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Scholar and Academic Citizen

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The organization I founded, the National Association of Scholars, has been blessed by its association with many outstanding scholars. Most simply gave it their blessing. Several others occasionally provided advice or opened doors. But Stanley Rothman was the one, the only one, whose activities brought him to the very center of NAS life, through his long service as NAS chairman, and the parallelism between much of his work and NAS core concerns.

This parallelism was most evident in Stan's work on professorial opinion and campus life, which never shied away from, but always addressed, hot-button issues in a measured, meticulous way.

This was never an easy task. The academy is in many respects a tribe, furious with self-protective passion and vigilant about fidelity to its totems. Stan never lost the respect of those who paid attention to his work, but he never had the opportunity to bask in the reverence of elder statesmanship to which a dispassionate accounting of his lifetime achievement would have fully entitled him. This wasn't an easy loss. Stan cared as much as any scholar for professional esteem, and he certainly wasn't of the nature to enjoy its dubious substitute: the grudging recognition given stinging gadflies. But knowing his duty he paid its price.

And what did Stan's achievement comprise?

The first part lay in his thorough reconnoitering of the academy's intellectual landscape, establishing unquestionable facts around which all future debate would have to turn. Building on earlier research on academic opinion by Seymour Martin Lipset and Carl Everett Ladd, Stan, with a number of collaborators, conclusively

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demonstrated the academy's continuing heavy leftward tilt in a depth and detail unmatched and indispensable for all future investigators. This was no small accomplishment.

Dispute over fundamental facts is characteristic of highly charged controversy, as is chronically demonstrated in policy debates over defense, national security, and health care policy. What are the true intentions of foreign states and movements, what are the capabilities of our arms, how many people lack adequate access to health care? Disagreement over the elementals of a problem is a great non-starter, disabling coherent debate over remedies. Indeed, it's often employed as a rhetorical tactic to prevent discussion from moving on to the heart of things. Stan's work helped to overcome this (though there are still occasional unsuccessful attempts to spin what he made obvious) and channeled debate into more productive if not yet dispositive outlets, the questions now being: Is there harm? Is there intention? Are there academically suitable remedies? If there's still far from a prevailing consensus about these matters—not surprising given the academic stakes involved—the arguments at least have a common ground on which to stand. This is Stan's achievement.

With respect to campus ethnic and racial diversity, academe's *beau idéal*, Stan's work showed there was no evidence for the claim that it contributed positively to educational satisfaction. It also showed that ethnically preferential policies were opposed by most students, including minority students, thereby undercutting the one significant claim of preferential policies to constitutional legitimacy.

It would be gratifying to report that in this case, too, these results have secured the status of widely accepted facts. Alas, they intrude too closely upon the citadels of contemporary academic moral self-esteem. Whatever students' actual experience of campus life, the need for university administration to demonstrate solidarity with progressivism's project of social transformation—which has considerably supplanted that of humanistic enlightenment—has thus far rendered diversity refutation-proof. Still, Stan's work has provided valuable ammunition to diversity's skeptics, especially those who take issue with its most toxic fruits: the racial, ethnic, and gender quota systems now driving much of competitive student admissions, as well as a great deal of faculty and administrative hiring. When these policies are challenged in the courts and at the polls, Stan's data often figure in the arguments.

With respect to alleged discrimination against academic conservatives, Stan's work discovered only minor evidence for it. Comparing the career success of scholars on the academic left and right, Stan found that, controlling for the usual measures of academic productivity such as publication, scholars with socially

conservative views achieved less success in promotion and institutional placement than liberal scholars, the differences being statistically significant though not particularly large.

I'm far from convinced in this case that absence of evidence is persuasive evidence of absence. Disproportionate impact analysis, of which this is a species, is always a tricky business, a fact Stan fully understood. It's hard to capture all the key variables and their lack may lead to false positives or negatives. It's particularly hard to measure deterrent effects that discourage ideological dissidents from even pursuing academic careers, especially in the humanities and social sciences, where anticonservative prejudice is likely to be most entrenched and shameless. The point, however, is not whether Stan thought his results dispositive, but that despite the fact that they surprised his grim expectations about the pervasiveness of professional bias against conservatives, he did not hesitate to report them. Stan was a scrupulously honest broker who did great services for the null hypothesis, even when its validation told against what he believed to be true. The great achievement of Stan and his collaborators in this case has been to sharpen conceptually the issues surrounding the question of discrimination—one of the most important services that good social science is capable of providing.

