

## INTRODUCTION: ROY SIMON BRYCE-LAPORTE AT YALE

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Roy Simón Bryce-Laporte was an academic pioneer, a social scientist committed to truth, a scholar of the history and sociology of the black diaspora, a dedicated teacher, an inspiring mentor, a kind and compassionate person, and a man devoted to social justice, freedom, equality, and dignity for all human beings, as the articles in this special issue edited by Aubrey W. Bonnett and Charles S. Green illustrate.

He was also my good friend.

Although we may have been formally introduced to each other in Puerto Rico earlier, I remember first meeting Roy and getting to know him at the Pacific Sociological Association conference in Coronado, California in March 1964. He was attending the meetings as a new graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where some months earlier he had come to work toward his PhD in part because of the UCLA West Indies Study Program which I had headed. But I had just left for a new position at Yale and was spending the academic year on leave at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford. We began our friendship at the conference and agreed that we would stay in touch with each other in the future.

In the fall of 1964 I arrived at Yale to begin teaching. At the time Yale was entering a phase of protest and turmoil that would turn out to be a period of tradition-shattering change—as well as reactionary resistance to it—that would continue to rage through the 1960s and into the 1970s. The opposition to the Vietnam War was a major issue, yes, as it was on many campuses throughout the United States at the time, but it was only one of many contentious disagreements. Conflict and political struggles also focused on efforts to transform Yale College to include women in what was then an all-male undergraduate student body; to add more racial and ethnic minority students, especially African Americans; to increase the percentage of women and African Americans on the Yale faculty; to create new programs, including those in African American Studies and Women's Studies; to enlarge area studies programs and to nudge Yale beyond being a national university toward becoming an international or global university; and to start a business school and establish an Institute for Social and Policy Studies.

The calls for change came not only from students and faculty members, but also from the top as well. For example, Yale had a new president, Kingman Brewster, who was inaugurated in April 1964 and who made it clear when he took office that he not only wanted to make Yale a university of the highest academic quality, he also wanted to base student admissions on merit and equality of opportunity and to hire more non-Yale people as faculty members (Bell 2012).

During this period of upheaval, I served as chair of the department of sociology for four years, from July 1965 until the end of June 1969, and although I found the job sometimes exhausting and frustrating, it was also exciting and challenging. Yale's future had been made problematic and what alternative possibilities should be pursued became a central concern of the Yale community. Although it was a time filled with student protests and demands as well as contentious and emotional faculty meetings, it was also a time filled with extraordinary opportunities for change for the better—for more inclusion,

more fairness, and more innovation. I threw myself into many of the ongoing efforts to produce what many of us considered to be beneficial changes for Yale, from bringing women and racial minorities to Yale College as students and expanding Yale's international and comparative study programs to enlarging both Yale's sociology's faculty and its focus so as to encompass the world. And I became fully involved in the struggles to add more women and racial minorities to Yale's faculty and to create an African American Studies Program.

Many people, of course, were involved in the creation of such a program. For example, members of the Black Student Alliance at Yale played an important role; so too did Yale's small community of African and Caribbean scholars. To mention a few, Richard Morse from Yale's history department and head of the Yale Council for Latin American Studies was influential. Dick was married to a Haitian, had worked in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, and had founded the Institute of Caribbean Studies at the University of Puerto Rico. Joining him were anthropologist and well-known Caribbeanist Sidney W. Mintz. Also contributing were psychologist Leonard Doob and art historian Robert Farris Thompson, each having worked in both the Caribbean and Africa. Also playing roles were pan-Caribbeanist Anthony P. Maingot who was a joint faculty appointment in history and sociology and the head of the Antilles Research Program, and James A. Mau and I from sociology who were both doing research in the Caribbean.

Also working to establish the African American Studies Program were Jamaican Michael Cooke, a long-time Yale professor of English, and Barbadian Elliott D. Parris who had joined the Yale sociology faculty July 1, 1968 as a direct result of efforts of members of the Black Student Alliance at Yale. Elliott Parris had been part of UCLA's West Indies Study Program as a graduate student, as had Jim Mau and Tony Maingot, although Tony ended up earning his PhD elsewhere.

As I have explained in my memoir (Bell 2012, 184):  
Each of us Caribbean researchers knew something of the distinctive history, society, culture, artistic and musical achievements, intellectual contributions, nationalist aspirations, and economics of African Americans and the Atlantic Black Diaspora more generally. Each of us knew, too, of the research on the African slave trade, plantation slavery in the Americas, the importance of slave labor in the development of the Americas, the history and continued existence of racism in America, and of the long struggle for freedom—from early slave revolts to the contemporary civil rights movement. Each of us knew also of the influences of African cultures on American society and culture.

