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Generational Time

When invited to this wonderful occasion, I was simultaneously honored, pleased, and daunted. I realized I had known Rich and Sally for an astonishing 35 years. How to sum that up? What modest accounting might I offer? Moreover, many of my collected books are still in North Carolina rather than with me in Los Angeles. My research has moved away from their beloved Caribbean, and in recent years I've been devoting much of my time to academic administration, all the more so in this crisis-ridden year. Even worse, I had given away my only impressive Hawaiian shirt.

I did, however, have a copy of Rich's memoir *Inside/Outside*, which I'd had the pleasure of reviewing for the press. So I decided to go back to my notes and also re-read it, in the hopes of finding at least a few thoughts that might speak to the moment.

What I found confirmed my initial impressions: the book offers a front-row seat to its own tangled history of an academic field — part drama, part comedy, part soap opera — featuring a remarkable cast of characters. The style is direct and informal, that of a storyteller settling in for a long evening, table groaning with food and drink. All to say, it's a good read, for someone who has any interest in anthropology or history, or the many, varied array of topics addressed, from Parisian luminaries to island fishermen to the long arc of slavery and race in the Americas.

It's an account of a remarkable individual life, lived alongside an equally remarkable companion. But it's also an account of a generational moment of possibility, and that is how I want to read it here. Shift the chronology by a decade or two, and much couldn't have happened quite this way. Our plucky protagonist, Richard Price, meets a remarkable cast of historical figures by virtue of being in the right time and place, from childhood in NYC on to Harvard to Paris to Martinique in the early 1960s. He has the good sense, along with sufficient chutzpah to make something of it. Looking retrospectively, the intellectual worlds around him seem more fluid and people more open than they might be today. He and Sally pass through institutions right when they go through a period of considerable upheaval, all in a way that creates interesting possibilities for thinking, writing and ethnographic adventure.

For example, Rich arrives at a Harvard that's intellectually vibrant, not just a stuffy clubhouse for provincial Boston elite or aggressively antisemitic in the way it might have been earlier in the 20th century. Nor was the place a metric-driven corporation, as it has evolved into since, suffused with monetary ambition, audit culture, and celebrity dropouts. Rich attends class, actually *reads* books, and feels the excitement of joining anthropology at a moment of expansion. Taken seriously as a future scholar by his mentors, from his initial seminar with Clyde Kluckhohn on, he does fieldwork right from the start. He enjoys the intellectual company of equally impassioned fellow students, many of whom would go on to academic careers. Heading to

Europe right when Alfred Métraux passes away, he ends up studying with Claude Lévi-Strauss instead (that combination alone is simply astonishing — Lévi-Strauss as a substitute teacher!).

The same might be said of Sally, of course. She arrives just as Radcliffe inches towards Harvard, but has not yet merged with it, or become the coed, frisbee-tossing college norm that people in my day already considered timeless. Her career spans starkly different eras, from one of separate libraries and faculty wives to another where women assumed they would pursue professional positions of their own. It's clearly a pivotal, uncertain moment for gender identity and expectations. Over the course of the narrative, she has to work harder for visibility, recognition, and a seat at the table. But she does so successfully, along with her contemporaries and colleagues, such as Jane Collier and Michelle Rosaldo. If I list her second here, it's both in keeping with the chronology and following my key source, knowing we can trust her to correct the record as needed.

The Martinique and Suriname that Rich and Sally encounter are largely unimaginable now, lost worlds where people could still routinely fish and hunt as an integral part of life, rather than as material for heritage nostalgia or Instagram posts. But the two of them are also primed to see these worlds differently than earlier visitors had, with different training and sensibility. Move back a few decades, and they might have paralleled Melville and Frances Herskovits. Move forward a few more and they might not have had access (think of the Surinamese Interior War) or sought other modes of engagement, say by becoming human rights lawyers.

The Prices also came of age during a pivotal, transitional moment in the history of American conceptions of race, in which white scholars could play a significant role in a period of academic reckoning and program building across the 1960s-80s, while also opening space for Black scholars. Moreover, it was an era of interdisciplinary exchange and experimentation, when an anthropologist could make transformative contributions in other fields like history and art history, even while working as independent scholars (albeit illustrious ones).

The university in general was a-changing, both for better and for worse, along with departments and disciplines. The story of Rich's seamless movement from Harvard to Yale, followed by his dizzying recruitment to Johns Hopkins to launch a new department sounds almost mythic in this era of human resources oversight, bureaucratic austerity, and professional precarity. Graduate students today would surely find Rich's anecdote about overhearing the phone call that summoned David Mayberry-Lewis to Harvard from Oxford (p.33) even less believable, a tall tale about a foreign land. All in all, these are careers that one couldn't reproduce now, and which also reveal so much, both about the time when things happened, but also the deeper past before it, and the more recent present we now inhabit.

The narrative pivot of *Inside/Outside* comes when the Prices leave Hopkins, under less-than-ideal circumstances. Their resignation opens a whole series of new horizons, along with relative independence, transformed from an alluring possibility to a sudden, sobering reality. Those laboring fully within institutions might stare at them enviously, the proverbial children who

escaped piano practice to play freely outside. (I say this as a current chair...). But of course, it was far from simple, as Rich's account makes abundantly clear: they navigated an uncertain and contingent landscape, children in tow, along with the fallout of broken ties.

And here again this episode reflects shifting generational experience. At least I suspect the shadow campaign against their re-employment that Rich describes might have played out differently in other eras, including the present. As someone pointed out at a workshop on academic precarity a number of years ago, most academics are now too self-absorbed and lazy to really damage another person's career in any sustained fashion, and (viral social media scandals aside), wouldn't know how to go about it, since everything has grown more bureaucratized.

But in the 1980s and even 90s, prominent senior figures still had more sway and energy, and the feuds seemed...well, even more personal. Reading this chronological account only underscored how informal, personalistic connections framed and supported much of Rich and Sally's early career; the right word, letter, or phone call puts someone in touch and doors open. And then, at this pivotal moment, this informal network of association turns around, part of it siding against them, operating in the shadows, all pre-internet, but still mobilizing rumors with far fewer forms, paper trails, or official mechanisms to navigate. Like everything, informality can have its pros and cons.

Had the Prices not been sufficiently self-confident and immensely productive, as well as enjoying timely support from a few key friends, allies, and funders, that might have been that. But if anything, they redoubled their efforts and demonstrated that their scholarship could stand on its own, even without support of institutions, or former patrons.

Contra Doctor Pangloss, this is clearly not the best of all possible worlds. Clearly. But it may still be a world to make the best of, to find a garden and work it as long as conditions allow. And what a garden Rich and Sally have planted and then carefully tended year after year! Those gathered here have all appreciated the harvest of its many fruits. So have countless other readers, now and hopefully on and on, well into the future, including in Martinique, Suriname, and Guyane. The return gifts have been given, in a basketful.

Reading *Inside/Outside* made me think not just of *First-Time*, but also of generational time. How lives unfold in relation, connecting people who may inhabit different worlds of reference, and yet share a common link. The people at the beginning of one story may live far apart from those at its end, but they all have a place in its retelling. Generational time is a reminder of that vital association, and of how knowledge transmits across periods.

Generational knowledge, generational time.

At a moment when the academy is under a remarkable assault, it seems all the more vital to recall times past, and what people accomplished during other periods of conflict and possibility. The remarkable sweep of Rich and Sally's lives and careers reveals not just the eras they have spanned, the chances they encountered, and those they in turn created for others. Their story's

many twists and turns also show the extent to which they met what the fates offered with daring and continuing curiosity.

Adventures in Caribbean History and Anthropology indeed!