

JAMES SMOOT COLEMAN, 1919–85

James S. Coleman, President of the African Studies Association in the USA in 1963–64 and member of the executive council of the IAI from 1969 to 1977, died on 20 April 1985. Michael Lofchie, Director of the African Studies Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, with the assistance of several of his colleagues, has written this personal appreciation of the man and his work:

For all of us who were his students, his colleagues and his friends, there is the sense that Jim Coleman is absolutely irreplaceable. His unique combination of personal qualities and capacities enabled him to do the work of several and gave him a profoundly meaningful place in our lives. Jim touched us in special ways and even now we wonder what will become of the monumental assignments that he assumed as his final challenges: the creation of a multidisciplinary programme in international development studies at UCLA and the completion of a volume on the role of education in Third World development.

So many of Jim's qualities stand out as larger than life that merely to inventory them is daunting. One calls to mind his pioneering theoretical contributions to political science and development studies; his legendary capacity for work; his uncanny administrative skills that combined meticulous attention to detail with a grand and sweeping vision; and a personal style that has been variously described as saintly, fatherly, incredibly self-effacing and touched with the quality of grace. All of us who came into contact with Jim brought away an enlarged sense of ourselves and our abilities.

Jim's intellectual contributions are enduring. The list of scholars who acknowledge a lasting debt just to his classic article 'Nationalism in tropical Africa' (*American Political Science Review*, 1954), is practically endless. A few years after its appearance, Thomas Hodgkin publicly stated that he was personally so stimulated by this article that he wrote his most famous book, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, as a response. The University of California Press has paid its own tribute to Jim's first book, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, by keeping it in print twenty-seven years. It remains the essential starting point for understanding that country's contemporary political history.

With Gabriel Almond as co-editor and co-author, Jim published *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, the book that introduced functional analysis to the political study of the non-Western world and pioneered the study of political culture. Generations of political scientists have quoted it repeatedly ever since – in term papers, in field examinations and in professional publications. As a member of the Social Science Research Council Committee on Comparative Politics from 1955 to 1965, Jim helped to forge the shape of a discipline for nearly two decades. What syllabus of basic contributions to the comparative study of the developing world would be complete without *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*, co-edited and co-authored with Carl Rosberg in 1964, or *Education and Political Development* (1971)? Being included in a volume that Jim Coleman edited was a little like an assurance of academic immortality, not because of the quality of one's own essay, but because it was a certainty that scholars would turn to that volume for generations hence to see what Jim had to say.

For a person whose published works are the required reading of the profession, Jim was less wedded to his ideas than most. He was constantly prepared

to try something new, and sometimes added special lustre to an academic journal just by doing so. For many of us, Makerere University in the 1960s represents an enduring model of scholarly excellence, and its journal, *Mawazo*, a concrete example of that excellence. Jim published his seminal article, 'The resurrection of political economy' in *Mawazo* in 1967. In some indefinable way that article remains a permanent reminder of a high-water mark in the life of an African university. As a reappraisal of what political scientists might be doing to study the development process more effectively, that article still has no equal. Other ideas that Jim legitimised, just by trying them out, include policy-oriented and policy-relevant research, the notion of the university as a developmental institution, and the importance of political capacity as an aspect of modernisation.

Jim's writing style reflected his personal style: each piece was a rich bibliographical essay encyclopedically surveying the literature on the topic at hand. And Jim's treatment of others' contributions was consistently and inevitably appreciative. Intrinsic to Jim's writing style was the attribution of his ideas to others. Somehow those ideas as he presented them sounded more profound, more persuasive and infinitely better reasoned than in the original. Jim treated people in the same way, always taking enormous pains to convey that what he did or said was the outgrowth of suggestions made by others.

Jim was a tireless booster of other people. How many of us over the years received early-morning phone calls from Jim in which he would say, in one way or another, 'You're not asking me to do enough for you.' His supportiveness knew no ideological boundaries. If, as we all knew, Jim was an exemplar of liberal social science in development studies, he was also, with logical consistency and deep conviction, a constant patron of radical and revolutionary scholars. Indeed, Jim Coleman actively encouraged the work of those who were among his most severe intellectual critics as well as those with whom he shared a commonality of views.