And each of us knew, additionally, that a respectable body of scholarly knowledge already existed on such topics and we each understood the rich possibilities of increased research and teaching efforts. We felt we had nearly reached our goal when the African American Study Group, chaired by Sterling Professor Robert A. Dahl, issued its report. It recommended that Yale create an African American Studies major.

Dick Morse, Sid Mintz, Tony Maingot and I also knew Roy S. Bryce-Laporte, had followed his work, and thought highly of him. He was teaching at Hunter College of the City University of New York and had finished his dissertation, "The

Conceptualization of the American Slave Plantation as a Total Institution” at UCLA under the direction of Professor Leo Kuper. Drawing from it, he presented a paper (Bryce-Laporte, 1969) at Yale in October 1968 as part of a seminar series on “The Indian and African in the Western Hemisphere” sponsored by the Yale Council on Latin American Studies. Going through the Yale appointment procedures, we made a formal offer to Roy to join the Yale faculty jointly with an appointment in the department of sociology to head the new African American Studies Program. He accepted.

Roy arrived at Yale as the first and founding head of Yale’s new “Afro-American Studies Program” (as it was then named) in 1969, the same year that the first cohort of women undergraduates also was admitted to Yale College. Although the wars for change at Yale were far from over, some major battles had been won and Yale was in the process of creating a new future for itself, much of which now—decades later—has become part of its hallowed traditions.

But at the time the campus was still churning in turmoil and reeling from the clashes between the fears of some that the old Yale was lost and that Yale’s future, as they envisioned it, would be a disaster, and the hopes and dreams of others that a new, better—more equitable and more excellent—Yale was being born. Roy ended up in the middle of the struggle.

His job was daunting. He had to chair a new, as yet nonexistent, program, supervise and help design a new curriculum, hire new faculty members (hopefully at least some of whom would be African American themselves), and face the usual challenges of department or program chairs (which included competing with other chairs to get an adequate budget from the provost). He also had to overcome some additional obstacles.

One was the lack of cooperation on the part of some faculty members after they had fought against creating the program in the first place. Thus a few faculty members, hoping that he would fail to create a successful program, were reluctant to cooperate fully with him.

A second obstacle was the additional burden of not being able to make appointments solely in African American Studies, as chairs of departments could do within their departments. He could only make an appointment jointly with some existing department. Thus, to make a faculty appointment Roy needed the cooperation of at least one other department. From my own experience as chair of the Yale sociology department, I knew that it was hard enough to make faculty appointments at Yale without adding the proviso that some other department must want to share the same person.

A third complicating factor, adding to Roy’s concerns by the spring of 1970, was the uproar at Yale—and in New Haven more generally—over the murder trial of Black Panther Bobby Seale. It was to be held practically across the street from Yale bordering the New Haven Green and it brought to New Haven and the Yale community an invasion of activists of various kinds from all over the United States.

Some sense of the upheaval of the time can be gleaned from the words of then Dean of the Yale Drama School, Robert Brustein (1971, 66): Like the majority of students at Yale, the students of the Drama School were eager to prevent a major conflagration from occurring in New Haven; at the same time, they were looking for some way to express themselves actively concerning the condition of black people in this country. For this reason, our students were torn between shutting down operations altogether (the position of the radicals) and ‘redirecting’ the school’s activities

(the position of the moderates) so that classes and productions might be more directly centered on America's political dilemmas.

Brustein goes on to describe going to one of the urgent and massively attended Yale College faculty meetings in Sprague Hall. He says (1971, 71-72):

I passed a crowd of students gathering at Beinecke Plaza. A mass meeting had been called for that afternoon, which was to march to the steps of Sprague while the faculty was in session in order to impress on us the need for action. Graffiti had begun to appear on the walls, fences, and gates of Yale, some of it threatening (Babylon will burn!), some romantic, some epigrammatic (Theft is the moral obligation of the poor), while huge STRIKE letters were being painted in red everywhere.

Brustein then describes the meeting, which had been scheduled to start with a statement by the President, Kingman Brewster. Instead Brewster yielded the floor to a relatively new and young faculty member, Professor Roy S. Bryce-Laporte, who presented a resolution on behalf of the black faculty at Yale. Later in this meeting Brewster made his famous—or infamous—comment, “I am skeptical of the ability of black revolutionaries to achieve a fair trial anywhere in the United States.” As Stanley Flink (1997, 32) says, “Criticism and praise for Brewster’s ‘skepticism’ erupted nationwide” and the criticism included an attack on Brewster by then U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew.

Roy remained near the center of the campus storm throughout Seale's trial and the protests against it occurring on the New Haven Green, one of which reached 50,000 people. A peak of activity was expected to occur on May Day with rumors of guns and dynamite along with speeches by Yippie leader Jerry Ruben and others, and the posting of federal troops and National Guardsmen in preparation for possible violence, which thankfully never erupted.

