



IN MEMORIAM

Michael Clark Kearney
Professor Emeritus of Anthropology
UC Riverside
1937 – 2009

We celebrate the life of Michael Kearney. Michael was husband, father, grandfather, brother, teacher, mentor, friend, human and civil rights activist, expert witness, and anthropologist. He was also avid runner, skier, and alas relentless punster. Born and raised in Hayward, California, he attended the University of California School of Dentistry before switching to anthropology at Berkeley, where he received his B.A. (1963) and Ph.D. (1968) degrees. In 1969-1970, he was a post- doctoral fellow in social psychiatry at the University of California Medical Center. He joined the anthropology faculty of the University of California, Riverside in July, 1967 where he spent his entire academic career until his retirement in June, 2008.

His anthropological studies in Oaxaca, Mexico began in the mid-1960s and have involved annual or even more frequent trips, first to the Sierra Juraez where in worked in the Zapotec town of Ixtepeji and later to the Mixteca, specifically to San Jeronimo Progreso. He sought to gain a fuller understanding of the changing dynamics of the everyday lives of its members, to renew friendships and kin relations with the people, and to happily fulfill commitments he had made to the community. In the process, he collaborated with and helped to train students from UCR and colleagues from Mexico. His legacy remains alive with the on- going collaborative research in which his previous students continue to engage in investigations on both sides of the border. In recent years, Michael has been actively engaged in changing the face of Oaxacan studies by training the first generation of native Mixtec- speaking young men and women as anthropologists, the first of whom are now completing their doctorates at UCR.

Anthropology was a way of life for Michael, and he continually worked toward improving the theories and practices informing the discipline. As his engagement with Zapotec and Mixtec peoples deepened in the 1970s, his grasp of how both he and persons in the communities understood and explained changes that were taking place locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally also grew. He no longer talked with his informants and friends only in Mexico, because many now worked in the Inland Empire and the rest of California. He often said, "I would walk out of the classroom to talk with them as they worked in orange groves around UCR or in nearby towns and cities to see whether what I was thinking jibed with what they knew and were experiencing."

Michael was one of the first anthropologists to explore the implications of conducting research with persons who lived in communities on both sides of the U.S.- Mexico border and who maintained strong emotional, cultural, and social ties with their natal communities. By the late 1980s, anthropologists would come to call these concerns multi- sited research, transnational communities, and transnational borders. He was acutely aware of the fact that emigration and migration affected not only the people who moved but also those who remained in their homeland. He wrote path- breaking books and articles addressing the changing face of anthropological research that inspired his anthropology colleagues around the world to think in new ways about these issues and the forces that underpinned their appearance and crystallization.

Michael's research interests grew steadily over time and, by the early 1980s, had come to include health and identity formation among transnational indigenous farm workers in California, the emergence of new social

networks, poverty, and most importantly the rights of indigenous peoples. This focus on individual and community rights led him to serve as an expert witness in trials involving indigenous individuals who on occasions spoke neither English nor Spanish and were thus often denied the right of adequate counsel. He became a leader among both scholars and immigrant communities on various immigration and citizenship issues. These experiences brought him into more profound relations with the communities which, in turn, clarified issues, emphasized the importance of justice for all, and created new ways for indigenous community organizations and their members, anthropologists and government officials, on both sides of the border, to think about and engage with the changing worlds in which we live.

Michael was fearless in confronting oppressive, antagonistic authorities on both sides of the border. On more than occasion, he placed himself in harm's way without weapons except those of his highly honed sense of indignation, honesty, fairness, and basic human love. Because of this and because of close collaborative relationships with transnational indigenous communities over the course of four decades, he earned the respect and trust of grassroots and home town associations of Mixtecs and Zapotecs living and operating on both sides of the border.

In 2005 he was commissioned by the officials of San Jeronimo Progreso to conduct a census of all members of the community regardless of where they lived. Michael accepted their charge. His travels with census-takers from the community took them from Oaxaca to Oregon and eastward into the Great Basin. He viewed this as a "wonderful adventure"-- an incredibly exciting, enriching, and rewarding experience. He had opportunities to renew acquaintances with old friends, to meet people he had been hearing about for years, to make new friends, and, most importantly, to serve a community whose members had been so generous with their time and insights over the years. This long, close collaboration enabled Michael to practice what he thought anthropology was or should become.

After 40 years of teaching, research and mentoring at UCR, Michael retired in 2008. His goal was to write about what he thought anthropology should be: (1) a field of inquiry whose practitioners had a nuanced appreciation of the dynamics of social relations, culture, and communication; (2) a deep understanding of the historical forces underwriting changes in the old sociocultural forms and the appearance of new ones; and (3) a profound commitment to peoples with whom one works.

In his most recent work, Michael sought to re- conceptualize current anthropological worldviews to provide a more progressive intellectual foundation for the field and its reorganization. He called it a self- reflexive, pragmatic anthropology. He understood that peoples and cultures not only differ but that they also change. Moreover, he understood that people do make a difference and even occasionally make history.

Michael was an optimist by nature who believed that some stories have better endings than others. Consequently, he put all of his considerable skills and energies into helping others improve the circumstances in which they live — to finding those "better endings." While he will be missed by family, friends, and colleagues, his insights and contributions will continue to inspire those of us who knew him as well as generations of future anthropologists and activists. He has left behind students, scholars, and community leaders who have been changed forever by his wisdom and generous spirit. He has also left a rich body of work for us to think about. So let us continue the conversation and the struggle.

Michael is survived by his wife, anthropologist Carole Nagengast; his daughter and son- in- law Mary Anne Connelly- Weiss and James Weiss; son John Connelly; and grandsons Seth, Christopher, John, and Daniel Connelly. He is predeceased by his daughter Claire Nicole Connelly, a Riverside Police Officer who died in the line of duty in 1998. He is also survived by his sister Sheila McClellan and her partner Ethel May Shaw, niece and nephew Katie Greathouse and Ian McClellan. Moreover, he leaves legions of cousins, relatives, colleagues, and life- long friends.

Wendy Ashmore
Carlos Vélez Ibáñez
Thomas C. Patterson