

REFLECTIONS ON ROBERT G. DIXON, JR.

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The news of Bob Dixon's sudden death came as a surprise, one which saddened his many friends in Washington D.C. I had known him for nearly three decades, first as a student in one of my classes, then as a faculty colleague for twenty years. Throughout that period my admiration and affection for him grew steadily. It is a privilege to contribute to this issue of the *Washington University Law Quarterly* dedicated to his memory, though it will be difficult to write about him fairly and accurately without appearing fulsome.

At the time of his death Bob Dixon was a respected legal scholar, one who enjoyed (literally) a prestigious national reputation, but that stature had been achieved only by overcoming serious obstacles. The most important, and the most enduring, was a series of major medical problems. At an age when most of us are blissfully unaware of the frailties and limitations of the human body, Bob underwent radical major surgery. That was only the beginning. Thereafter for many years he suffered from one serious physical disability or another, some requiring extended hospitalization. The details are irrelevant; I couldn't supply them in any event. The point is that in this respect he confronted and overcame trials of a character and frequency which would defeat most people. He seemed to thrive on them though, to come back from these interludes more determined, more ambitious than ever. Ultimately, he came to take his physical limitations and the periodic interruptions of normal life which they entailed entirely in stride. At least as he described them to others, his medical problems had assumed a diminishing importance and had come to be regarded as annoying, but manageable, nuisances rather than disasters.

Obtaining a legal education was not simple for Bob. His original goals in education led him to the Ph.D. in political science and to appointment as a junior member of the University of Maryland's department of political science. Originally, I believe, he thought of the study of law as a useful adjunct to political science rather than as an end in itself. In any event, as a married man with two small daughters he

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could not afford the luxury of full-time law study. A foundation grant underwrote one year; thereafter it was part-time study at the end of the day downtown several miles from the Maryland campus in suburban College Park.

Some lawyers and law teachers belittle part-time legal education. (Those quickest to do so, in my experience, have usually had the least actual contact with it.) To go to school in the early evening after a full day's work is not ideal; neither is it impossible. Many who undertake it lack the energy or dedication to succeed as fully as they might if they were to devote themselves to legal studies full time, but the part-time student who makes a real success of his or her studies demonstrates energy, determination, and an ability to organize his or her time and efforts in a degree never required of the successful full-time student.

Bob Dixon made a success of his part-time law studies, and the qualities which enabled him to do so served him well for the rest of his life. His professional career (and those of many others) demonstrates the potential for excellence in professional life to be found in that route of entry. Fortunately, while he was still a law student his instructors recognized his potential and sought his appointment to the George Washington law faculty upon graduation. He agreed, and Maryland's loss became G.W.'s gain. It was a wise and happy decision for Bob and for the Law School.

Bob added valuable strength to our faculty. He was an effective, though not always popular, teacher. His courses were thorough and balanced. In public law subjects his background in political science and in the writings of political theorists added an important dimension to the purely legal materials of constitutional provision, statute, regulation, and judicial decision. Perhaps Bob's most effective work with students was in his seminars and with his research assistants. In that context students' attention is more intensively focussed on issues of current importance than is possible in courses where subject matter coverage is an important objective. Here they could also profit from a close-up view of the legal scholar, seeing the thorough research and imaginative analysis which he brought to consideration of difficult legal problems.

While his teaching was good, Bob made his principal mark as a writer. He had published important articles before coming to full-time law teaching. For the rest of his life he continued to write, producing a steady stream of articles, books, memos, and reports on subject matter

with an ever broadening scope. The total makes a formidable life's work. The chef d'oeuvre is undoubtedly his book on reapportionment.¹

Although the quantity is impressive, the quality is even more so. Underlying all his work was a fundamental honesty. He would do only work that he knew to be thorough. He had to be satisfied that he knew as much about his subject as possible. Once that was accomplished his conclusions were the product of his own analysis and conviction without regard to the possible reactions of others. The results were not necessarily flashy—he eschewed the novel idea floated primarily for its attention-getting effect—but over the long run his methods paid off in a solid reputation for thoughtful, fair, thorough work, and won him respect throughout the profession and beyond.

Others more familiar with his areas of study can better assess his particular contributions to those fields than I can, but the qualities that characterized his writing permeated his life. Though highly sophisticated about the operation of government, he did not become cynical. His values remained traditional. He demanded the best possible of himself; he hoped for it in others. He was community-minded, whether the community was the country, the city, or the university, and he accepted his responsibility to contribute his time and energy to its needs. He believed in opportunity for all without special privilege or status for any. These ideals and standards may not currently be as fashionable as they once were, but they are at the core of our national tradition and strength. Ultimately they will be restored to their rightful place.

One cannot write of Bob without mentioning his family. His three daughters were ever a source of pride and joy to him. He and his wife, Claire, were a team. She shared his ideals and standards; she encouraged him in his specific goals and efforts; she supported him in manifold ways to make it possible to devote himself fully to his work.

Measured by the Biblical three-score-and-ten or by modern statistics on life expectancy, Bob Dixon's life was cut short. Measured by its accomplishments and its contributions it was far fuller than most.

1. R. DIXON, *DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION: REAPPORTIONMENT IN LAW AND POLITICS* (1968).