Festschrift for John Raines
By Dave Krueger

I knew Bonnie Raines long before I knew John Raines. I first met Bonnie when she worked for Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth. At the time, I was running after-school youth programs for a group of Methodist churches in the Kensington section of North Philadelphia. I was inspired by Bonnie's hard work as an advocate of our city's underprivileged youth and sought her advice for acquiring funding and other resources. When I first met Bonnie, I had no idea her husband was a professor. At the time, I was quite skeptical of the work of academics, viewing them as elitist and out of touch with street-level practical problems. I was convinced that the only way to enact social change was to be involved in hands-on projects. However, in the midst of my activist work, I found myself yearning for a greater capacity to understand the social and religious complexities that I witnessed on a daily basis. After earning two seminary degrees, I still desired to further develop my critical thinking tools, so I decided to apply to university Ph.D. programs in religion.

When I arrived at Temple, I was still suspicious of the work that academics did, but John helped me to bridge my perceived gap between activism and intellectual work. John's rich experiences in the American Civil Rights movement deeply inform his writing and teaching, and his passion for justice shines through everything he says and does. Through John, I came to recognize the power of research and writing to expose the mechanisms of economic and social injustice and articulate alternative ways of forming human societies based on compassion and fairness. My favorite seminar by Dr. Raines was Post-Colonial/Post-Modern Theories, in which he introduced us to several powerful social critics. It was in this class that I was first captivated by the thought of Pierre Bourdieu. I was fascinated by Bourdieu's observation that social structures reproduce themselves through the inculcation of values in the habitus (seat of dispositions and worldview) of successive generations of a society's members. Particularly influential on my work is Bourdieu's language about how the powerful in a society often portray the status quo as natural or ordained by God; when in reality, their power was acquired by brute force or some other arbitrary means. This notion has framed my analysis of how white Midwesterners have used myths of pre-Columbian Viking exploration as a means of reifying their claim to the landscape and justifying the violent dispossession of the region's first inhabitants. My book manuscript A Holy Mission to Minnesota: Viking Martyrs, Civil Religion, and the Birth Place of America is profoundly shaped by Dr. Raines' reading of Bourdieu's social theory. I look forward to the day when I can present John a signed copy of my book!

I am extraordinarily grateful for the opportunity that Dr. Raines gave me to travel to Yogyakarta, Indonesia with the Henry Luce Foundation to study at the Center for Religious and Cultural Studies. It was a privilege to study among Muslim, Buddhist and Christian students in this revolutionary program that Dr. Raines was so instrumental in creating. It was obvious to me how grateful the faculty and students at the Center were for the work of Dr. Raines.
John was uniquely able to influence my dissertation research project in part because we have shared geographical roots. Although I knew that Dr. Raines was a fellow native of Minnesota when I started graduate studies at Temple, I was stunned to find out that Dr. Raines’ family had spent many summers in a lakeside cabin near my hometown of Alexandria, Minnesota. John told me it was common for privileged families in urban Minnesota during the 1930s and 1940s to leave the cities during the summer when the risk of polio transmission was high. I was even more surprised to discover that his family cabin was on Lake Le Homme Dieu. The name of the lake is French for “Man of God” but is pronounced in the local Scandinavian-American vernacular as Lake “Luh Hommah Dooh.” This lake is particularly special to my family because my great-great-grandfather’s family purchased a farm on this lake just after they emigrated from Sweden. For this and many reasons, I feel a special kinship with Dr. Raines, and I will always remember him. I have been very grateful for his mentoring and friendship, and I hope that he and Bonnie continue to have a satisfying not-so-retired retirement!

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