He treated projects and programmes that he was involved with identically, often calling in the early morning to ask what sort of resources he could provide. He had clear and strong ideas about academic administration and how to achieve institutional excellence. His ideas included 'build on excellence' and 'recognise differential merit and support it'. Yet such was Jim's personal style that he never revealed what he considered to be less than excellent or which persons he may have deemed less than supportable. It seemed that all areas of international studies had his attention and support and that all the scholars he dealt with had his esteem and commendation.

Institutions grew and developed under his touch. He was founder-director of UCLA's African Studies Center, and its programmatic profile continues to reflect the momentum he imparted twenty-five years ago. Early in his academic career Jim decided that building institutions in Africa was more important than doing so in this country, and in 1965 he accepted an invitation to join the Rockefeller Foundation, to head its University Development Program in Eastern Africa. It is indicative of his remarkable organisational skills that he endowed such institutions as the Makerere Institute of Social Research and the University of Nairobi's Institute of Development Studies with a truly miraculous capacity to survive. There are few books written during the 1960s and early 1970s on development in East Africa that do not acknowledge his personal contribution.

Speaking of Jim's dedication to institutional development in Africa, Crawford Young wrote as follows:

My most prolonged and intimate collaboration with Jim came in association with his biggest gamble: the commitment of the Rockefeller Foundation university development programme to the cause of higher educational reform in Zaire. All of us immersed in that adventure shared the initial optimism, even though we later learned that strong skepticism prevailed in the upper reaches of the RF hierarchy. Jim, however, won the opportunity to engage in his boldest venture. That it was even a partial success is entirely owing to the tireless efforts Jim committed to operating within a system whose derelictions finally defeated him. But Jim all but wrestled this goliath of kleptocracy to the ground, in his five years of unremitting toil. He learned, as Jean-Claude Willame wrote in *Revue Nouvelle*, to overcome every obstacle, to surmount every barrier, to outwit the craftiest adversaries. Jim was always up well before dawn, frequently spending the night sleeping fitfully on the couch in his cramped Kinshasa office, giving ceaselessly of himself to somehow make impossible things happen. On his desk, stacked in a corner, were the latest important books in the discipline; when – and if – he ever permitted himself a moment to open them, I know not. On another table stood a television set – acquired so that he could somehow master French, in which he did develop a fractured fluency. Close beside was his wife Ursula, whose quiet dignity and equal selflessness made her a matchless partner.

Jim Coleman made it fun to be an administrative colleague because he was always there to laugh at the difficulties and straighten out the mistakes. He also made the job a good deal easier because he did a disproportionate share of the work. His constant attention to and unvarying respect for the work of others also made it appealing to be an academic colleague. His appreciation impelled all of us to exercise a little more of ourselves, partly because of the positive anticipation of being able to show him a new piece of work. In all of this he endowed university administration with a broader sense of purpose. And he believed in the strongest possible way that every person called upon could make a contribution to that purpose.

This bare outline of Jim's personal qualities and scholarly and administrative achievements barely begins to take the measure of the man. Nor do these accomplishments alone account for his extraordinary reputation in the milieu of African studies. For twenty years he was the unofficial American ambassador for higher education in Africa and came to know Africa as well as any American of his time. The home and hearth that he and Ursula made in Los Angeles were also home and hearth to African scholars.

The pain of Jim's sudden death is so much the greater because it left no opportunity to tell him how much he and his work meant. His generous praise of the work of others was matched by an almost resolute avoidance of reference to his own contributions. Jim was an implacably private person and the mere mention of these seemed to cause him embarrassment. News of Jim's death was couched in terms of a 'massive' heart attack. Upon reflection, the phrase is meet: Jim was larger than life. No ordinary heart attack could possibly have felled him or prevented him from doing what he most wanted to do – involve himself with us in the search for excellence.