Stan's work went well beyond his interest in academe. The scope of his intellectual interests were truly global. It is, I think, what he did with his broader social analyses that will stand as his most lasting legacy. Stan richly documented and unflinchingly diagnosed the decay of national pride and optimism among America's intellectual elites, what he feared presaged "the end of the American experiment" in popular self-government.

Stan and I often talked about how our respective labors would be regarded in the future. I tried to convince him—against his engrained skepticism and modesty—that he would be very well and widely remembered. Indeed, I believe he will become a household name among the historically sophisticated, with future narrators of the American story coming back, time and time again, to quotations from Stan and the data he reported in the way that medical examiners cite autopsy results.

The reputations of most social observers fade with the generation that produced them, but for those few who provide unique insight into a major historical epoch, like the Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon for the court of Louis XIV, Tocqueville for the age of Jackson, or Finley Peter Dunne for American politics at the turn of the twentieth century, each new cohort of historians unfailingly revives their testimony in textbooks and essays. So it will be with Stan, though in a rather different and more melancholy way than for Tocqueville and Dunne.

Stan was among the first social scientists to see the unprecedented divorce taking place within the United States: the ideological separation of its elites from the rest of America's citizenry due to a deepening repudiation of the main body of American traditions and ideals. His insight ran contrary to the received wisdom of American social science during the mid-twentieth century, when he started to address the phenomenon. According to that wisdom, the United States was in the process of bidding goodbye to ideology, installing in its stead an essentially status quo pragmatism.

Of course, it's impossible to do without ideology, if what ideology means is an action-informing vision of the world. Pragmatism, as Stan could have told you, is what emerges when a consensus about more fundamental issues widely prevails. Over the course of America's history, one largely free of the tensions between aristocracy and masses that wracked Europe, there was such a consensus, or at least quite nearly one. America's cultural and political leadership embraced values nearly identical to those of the average citizen. This allowed for a level of social concord and an agreement about the nature of American governing institutions rarely duplicated elsewhere. And it produced, after the Civil War, an uncommonly stable polity.

What Stan saw, long before most, was that this consensus was being undone. But he did more than observe this distressing fact. As was his wont, Stan documented it in book after book and article after article of thoroughgoing analysis, beginning with *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians, and the Left* in 1982 (my first encounter with his writing); *The Media Elite: America's New Powerbrokers* in 1986; and *American Elites* and *Hollywood's America: Social and Political Themes in Motion Pictures* (written with his gifted son David) in 1996. These works quantified the gap that had opened between the country's putative opinion leadership in academe, philanthropy, entertainment, and the learned professions, and those outside these exclusive spheres, pitting an adversarial attitude toward many long-held American institutions and ideas against a still allegiant one.

This was a new phenomenon, the harbinger perhaps of a gigantic cultural transformation, should the elite views prove leading indicators, or of a deep and enduring cultural conflict should they fail to be. Stan saw, early on, that one way or another America culture and politics were being fundamentally redefined.

The answer future historians will give about how this conflict turns out can't be predicted. It's sadly possible that dramatic transformation and intense conflict will be America's lot as the plans of elite social engineers prove as destructive in practice as they seem (to some) attractive in theory. But whatever the nation's fate, we can be sure that historians will return repeatedly to the evidence Stan

compiled and interpreted in order to identify and explain it. No one accumulated such a trove of analysis and explanation. No one attended in such a protracted, painstaking, and intelligent way to the underlying process. Stan was in the right place at the right time, analyzing the splits along a seismic rift with all the sophisticated social science instruments, and the unfailing social science honesty, needed to give it accurate measurement.

Stan Rothman also had the keenest appreciation for what was at stake in this disjuncture, and was particularly troubled by what he saw as the erosion of a commitment to reason, self-restraint, and old-fashioned liberalism among important segments of elite and academic opinion. There was nothing knee-jerk, however, in his reactions. His opinions, though describable within parochial academic terms of reference as "conservative," were never predictable in assessing individuals or policies. President Obama has, almost from the first, been a polarizing figure, to the extent that Left and Right quickly developed strong and very contrary opinions about his leadership. Stan's reactions to Obama's initial years in office were, it appeared to me, surprisingly cautious, and he was unwilling to jump on factional bandwagons before there was good reason to do so. In public forums, and in quieter table talk and phone conversations about contemporary events, he remained true to form.

