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Charles Glock
University of California, Berkeley

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Remembering Erving Goffman and Herbert Blumer

Charles Glock:

Losing Erv, I Recognized, Would Be a Severe Blow to the Department

Charles Glock is professor emeritus of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. He chaired the department in 1968-1969 and 1970-1972. Herbert Blumer chaired the department in 1952-1958 and 1969-1970. Erving Goffman taught at Berkeley in 1958-1968. Dr. Glock gave his approval for posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives

November 12, 2008

Dear Professor Shalin:

My relations with Goffman were very limited. We were friendly but never friends. My major encounter with him was at a time when I was Department Chair and he was considering an offer to join the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. In that regard, here is an excerpt from my autobiography that deals with my encounters with and about him at the time.

"There were many outstanding people on the Department's faculty during this period. Keeping them content was an abiding task. There was always the prospect of losing them to other Universities or to other Departments on campus which, should it happen, would represent a defeat for the incumbent Chair. During my watch, I had a number of defeats in this regard. In 1969-70, as I've already mentioned, Martin Trow resigned to accept an appointment in the School of Social Policy and in 1970-71, Reinhard Bendix transferred to the Department of Political Science. Both Trow and Bendix were disenchanted with the radicalization of the Department and this, I think, was a major factor in their departures. I was unable to persuade them to change their minds.

Erving Goffman, another of its stars, was also lost to the Department while I was Chair. Erv did not leave out of pique with the state of the Department, however. Rather, he had received an offer from the University of Pennsylvania that the Department was unwilling, indeed unable to match. UP offered Erv a distinguished named Professorship, an augmented salary, and only a half time teaching load. In our conversation, Erv had made it clear that he was open to entertaining a counter-offer from the Department. He didn't care that much, he said, about the named Professorship or the augmented salary. He would insist, however, that he have only a half time teaching load.

I told Erv that I would look into the possibilities and get back to him. We agreed that this would happen within a specified period of time. Losing Erv, I recognized, would be a severe blow to the Department, but I didn't see any

way to justify his being allowed to teach half time at a full time salary. Other senior faculty of equal or greater stature, I felt, would not stand for it unless they were offered a similar emolument. That would not be agreeable, I was sure, to the University administration.

The matter was of sufficient moment to warrant contacting the Chancellor about it. He was sympathetic to a salary increase but no more. Granting Goffman the half time teaching arrangement he desired was simply not a possibility in the Chancellor's view. It would require approval of the Regents, for one thing, and it was inconceivable that such approval would be forthcoming given the precedent that doing so would establish. Armed with this information, I then consulted with the tenured faculty about it. The salary increase was also all right with them but they were agreed that half time teaching was just not a viable option.

In my subsequent talk with Erv, I tried to persuade him that his demand about teaching was unreasonable given the likely repercussions. I suggested that the Department would be open to granting him half time leave when he desired it but leaves, I acknowledged, would have to be taken without salary. This offer plus the increased salary, unfortunately, were not sufficient to do the trick and after a few days to think about it, Erv elected to accept the offer from the University of Pennsylvania, effective at the beginning of the next academic year.

Losing Erv was a blot on my record I suppose, more so than losing Trow and Bendix, since they were not leaving the University. By and large, however, the University administration, faculty and students understood that the loss was not in anybody's control except Erv's. The Department certainly suffered from losing Erv but the loss was far from fatal.

I read with interest your piece on "Goffman's Biography and the Interaction Order:..." The only point I would add to it, based on observing and interacting with him at parties and Departmental meetings, is this. I sensed that in his interaction with other people he was frequently, if not always, engaged in research, using the interaction to gather data on some new insights he was perusing. His doing this, I suspect, sometimes produced the kind of negative reactions to him which you detail in your piece. In this connection, I remember at a party at which I believe I first met him, he came up to me to introduce himself and as we talked, he moved ever closer to me until I withdrew. Strange behavior, I thought at the time, only to recognize later that it was one of his research tricks.

It may be irrelevant to your interests but while he was married to Sky (I remember her spelling it Skye), I had occasion to interact with her mostly at

parties on our respective involvement in eleemosynary activities. Here's what I have to say about this interaction and what followed in my autobiography.

Servicing Berkeley Youth

"I have had occasion to mention Erving Goffman before but not to tell you about his then wife Skye and my association with her. Skye was the offspring of a well to do and well known New England family named Choate. The Choates were not as famous as the Kennedys but they were in that league. Upon meeting her, one immediately recognized from her bearing and demeanor that Skye was high born, as they used to say.

My acquaintance with Skye was largely confined to chatting with her at parties. She was into a variety of charitable activities and would like to talk with me about them. She knew of my participation in Red Stephenson's activities in North Richmond. I must have offered a sympathetic ear because soon she began to seek me out not only at parties but by phone or at an arranged luncheon meeting to ask my counsel on what she was about. In our encounters, I sensed that Skye was a disturbed personality. However, I never got to know her well enough to recognize how severe the disturbance was. That knowledge only came with her successful attempt at suicide by jumping off an area bridge.

In her will, Skye made provision for the establishment of a small Berkeley based foundation whose principal purpose was to afford support to community efforts to advance the education of economically dis-privileged youth. Since I deemed my brief acquaintance with Skye as no more than casual, I was surprised to be designated in her will as someone whom she hoped would agree to help organize the foundation and guide its operations. Two other persons were similarly named.

The three of us somehow managed to get the Foundation chartered or whatever was necessary in this regard. My experience with the Cornerhouse Fund proved helpful although, as I recall, one of Skye's other designees was a lawyer and took most charge of the necessary paper work. Once knowledge of the Foundation was circulated, we were besieged with requests for support from a wide variety of local agencies. Our major task at Board meetings was to make decisions as to which ones to support. I recall that one of the requests came from a program in which Mickey* (*my wife) was engaged, and about which I'll report in more detail later. I excused myself from participating in the decision on this request. My colleagues acted favorably on it nevertheless.

