Remembrances of Charles Bergquist

This page is dedicated to the late Professor Emeritus of History, Charles Bergquist.

Chuck’s friendship was one of the things I most treasure from my work at the Bridges Center. Chuck and I had so many conversations left to have - even deep into his retirement, his intellectual curiosity never ceased. He was such a generous and kind spirit, and I can still see him smiling.

- Andrew Hedden, Associate Director of the UW Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies

I came to Duke in 1985 to study Colombian history with Chuck based upon his first book, Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, but I discovered in about five minutes that he had wider personal and scholarly ambitions, and that he wanted the same for me. I never quite developed those wider ambitions, but he always encouraged my work and he helped me out in all sorts of vital ways—co-carrying a mattress with me from Pasaje Rivas up to La Candelaria in 1988 may have been the most memorable. He took all aspects of his professorial work seriously—teaching, scholarship, and mentorship—even as he reminded us that in the end we were all workers not so far removed from those many of us studied, just a lot better-off and more effectively hegemonized.

- Richard Stoller

I was stunned to read that Chuck Bergquist passed away. He was a pillar of strength in the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies. He was so kind and personable. I will miss seeing him on my walks on Alki. He will be missed.

- JoAnne Jugum

Charles durante sus años de estudio e investigación social, hizo muchos amigos en Colombia. Sus observaciones sobre el latifundio, represión y violencia nos permitieron entender la debilidad de nuestra democracia y los grandes conflictos del siglo XX en contexto.

Con su apoyo, tuvimos visitas memorables a Seattle de destacados colombianos como Gonzalo Sánchez, el historiador Medófilo Medina o el líder sindical y político Lucho Garzón.

Sabiendo de mis vínculos con ese país, tuvo la cortesía de participarme en varios de sus eventos. Estoy seguro que sus colegas y amigos más allá de la Universidad Nacional en Bogotá, le echarán de menos.

- Javier Amaya, UW alum '95, '02
The Zimbabwean Alois Mlambo and I were Chuck's first graduate students. We both entered Duke University's doctoral program in 1986. Since Chuck specialized in Colombian history, it was a little odd that we both planned to work on the history of Brazil.

Chuck's budding interest in Latin American labor history is what called my attention to him. I arrived at Duke without having finished my master's thesis at the University of Maryland and that's where I learned my first great lesson from Chuck. One day, a little frustrated with this endless saga, he said to me, "Stop trying to get it right and just get it done!" That very weekend, I got it done. Until this day, I tell my graduate students that story and it still seems to work!

Chuck was then the director of Duke's Latin American Studies Center and developed a consortium with the University of North Carolina. The center brought a number of influential scholars and writers to the area, such as Ariel Dorfman from Chile and Amaury de Souza from Brazil. Paid to assist Chuck, he rarely put us to work, so that we could concentrate on our studies. At UNC, Chuck introduced us to Leon Fink; a year ago, I collaborated with him on a comparative US-Brazil labor history book.

Alois and I were both in Brazil when we heard Chuck was moving to UW. It came as a surprise to us. For that reason neither of us finished our dissertations under his direction. Duke's John Jay TePaske, a Mexicanist, directed our final committees. This was another way the interdisciplinary studies and cross-cultural perspectives Chuck valued also influenced my career as an historian.

Chuck and I had a few other things in common. One was a working class background. While in Durham, I did construction work, including roofing, to supplement my scholarship. And, my family was part of the Harry Bridges - ILWU family. Since WWII, my step-father had worked on the docks in San Francisco; for decades he served as secretary treasurer of an ILWU local. My mother had been secretary to the man who replaced Bridges as the union's president. When Chuck got the Bridges center going, my family helped generate contributions.

Chuck and I continued in contact, but the news of his death shocked me. I only learned of it on August 14, through John French, who now teaches at Duke. Although there will be no more emails or bumping into each other at conferences, there's no question he's still among us in so many ways.

- Clifford Andrew Welch

This page will be updated as more submissions are sent in. Please send remembrances to Alexandra Colley at alexc09@uw.edu

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