



IN MEMORIAM

Michael Paul Rogin
Robson Professor of Political Science
Berkeley
1937–2001

Michael Paul Rogin, Robson Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, died in Paris on November 25, 2001. He was 64 years of age.

He was born on June 29, 1937, in Mt. Kisko, New York, and received his bachelor's degree summa cum laude in government from Harvard University in 1958. He did graduate work at the University of Chicago, where he earned his master's degree in 1959 and his doctorate in Political Science, in 1962.

After teaching one year at Makerere University in Uganda, Mike received an appointment in the UC Berkeley Department of Political Science in 1963 and remained there throughout his distinguished career. His eight books and numerous articles and essays earned him a preeminent place in the United States and Europe among scholars of politics and the literate public, who valued the breadth and originality of his work and its interdisciplinary character. His books include *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: the Radical Specter* (1967), which he described as "a Gothic horror story (the first of many) disguised as Social Science"; *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (1975); *Subversive Genealogy: the Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (1983); "Ronald Reagan," the Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology (1987); *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (1996); and *Independence Day, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Enola Gay* (published by the British Film Institute in 1998).

What is apparent beyond the breadth and deliberately controversial character of the topics he chose to explore is the prodigious labor of research Mike invested in each. *The Intellectuals and McCarthy* immediately garnered the Albert J. Beveridge award of the American Historical Association. Awarded annually to the most distinguished book in English on the history of the United States that employs new methodological or conceptual tools or that constitutes a significant reexamination of an important interpretive problem, the Beveridge prize aptly summarized the kind of mark Mike's scholarship would leave on almost every historical or theoretical subject he touched. His next book, *Fathers and Children*, would be characterized in one review as the most brilliant psychoanalytic study of an American president yet published, and in the *New York Times Book Review* as a stunning major reinterpretation of the Age of Jackson. In *Subversive Genealogy*, he turned the tool of psychobiography to the life and writings of Herman Melville to expose what the New Historicist and former Berkeley colleague, Professor Stephen Greenblatt, recently called hidden histories. [London Review of Books, 3 January 2002] As Greenblatt puts it, the fundamental aim of this exposition was to burrow deeply into the strata where psychic fantasy and social identity merge, where private dream and national dream collude in darkness. In this place, Mike found the resources of his vision of American political thought that was neither wholly dark nor even cynical but certainly, for want of a better word, clear-eyed. In his view, America's liberal democracy — theoretically and historically — was anchored every bit as much in genocide and in slavery as in any foundational document and only a fantasy could mask that fact. Such a perspective often made Mike's work appear to other political theorists as idiosyncratic, but also as profoundly original and subversive. Mike invented ways of thinking about things. No one can duplicate that, suggests UC Berkeley Professor of Law Robert Post, who coauthored *Race and Representation* with Mike in 1998.

Subversive Genealogy might arguably be Mike's most original work, and yet, in his typically good-humored way, he both credited and distanced himself from the thinker who had originally coined that title. "I have borrowed the title from an essay by my college professor, Judith Shklar," he wrote in the preface of the work. "She would not approve of the uses to which I have put her oxymoron, however, and so my book has a subversive genealogy of its own. I thank Judith Shklar for permission both to use her title and to write my book." Mike's later, more openly public and combative writings — "Ronald Reagan," the Movie; Black Face, White Noise; and Independence Day— explored his unshakable belief that American cinema was a subject worthy of the theorist's attention, as something more than benign entertainment and often nothing less than propaganda disguised as escapism. From its earliest days, film seemed to Mike to have become an almost irresistible medium of self-reflection for Americans — a transformative lens through which, he claimed, we reimagined American society and rewrote American history. As such, its political, social and aesthetic power could not be overestimated, nor the depths of its impact on popular imagination left unexcavated. His death leaves incomplete a much-anticipated book on the Hollywood Popular Front.

Mike's quality of mind, which others have characterized as a fabulous empathetic intelligence, had in many ways to be experienced to be fully appreciated. As Stephen Greenblatt again recalls, "Mike always had the startling gift of being totally present when he was with you, an ability to focus all of his formidable energy on you, so that you felt you were the sole object of his passionate attention. No matter, as I discovered early on, that many others felt the same sense of privileged intimacy." This passionate attention was certainly intellectual as well as personal, as much the product perhaps of his gifted, serious fascination with chess, as of his fascination with his colleagues and students. Mike never overlooked the small, the incidental, the casually expressed, in conversation or argument. He wondered at others' reactions to a given book, a movie, a student's well or poorly organized thesis chapter, seemingly with the same rapt attention. This, of course, is why students adored him. It is also perhaps one source of the penetrating insights that made memorable so many of his contributions to the London Review of Books, including a thunderbolt review of David Mamet's novel, *The Old Religion* ["Magician Behind Bars"] in 1998, and a touching but frank assessment two months later of the collected letters of Simone de Beauvoir and Nelsen Algren, her *Beloved Chicago Man* ["More Than Ever, and For Ever"].

While such work ensures that Mike will be remembered as a prolific, wide-ranging author at Berkeley, he will also be recalled as a master teacher and mentor of graduate students and undergraduates alike, across a broad range of academic disciplines. In addition to political science, these include English, comparative literature, history, American studies, sociology, and ethnic studies. Within political theory, he taught the history of European and American political thought, as well as courses on film, Marxism, race and racism, and feminism, and a near-legendary course on the American president that would change its coordinates with each new incumbent of the office. His impact on students was enormous. As one of 30 faculty members across the campus nominated in 1978 by graduating seniors as their best teacher and the one from whom they had learned the most at Berkeley, Mike received the Award for Distinguished Teaching. In 1996, when Chancellor's Professorships were established, he was among the first group to be awarded this honor. Such just rewards are the scholar's due, but from his many friends and colleagues at Berkeley and across the country who both loved and honored him, quite simply they do not seem enough. In a characteristic passage at the conclusion of his consideration of de Beauvoir's unresolved relationship with Nelson Algren, Mike reflected on the significance of the ring that she kept as her secret sign of betrothal to him. He quotes from her reported dream to Algren concerning it: "I told you I should be buried with your ring at my finger, which I intend to do. Your ring at my finger, and your face in my heart as long as I live." It is no secret that Mike's face will remain in our hearts as well.

Shannon Stimson
Paul Thomas