Stan was anything but a Pollyanna. He felt elite opinion's immense weight and the strength of the cultural shifts it was enacting. And he was often critical of the way media elites communicated a misleading picture of the world to the larger public, as, for example, in *Environmental Cancer: A Political Disease* (1999). I can remember him telling me during a discussion about academic reform, how strongly he thought the culture was moving against the old-fashioned liberal ideals he most prized and on which American success was built. Yet he retained a belief in the powers of reason, and in the goodness of a tolerant, open, and sensible society that made the continuing battle for both of them seem worthwhile, even as it also seemed increasingly against the odds.

Instead of despair, his apprehensions for the future bred a continuing outpouring of meticulous, exacting, and forthright scholarship. Stan was a child of the Enlightenment (in its British, rather than utopian French form), and his reaction to what he saw as a threat to its principles was a kind of propaganda of the deed—which is to say that he most vindicated the ideals of the Enlightenment, of the spirit of science itself, in the unrelenting high quality of his work.

And he fought against them on the public stage as well as in scholarly publication. Although not at all shy, particularly when his dander was up, Stan was no academic activist. He was a creature of the study rather than the rostrum

or the rally. Nonetheless, he rallied himself to do all sorts of things not fully comfortable to his nature.

As chairman of the NAS board he made long trips from his home in Northampton, Massachusetts, to either Princeton or New York City, excursions that increasing told on him as the infirmities of age accumulated. Presiding over talky board meetings, replete with the procedural complications that inevitably accompany such assemblies—especially when academics are involved—sometimes wearied but never deterred him. Despite the organization's difficult challenges and uphill battles, neither surprising given his theoretical lights, Stan never wavered in its support, fulfilling his official duties and making significant informal contributions to the last. He also regularly came to the NAS national conferences, pressed flesh (he had many admirers), bestowed (and received) awards, and of course made fascinating presentations based on his continuing work.

He was certainly important in keeping me on an even psychological keel. The NAS was founded in the 1980s, when America and higher education seemed to be undergoing a period of cultural recovery. It was the period during which the 1960s might be seen as an aberration, a moment when good sense had been temporarily lost, but would again soon be found. Stan, I'm sure, quite early on knew otherwise. It took a lot of learning for me to reach the same level of realism that was always his, and it helped immensely to have him at my side.

The prevailing view among "conservative" academics during the 1970s and 1980s was that the academy could be talked out of its follies by appealing to its reasonable faculties—in both senses of that word. This was certainly my opinion when I took up my reformist cudgels, as it had been of earlier opponents of sixties university radicalism such as the great Sidney Hook. Stan, from his earliest inquiries into the origins of intellectual radicalism, knew that the problem went far deeper than passing errors of thought. He knew that understanding the world of ideas, even at its highest levels and among its most sophisticated thinkers, required close attention to the powerful forces of unreason that drove the human psyche. In this he was a keen student of Freud, though a quite undogmatic one.

This perspective, central to his thinking, gradually reshaped NAS's activities and sense of mission—steering them away from an exclusive interest in argumentation and pushing them toward a growing concern with structural changes in the institutions and practices of higher education. While the organization first imagined that its work could largely be conducted in the pages of this journal, a newsletter, and public policy statements, it increasingly began to see—perhaps as it turned out too belatedly—that it would have to address broader questions of higher education public policy and structure. This led to efforts to found new academic programs as

platforms on which dissenting scholars could build their careers, to try to take a fresh look at university governance procedures, to consider the responsibilities that accompanied the liberties of academic freedom, and increasingly to think of reform in terms of institutional and intellectual checks and balances rather than the enlightened good will of the professoriate. It was less in the specifics of these efforts than in the overall social/psychological realism informing them, that Stan's influence was consistently felt.

Stan bore up under the assaults of life and years with stoic fortitude and an all the more tenacious commitment to his scholarship. (He continued to talk with me about a major work of social theory that he was saving for his final years.) His last book, *The Still Divided Academy: How Competing Visions of Power, Politics, and Diversity Complicate the Mission of Higher Education* (written with April Kelly-Woessner and Matthew Woessner) appeared little more than a month before his death. Stan found in his scholarship a solace derived not just from pride in its important intellectual contribution, but from the belief that its rigor and candor made it, and him, part of the great march forward of the rational and decent civilization that he so hoped would endure.

Stan Rothman was the gift of a passing generation of scholars to scholars yet to be born. Even if the world turns as bad as he sometimes feared, perhaps especially if it does, I am sure that they won't forget him. Nor will I.