

On Jacqueline Leavitt

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Guest Editor

For more than three decades Dr. Jacqueline Leavitt was an inspiring force in the field of urban planning, whether as a professor, a founder of the American Planning Association Planning and Women Division, author (with Susan Saegert) of the groundbreaking book *From Abandonment to Hope: Community-Households in Harlem*, or as a scholar-activist with a lifelong commitment to working with community members toward justice.

If you were Jackie's student, then it is likely you spent time during meetings taking in the surroundings of her campus office or home: Endless shelves of books, artifacts and mementos from travels around the world, her own sketches and paintings, buttons and stickers from community organizing campaigns, along with ephemera that signaled a thriving existence beyond academia -- ticket stubs, art supplies, and museum exhibit pamphlets. For me, and for the many decades' worth of students she mentored, these spaces produced a powerful visual history of her life, and her life's work.

I often found myself staring at a small, stuffed doll – wavy white lace for hair, a body stitched together from blue patterned fabric remnants, and orange felt cutouts for eyes. On its torso is a poem, letters typeset on thick white cloth and carefully sewn to the front, which reads:

*Officials who lay off workers
After raising their own pay
Make us want to hit the ceiling!
Grab this little doll and say
Dammit! Dammit! Dammit All!
Slam this doll anywhich way,
But don't forget election day
To VOTE THOSE OFFICIALS AWAY!*

She once handed me the doll on a day when I expressed doubt and frustration so I could read the poem, and I cackled. She laughed out loud, a generous and joyful Jackie laugh, the kind that told me the doll and those words held a thousand memories. I took comfort in the fact that it was a doll – not a paperweight featuring a moving quote, not an engraved plaque, not a passage drawn from obscurity – but a doll that for me has come to symbolize Jackie’s strong adherence to the broader project of centering women as agents of change.

The doll now sits on my desk, a handmade reminder of Jackie and her commitments to justice. A reminder of the ongoing need for community organizing. A reminder about the importance of embracing creativity, and the role this played in developing subversive stuffed dolls as a reminder that it’s okay to feel the frustration, anger, and hurt that is so often produced in a system that thrives on systems of power, so long as you then use your own power to push back.

In the entries that follow, former students and longtime colleagues share their reflections on Jackie Leavitt’s career, her contributions to the field of planning, and her impact on their lives and trajectories. First, Amy Shimshon-Santo reminds us of Jackie’s focus on the relationship between the university and the city, and her role training folks in what Shimshon-Santo refers to as the “magic of public scholarship.” Next, Peter Marcuse writes about the deep connections between Jackie’s professional, political, and personal work for justice, noting that people played a central role in her life and she treated them all with the utmost respect and humanity. Then we hear from Dustianne North who shares Jackie’s influence as an activist-scholar, and her deep understanding that promoting justice in academia requires supporting and nurturing the growth of activist-scholars.

Jackie, may you always rest in power.