

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

RICHARD T. LAPIERE (1899 – 1986)

Richard T. LaPiere, Professor Emeritus of , who served on the Stanford faculty from 1929 to 1965, died of cancer at his campus home February 2, 1986. He was born in Beloit, Wisconsin, on September 15, 1899. He received all his degrees from Stanford: A.B. in Economics with great distinction in 1926, and M.A. and Ph.D. in Sociology in 1927 and 1930. In 1927-28, he studied at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He married Helen Halderman LaPiere (Stanford 1931) on December 31, 1934. She survives him, as does a brother, Perry LaPiere.

Dick LaPiere was an original -- in Herbert Hoover's phrase, an uncommon man. Themes in his life included personal responsibility and self reliance, and he illustrated them by protean displays of competence. Never mediocre, he didn't accept mediocrity as the norm.

Imagine a young man from Oshkosh who leaves school to enlist, who serves as a sergeant doing mechanical repairs on the flying machines of the Lafayette Escadrille in World War I, is hospitalized at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Menlo Park, California, later runs a garage in California, and then enters Stanford to study engineering. Who could predict that he would be a Phi Beta Kappa graduate in Economics and join the Economics Department a few years later as a faculty member in Sociology?

He wanted to do things for himself, and with pride he babied his 1950 Buick through the decades. No drop of oil had been inserted by any other hand. That self-reliant theme, that emphasis on responsibility, pervaded his writings as well. His non-professional work, *THE FREUDIAN ETHIC: An Analysis of the Subversion of American Character* (1959), which received the Award of the American Academy of Public Affairs, portrayed with alarm the extent to which individuals were assigning responsibility to other persons or to larger institutions. In a *THEORY OF SOCIAL CONTROL* (1954), partly based on his study of methods used by the Nazis in occupied countries, he described social control as the summation of activities of individuals and small groups, and not the simple product of large-scale interventions.

His other scholarly books included *SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY* (1936), co-authored by his psychology colleague Paul R. Farnsworth, *COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR* (1938), *SOCIOLOGY* (1946), and *SOCIAL CHANGE* (1965). In addition, he wrote two novels: *SON OF HAN* (1937), which was translated into Dutch, and *WHEN THE LIVING STRIVE* (1941), set in San Francisco's Chinatown, which won the Commonwealth Medal.

Yet his most-cited study was a short study demonstrating the gap between verbal reports and behavior. A half-century ago a young Chinese couple joined him in a motor tour of the United States. Upon his return, he wrote all the hotels and motels at which they had stayed to ask if they would accept reservations for Chinese guests. Almost all replied negatively. That classic study of the discrepancy between attitudes and behavior continues today to be a starting point for scholars fascinated by the complexity of human behavior.

That complexity never provided an excuse for Dick and Helen to obscure thought in verbiage. Fred Terman and he were appointed together as consulting editors by the McGraw-Hill Book Company; Fred to edit works in engineering, and Dick to edit their series in sociology. Dick struggled with authors who could not express their ideas clearly, a sign of sloppy thinking in Dick's eyes. With Helen as his partner, he wrote so well that his works set a high standard.

Helen and Dick were truly world travelers, visiting all the continents. They never took a camera. They hated to bore people with their photos; they remembered everything and could recount their adventures beautifully.

As a friend and neighbor, Dick was a constant source of assistance when needed. His mechanic's training in the armed services enabled him to be a "Jack of all Trades." He had a series of baskets, and when a neighbor had trouble with bathroom or kitchen fixtures, he appeared with his "plumbing basket," filled with the necessary tools. If the trouble was with electrical appliances or outlets, he came with his "electrician's basket." If cars failed to start, there he was with his "machinist's basket". If tile grouting eroded, he had his "tiler's basket." Dick loved to garden and grow fruit and vegetables, and so naturally, he had a "garden and spraying basket." But no matter which basket it was or how dirty the task, he was always well-dressed, even in working clothes, for Dick was naturally immaculate in dress and appearance, as he was warm and friendly of manner.

As a teacher, students appreciated his lively wit and incisive analyses. He felt that a Stanford education should be broadening, with the student learning the deficiencies of the culture to which he or she had grown accustomed. That he was successful as a teacher is clear from a most unusual tribute. In the 1938 Gaieties, Stanford students sang a parody of "You're the Top." One of the lines was, "You're the top, you're a LaPiere lecture." No more sincere compliment can be given to a teacher. His colleagues attended Dick's last lecture before retirement and noted that he had lost none of the sparkle that had attracted generations of students.

In addition to his long service to Stanford, he accepted short teaching assignments at the University of Michigan, University of Hawaii, UCLA, University of Alberta, and University of Washington. He enjoyed teaching at Stanford's overseas campuses, and he and Helen were invited to serve at Tours, Florence, and Beutelsbach.

Dick knew that he was good and had made major contributions to sociology. His sociology colleagues elected him to Alpha Kappa Delta and to the Sociological Research Association, both honorary societies. He was also President of the Pacific Sociological Association. He set a high standard for Sociology at Stanford, and he welcomed the growth of the department towards the end of his career.

He required no kudos from his contemporaries; he didn't have that much faith in their judgment. He spent his professional life in a true partnership with Helen, doing what he enjoyed doing, and doing it exceptionally well.

Sanford M. Dornbusch, Chair
Joseph Berger
Edward S. Shaw
Rixford K. Snyder