John Raines was the chair of the Department of Religion when I came to Temple University. A kindly face, lots of energy, and piercing eyes full of painful awareness were my first and lasting impressions of him. I really learned about his amazing history and interests over time. His civil rights activism translated directly in his teaching and regard for students. Though he had little to do with Islamic Studies at that time, he had everything to do with my sojourn through it and landing on my feet. As a compassionate listener, ardent supporter and teacher of many things, Dr. Raines was just always there. He suffered with me through my frustrations with ‘Proseminars’ and the language of humanities. He heard me in my angst with Islamic Studies courses and professors. He assisted me in figuring out graduate school in the humanities.

I watched him navigate perilous waters when one of the Islamic Studies professors was murdered and numerous temporary professors had to be found immediately. One professor of African American Religious History took gravely ill and then died, leaving a gaping hole in the department, and he continued to steer everyone straight ahead. He brought in what I assumed was the first black female professor who was a cutting edge professor in women/gender studies in Christianity.

As an advisor, John Raines was both taskmaster and guide. He made sure I knew what to do and when to do it. I learned a great deal about what it means to mentor from him. As a graduate student, I, of course, had little knowledge of the machinations of faculties regarding which students showed promise and needed nurture and which students needed to put their energies elsewhere. What I learned from Professor Raines was how to nurture promise and how to be patient with it as it matured— invaluable lessons that I did not even know I was learning. I have kept his counsel close, regarding my own students.

I would say without hesitation that John Raines was instrumental in my becoming the scholar-activist I consider myself today. He ran a department that encouraged its students to ‘lounge’ conversations across our various fields of study. I naively assumed that all graduate students had the trying but wonderful experience I had at Temple. While other professors contributed to making the atmosphere what it was, the constant for me was John Raines. Behind those stacks of files on his desk in that corner office, he was a fixture with door always cracked, signaling accessibility.

While this tribute is meager compared to what he has taught me, I hope it conveys a little of the character of the man I had the privilege to meet, learn from, and attempt to emulate.

Aminah Beverly McCloud, Ph.D.
Professor of Islamic Studies
DePaul University
Chicago, Illinois