The will allowed that the Foundation's principal be expended along with any income. The income was not sufficient to do anything meaningful. So, from the outset, we made the decision to distribute the principal over a period, as I recall, of five years after which the Foundation would be terminated unless, of course, we managed to find another source of funds. We didn't.

My association with the Foundation provided a rare opportunity for me to function as a racial minority. My colleagues were both Afro-American. Race counted in our deliberations, never openly as I recall, but when decisions had to be made, program serving Afro-American youth were clearly favored."

That's about it. I trust you will find it of some use. Thanks for the other material that you sent along. I'm not sure that it's my cup of tea but I will give all of it a look. Let me know if you would like any of it returned. Best wishes for continued success in your endeavors.

Charlie

November 25, 2008

Dimitri:

Here's are the only references to Blumer in my autobiography. Sorry, but I don't I really don't have much else to say.

". . . The Center referred to in the following excerpt is the Survey Research Center, of which I was the Director.) I haven't said much about the political atmosphere on campus during these years. Actually, things were quite calm on the campus until about 1964, after which with the rise of the FSM (Free Speech Movement), things got increasingly tense. For the most part, the campus turmoil passed me and the Center by. There was one occasion, which involved field operations which is why I report on it here, where this was not the case.

One day, I would guess in 1965, I got a call from the Vice-Chancellor, a psychologist with a reputation for his right wing views, to say that he and the Chancellor, Edward Strong, the former Chair of the Department of Sociology, wanted to see me. I dutifully appeared at the Chancellor's office to be told that I was to fire two of my staff who had been revealed to be Communists. I was non-plussed by this request but thought it was in error since I didn't know either of the two persons I was to fire. I reported this to the Chancellor without, at the moment, revealing that my back was up and I had no intention of following his instructions. I was dismissed with the

understanding that I would look into the matter and report back.

It turned out that, unknown to me since I was not familiar with all of the Center's support staff, the persons named were both employed as interviewers on a Center project. I decided, after some consultation with Mickey I am sure, that I should protest the Chancellor's instruction, refuse to follow it, and insist that the two employees be given a personnel hearing before any action was taken against them. Before reporting this to the Chancellor, I consulted with the Chairman of SRC's Board, then sociologist Herbert Blumer. Blumer was not, based on my previous experience with him, disposed to challenge authority. He was also a close friend of Strong. He surprised me, however, by saying he'd back me up. Other Board members followed suit at a quick Board meeting I arranged.

The Chancellor was away from his desk when I called so I reported my decision to the Vice-Chancellor. He threatened me about with the possible consequences of my insubordination. I don't recall what they were now. The Vice-Chancellor went on to say that he would be back in touch with me after talking with the Chancellor. He didn't nor did I ever hear from the Chancellor. And, as far as I know, the incident never appeared on my record. . . . "

"The University, including the Department, grew substantially in the intervening years prior to my joining its faculty in 1958. This was a period in the growth of higher education which had no precedent. It was stimulated, in part, by the G.I. bill which provided educational opportunities for returning veterans. The Cold War was also undoubtedly a stimulant to the growth as was a period of general prosperity.

The Chancellor of the Berkeley campus and later University President during this time was Clark Kerr, a Professor of Economics and former Director of the Institute of Industrial Relations. Berkeley was already the most distinguished of the University's several campuses. It was not quite, however, among the top Universities nation-wide. Kerr was committed to making it so and the resources were available to enable him to do it.

Given Kerr's background, the social sciences were not neglected in the University's growth. During his regime, all of the social sciences flowered including, in a quite spectacular way, sociology. Thanks to the innovative sociology pioneered at Columbia, Harvard, Chicago, and Michigan, among others, the discipline had become prestigious and universities were vying to be among those with distinguished sociology departments.

Berkeley, by virtue of its financial resources and highly desirable physical locale, was well equipped for the competition. Sociology also had the benefit,

at least in my opinion, of the right Chair, in the person of Herbert Blumer, for the job. Herb had been recruited to Berkeley from the University of Chicago expressly to lead the Department's development. He was Chair for most of the fifties. He was succeeded by Reinhard Bendix in 1958. During Blumer's regime, the Department grew spectacularly and was soon rated among, if not, the best in the country.

How much Herb actually had to do with the growth was a subject of some controversy, I learned once I joined the faculty. Some felt he was more a hindrance than a help. Others were inclined to give him much of the credit. Since I wasn't around during much of the growth, I had no personal knowledge of how it was managed or of Herb's role in it. Listening, after I arrived, to the opposing views and juxtaposing them with my personal experiences with Herb, I came to the conclusion that he probably had been the right man for the job. While his own sociology was somewhat narrowly focused, Herb made no effort to shape the Department in his own image. On the contrary, he was very open about hiring talented people whatever their sociology specialties might be and, in my judgment anyway, he had a good eye for talent.

I can't recall the names of all of the faculty recruited during Herb's tenure as Chair. The names I do remember are Kenneth Bock, Kingsley Davis, Erving Goffman, William Kornhauser, Franz Schurman, Hanan Selvin, and Martin Trow. Leo Lowenthal also came to Berkeley during Herb's reign as Chair but initially Leo's appointment was in the Department of Speech. I don't know how, if at all, Herb was involved in Leo's recruitment. The Department also benefited from retaining Reinhold Bendix. Seymour Lipset and Robert Nisbet were lost to Columbia, Lipset temporarily so since he later returned to Berkeley."

Charlie