
COMMUNICATIONS

IN MEMORIAM: RUSSELL H. FITZGIBBON 1902–1979

Many will remember Russell Fitzgibbon as the scholar who pioneered a controversial “measurement of democracy” scheme, one that will be the subject of social science debate well into the future. Others may remember him also as their mentor, the teacher who produced more Latin American specialists, perhaps, than any other scholar of note within political science and related disciplines. He was as towering in his scholarly influence as he was diminutive physically and shy. If you knew Fitz (as some of us called him, affectionately) you would remember his probity above all else, but your list of outstanding character traits would surely include these: a penetrating intellect with an historical bent (of which he was very proud), a compassion for the disadvantaged, his commitment to frugality, his generous giving of himself to the cause of interdisciplinary higher education within the Latin American area studies context, and his dedication to the cause of political democracy and human decency in Latin America. He would have cheered the collapse of the Nicaraguan tyranny, and, at once, been appalled by the human carnage that was paid to accomplish it.

Fitzgibbon had an enormous influence on the way we study Latin America, at least here in the United States. His background included a doctorate from Wisconsin, field service with the Office of Inter-American Affairs during part of World War II, Special Observer status with the OAS during the early 1960s, and long distinguished service thereafter as professor and researcher at UCLA and UCSB. His legion of articles appeared in most of the major political science and interdisciplinary journals in this country and he authored books on Cuban-U.S. relations, Colombia, and Uruguay. His interests and abilities transcended several disciplines, and his legacy, the Image-Index measurement scheme cited above, will continue to stir healthy debate and valuable reflection in academic and policymaking circles. Fitz believed that a “democratic weather-

vane" was visibly operative throughout Latin America and he devised a method, albeit, and by his own admission, an imperfect one, for reflecting scholarly images of the ongoing patterns of Latin American political change. The most recent of the Image-Index studies appeared, in part, in the Summer 1976 issue of this review; the expansion and further elaboration of Fitzgibbon's work that is now being planned may perpetuate his influence well into the coming century.

Those of us who trekked the worn steps of Haines Hall to Russell Fitzgibbon's tiny UCLA office will not forget the gentle humanist with his shortly cropped and brilliantly white hair, and his disarming shyness that one came to regard fondly in the course of time. My first encounter with the venerable Fitzgibbon occurred in the spring of 1959, when I made a bus trip from San Diego to Westwood just to see him and to promote my status as an aspiring graduate student. Fitz generously arranged to see me on a Saturday morning and promptly, but gently, chided me for having written "greatful" in my letter requesting an interview. That was our first meeting.

Nearly twenty years later, on the occasion of our last meeting, in February 1977 at Arizona State, Fitz chided me again, still gently, over my being too tough on the Latin Americans for what he had just heard me describe in my presentation as their chronic governmental ineptitude and corruption. I had recently returned from living amidst the final throes of the second (or third?) Perón era. Fitzgibbon always had a warm heart, and urged me to follow him along that charitable path. If there was even an ounce of good left in something, even in Perón, he was disposed to seek it out; and for that I had to admire him.

But what impressed me even more at our last meeting was that Fitzgibbon, then in visibly poor health, had driven alone through the Phoenix traffic to hear me speak. Such loyalty to his graduates was another trait that all of us who knew him and benefitted from his teaching will not forget. Fitz stayed with us; yet few of us would say that we ever really knew him well at the personal level. And therein lay much of his charisma and charm, one's captivation by his elusive, fleeting glimpse of a smile when he bent a furrowed brow toward you and listened intently to your statement of belief or dilemma. Fitz then debated silently, and using few but well-measured words, he shared with you his own doubts, hopes, and wisdom.

Russell Fitzgibbon leaves us a rich heritage of optimistic compassion, professional integrity, and a magnificent corpus of scholarly works, all of which he married comfortably with a cautious dose of healthy cynicism. His legacy is a formidable standard of excellence by which to judge ourselves, and academia worldwide will be much the better because Fitz was here. For those of us who felt we knew him he will always remain the shy, frail, but powerful humanist, who sought to persuade others to embrace a positive faith as he did, and who seemed always to view his professional mandate as a sacred trust.

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