Chronicle

Professor Leonard Lieberman
(1925 – 2007)

On February 6, 2007, Professor Leonard Lieberman – a well-known American anthropologist and sociologist – died from heart surgery complications. He was born on September 20, 1925 in Los Angeles and educated at the University of California, Berkeley, where he obtained his bachelor’s (in 1956) and then master’s degrees (in 1959) in Sociology. He obtained his PhD from Michigan State University in 1970.

Leonard Lieberman spent most of his forty-year career as professor at Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI. and its Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work. He joined the faculty in 1965 and was known as a creative and inspiring teacher. He taught courses in human variation, human evolution, forensic anthropology, and primate behavior. He also contributed to the theory of anthropology teaching. Both as a professor and head, he was a key figure in mentoring staff and building up the department, turning it into an internationally recognized teaching and research institution.

As a researcher Professor Lieberman contributed to several fields (sociology, psychology, anthropology) and several subjects. He made significant contributions to the evolution/creation debate and, together with his wife – Professor Leslie Lazaro Lieberman – to family studies. Most of all, however, he is the best known for his research and critique of the race concept. Indeed, apart from the late Ashley Montagu and Frank Livingston, there is probably no other anthropologist who contributed more to the deconstruction of the concept. Lieberman saw himself as a follower of Montagu’s pioneering ideas about race. He (together with Larry T. Reynolds) edited a classical volume “Race and Other Misadventures” (1996), published numerous articles, and presented 60 papers at various conferences – the last being “The decline of anti-racism” at the 105th American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings in San Jose in November 2006.
Leonard Lieberman often entered debate with the proponents of the race concept and often challenged racists and racialist views. In a 2001 *Current Anthropology* paper entitled (with a typical Liebermanian humor and irony): “How ‘Caucasoids’ got such big crania and why they shrank”, he dissected and ridiculed views of supposed racial differences in intelligence. To the General Anthropology Division of the AAA he contributed two valuable booklets on teaching human variation which were produced in mid-1990s: “Races or Clines” (written with Patricia C. Rice) and “Race 1997 and 2001: A Race Odyssey”. These two publications are still invaluable teaching guides for many anthropologists.

In December 2006 we (KAK and GS) were putting finishing touches on our paper on current views of European anthropologists on race. We both were very happy to have Len Lieberman – a pioneer of such studies – as our co-author, as his input on the matter was invaluable. Our acquaintance, and then professional collaboration and friendship with Len dates to the early 2000s, when it so happened that he was a reviewer of our first paper on races submitted to, and then published, in *Current Anthropology*. Soon afterwards, we were invited by him to work on a joint paper on the perception of race in various regions of the world. We met him in August 2002 (KAK for the first time, GS for the second) at the 13th *European Anthropological Association* Congress in Zagreb, Croatia, when all three of us took part in the symposium *The Concept of Race*. Mutual projects ensued and were crowned by a survey of the attitudes of European anthropologists toward race. As the paper was close to completion, we sent Len the final draft of the paper for comments. The reply from our colleague was, however, not forthcoming. Soon we learnt that Len was in hospital recovering from heart surgery. The reply never did come as, sadly, he passed away.

Professor Leonard Lieberman is survived by three children, four grandchildren, a brother and nephew. His colleagues and friends will undoubtedly remember him as a gentle and knowledgeable person, but at the same time a firm and uncompromising proponent of the non-racialist and anti-racist cause.

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