

Richard Newbold Adams

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Richard N. Adams, anthropologist, scholar, and university professor, passed away in his sleep on September 11, 2018. He was 94.

A native of Ann Arbor, Michigan, Adams served in the US military during World War II. He earned his BA from the University of Michigan in 1947, his MA (1949) and PhD (1951) from Yale. He worked briefly in Muquiyauyo, Peru, and then in Guatemala, where he met his future wife, Betty (an Anglo-German-Guatemalan and Guatemala's first woman pilot) in 1951. The two were married for 67 years.

After working in Guatemala for several years for the Pan American Health Organization, Rick returned to the States to teach at Michigan State University (1956–1961) and then joined the faculty at the University of Texas, Austin. There he earned the rank of Professor of Anthropology and Rapoport Centennial Professor of Liberal Arts. Throughout his career he played an active role in the Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS), and served as its director from 1986 until his retirement in the early 1990s. He also worked for the Ford Foundation in Buenos Aires in the late 1960s and was named a fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in 1973. During his career, Adams served as president of the American Anthropological Association and was one of the founders and president of the Society for Applied Anthropology.

Rick was a fierce believer in the value of interdisciplinarity and helped to elevate Latin American studies across the United States, building collaborations with scholars and institutions in Latin America before such horizontal relationships were fashionable. Along with a small group of

other social scientists, Rick pushed to develop an academic conference where scholars of a variety of disciplines, activists, policy-makers, and filmmakers could come together for collaboration and debate. This was the beginning of the Latin American Studies Association, which held its first Congress in 1966. Rick was selected as LASA's first vice president in 1966 and then served as LASA's second president from 1968 to 1969. He was active in the organization throughout his career and well into his retirement. In 1998, LASA presented Adams with the Kalman Silvert Lifetime Achievement award.

The Dean of Liberal Arts at University of Texas at Austin recruited Rick in the early 1960s to the Anthropology Department as an institution builder, with a mandate for transformation. Over the next three decades, Rick fulfilled these aspirations with gusto, both as department chair and senior faculty member, playing a major role in transforming a parochial Texas-focused unit into a highly ranked and nationally respected department. Already a towering figure in the discipline, Adams published a series of works during the 1960s and 1970s that sealed his standing as a leading analyst of culture, power, and political economy in Latin America and beyond. He authored some 75 scholarly books and articles. (Rick's first book, *The Home Made Poems*



[London: Caxton Head], was published in 1934, when the author was only ten years old). *Crucifixion by Power* (1970), Rick's magnum opus, achieved widespread acclaim as marking anthropology's transition away from the bounded community study toward full engagement with national and global structures and processes. Both the title and the central message of this collaboratively produced volume would prove to be a sober portent of the genocidal state violence that began before the decade's end.

Rick's relationship to Guatemala became complex and entangled in that period, as political polarization, conflict, and violence accelerated and engulfed all facets of the society. One faction of the leftist Guatemalan intellectual community denounced "*adamcismo*" as exemplifying an era of "anthropology of occupation," which the rising tide of revolutionary change and national liberation would put to an end. Although Rick did step back from Guatemala-focused research as the political violence deepened, his intellectual and ethical-political positioning during this period, and throughout his career, defied this facile categorization. Two of his closest Guatemalan intellectual interlocutors, for example, were Jorge Skinner-Klee (associated with the center-right) and Joaquin Noval, the brilliant anthropologist who had joined the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (Guatemalan Communist Party) by the early 1970s. Rick also served as PhD mentor to Ricardo Falla, SJ, another pillar in Guatemalan anthropology and an exemplar of politically engaged anthropological research. Rick aligned himself with analysis that had integrity, independence, and rigor, and let the chips fall where they may.

After the worst of the state violence had subsided in the late 1980s, Rick returned to Guatemalan research with enormous energy, now focused primarily on Maya culture and politics. His writings on contemporary Maya rights mobilization combined his signature historical and structural approach with great attentiveness to cultural-political discourse and representation. With characteristic self-critical reflexivity, Rick decided that he was too "positioned" to conduct interviews directly with Maya protagonists, but provided prescient and original analysis based on

demographic, archival, and documentary sources. One of Rick's most admirable qualities as a scholar was his inclination to subject his own prior work to his own highest standards of critical scrutiny. His concept of "ladinization"—developed in the late 1960s and the subject of much subsequent critique—became the centerpiece in his own thorough rethinking of assimilation, racism, and identity formation at the turn of the century.

After his retirement from the University of Texas in 1990, Adams and his wife, Betty Hannstein Adams, lived mainly in Austin and Panajachel, Guatemala, where they served as friends and mentors to veterans and young scholars alike. Although university bureaucracy nudged him into retirement soon than he would have preferred, he wryly referred the first 20 years after his retirement the "most productive of my academic life." Rick continued for many years to write prolifically, to avidly engage with new ideas and other bright minds, and to regularly participate in academic conferences throughout the United States and Latin America.

In addition to his considerable gifts as a scholar, teacher, and intellectual, Rick Adams was a tireless and fearless student of Guatemala, a man who suffered no fools. He was a lifelong learner; a devoted husband, father, and grandfather; a valued teacher and friend; a great wit and bon vivant; and in the words of one of his UT colleagues, "a fun person to have around." Adams is survived by his wife, Betty, their children Walter and Gina, and their grandchildren Ariel, Lia, and Nico Adams. Adams was predeceased by the couple's eldest daughter, Tani Marilena Adams, who died in 2017 and was herself a well-known scholar and activist. Both Gina and Walter also follow in their father's footsteps, using research to help shine a light on social and political challenges in an interdisciplinary way.

Those who wish to honor Richard N. Adams's work and memory are invited to donate to the Maya Educational Foundation (MEF) in support of scholarships for Maya students in Guatemala. Rick was a supporter of education and mentored multiple generations of scholars in and from Guatemala. He would certainly appreciate such a gesture in his memory. While the bulk of his field

notes and professional papers are housed at the University of Texas, his library will be donated to the Universidad del Valle in Sololá, Guatemala, where it can be used by the Guatemalan interlocutors who made his work and career possible. The extensive Adams library of some three thousand books will also be digitized and eventually available through open access online.

To make a tax-deductible donation to MEF in Rick's memory: (1) Donate securely online at www.mayaedufound.org via the yellow Donate Now button; or (2) Send a check to MEF at Maya Educational Foundation, P.O. Box 1483, Wellfleet, MA 02667, USA, or (3) Call MEF at (001) 508-349-1330 to make a credit card donation. Be sure to convey that this is a special memorial gift in honor of Richard N. Adams. //