Through it all Roy, though fully engaged, remained calm. He talked to students, met with faculty members, helped lead the black faculty, and advised administrators to help the Yale community get through the crisis. Yet he still found time to move forward in his efforts to build the new African American Studies Program, making it clear that for him “American” included not only the United States, but also Latin America and the Caribbean—that is, the African diaspora in the entire Western Hemisphere.

But I doubt if he got much of his own research and scholarship done and I know he sometimes became tired and discouraged. My office in sociology was a few steps away from his and he would often share with me his disappointments, either with some departments that would not cooperate with him in making appointments he wished to make or with the provost who would not agree to the entire budget that Roy felt he needed to hire adequate faculty members and staff.

Despite the difficulties, Roy got the African American Studies Program off to a good start. During his three years at Yale, Roy proved himself to be both a serious scholar and a competent administrator. In building the program, he was a wise diplomat, working successfully to launch the program for the long term. He just kept going, moving toward his goal with empathy and caring—and when necessary, forgiveness—for all the people, whether students, faculty, or administrators with whom he dealt. He worked to

keep standards high for both hiring new faculty and selecting and evaluating students. Although he may have been angry and smoldering inside as a result of some of the obstacles he had to deal with, Roy advocated keeping the peace, as he patiently and persistently pushed for more resources and more African American students and faculty members.

Today, after decades of work by members of the program and several other dedicated chairpersons who followed Roy, Yale's African American studies is no longer merely a program but has been upgraded to a "department" and can make appointments on its own just as other departments can. Moreover, Yale's African American studies department has a distinguished faculty and is thriving in teaching, research, and turning out exceptional students. Clearly Roy was the right person to set the course for the program and get it started on its journey.

When Roy decided to leave Yale, it was largely because of the challenging offers that he had to continue his work on the history, society, and culture of Black America and his efforts to achieve the empowerment, respect, and social inclusion of African Americans. It had been my hope that Roy would spend his career at Yale and would remain a colleague. Thus I was disappointed when he left. We remained friends, occasionally rooming together at conferences over the years, and we reunited for more personal contact for a time when he returned to Yale some years later to get his master's degree in studies of law at the Yale Law School.

In his post-Yale professional life Roy achieved great success, including organizing the hugely influential bicentennial conference that the Smithsonian Institution held November 15-16, 1976 (Bryce-Laporte 1979b, 1979c) and the exceptional exhibit in 1986 ("Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor: Voluntary Black Migration to the United States") at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture for which he served as curator.

His scholarly work on black immigrants covered a variety of related topics. He showed how black immigrants were economically exploited and victimized and how neo-exclusionary forces in the United States had escalated attacks on new immigrants and isolated the most defenseless among them—the illegals. He showed how the immigrants were at the same time part of a special invisibility. He also began to probe how black immigrants had been changed by American society, and how they, in turn, had changed and were changing American history, society, culture, and even international relations (Bryce-Laporte 1972, 1979a, Mortimer and Bryce-Laporte 1981).

Roy became widely recognized for his scholarly work and his public service. He testified before the U.S. House of Representatives, received several awards—including a Distinguished Service Award from the Yale Alumni Association, served as a Woodrow Wilson International Scholar and as the founding director of the Institute of Immigration and Ethnic Studies at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and was appointed the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur professor of sociology and anthropology and director of the Africana and Latin American Studies Program at Colgate University.

In his work, as in his life, Roy exemplified what sociologist Menno Boldt (2011, 205) has called "transcendent humanity." When he wrote about black slaves and the historical conditions of their lives, for example, Roy made it clear that black "slaves, although black and slaves, were indeed human beings with patterns of social behavior" (Bryce-Laporte 1969, 4). Roy looked beyond social boundaries and recognized every

person's equal human worth, regardless of skin color, religion, gender, nationality, etc. He acknowledged and honored every individual's intrinsic potential for and aspiration to equal dignity and humanity and he tried to generate in his students and colleagues a conscious sense of being part of all others' humanity, although some of us were not yet ready to embrace such a wide inclusionary view of the world.

For example, Roy went beyond merely endorsing tolerance. Rather, he defined 'the other' as 'the self' and conceived of the humanity of others as his own. As he studied the processes of immigration, the meanings of home, the nature of community and culture, the search for identity, and the struggles for equality and social justice, Roy was not only inclusive and respectful of each person's human dignity, he was also sensitive to the humanity that each of us shares with others. He understood that "any violation of another's dignity and humanity constitutes a violation of one's own dignity and humanity" (Boldt 2011, 205).

Although Roy Simón Bryce-Laporte is no longer with us, his wisdom and his teachings live on. I hope that these articles honoring him will renew our efforts to probe the issues to which Roy devoted his life, issues of social justice, freedom, equality, and human dignity for all.

## NOTES

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