

GORDON W. ALLPORT (1897 - 1967)

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Gordon W. Allport, a great man, a great psychologist, a great supporter of Adlerian psychology, and a consulting editor of this Journal, died on October 9, 1967, shortly before his 70th birthday. We are fortunate in having his first graduate student and life-long friend, Hadley Cantril, express here in his words what all of us who knew Gordon Allport feel in our own ways.

I never dreamt in the fall of 1927 when I started my first course with Gordon Allport as an undergraduate at Dartmouth that just 40 years later I would be asked to write an obituary note about this young red-headed assistant professor.

This was the period when Gordon was doing the major research and writing on his *Personality* book. He shared his thoughts with us in the course, giving most of us our first glimpse of someone pursuing a major intellectual inquiry with conviction, mixed with occasional doubt, but with a sense that he was moving with a clear direction in view. Gordon's scholarship and quality of intellect were clearly apparent to us back in those days before they had become public knowledge and taken for granted.

It was largely because the level of analysis labelled "social psychology" to which he introduced me was congenial to me that I decided to make it also my career. Gordon communicated the potential excitement ahead in a field just opening up. So after a year of study in Germany, at Gordon's suggestion, while he finished his Dartmouth stint, I moved to Harvard with him as his first graduate student. The history of Gordon's career at Harvard is well known. And his intellectual attainments and influence on the stance he felt psychology should take are now part of the record. They are reflected in the writings he has left us and in the many honors his professional colleagues bestowed on him.

As I retrospect on the 40 years with Gordon, two characteristics stand out most in my mind. The first is his sense of quest and the zest and focus he brought to it. This is reflected best to me in a personal way by the annual *Ausflug* we used to make together for a week or two while I was teaching with him at Harvard and for years thereafter. In those days, the standard salary for an instructor was \$2,000. So it was the wildest of fantasies to think of owning a car. Since Gordon had not learned to drive at that time, I managed to locate a snappy convertible Dodge for \$15. But this didn't leave me enough money to register the car and buy a driver's license. So

Gordon said he would cover those expenses and I got the car so we could take our *Ausflug* for many summers. After we became the proud owners and after the June examinations had been corrected and grades sent in, we would pack our bags and head north with absolutely no destination in mind, just taking what roads looked interesting.

The main purpose of our *Ausflug* was to talk about social psychology, about what it ought to be, and about research that might be started by way of demonstration. I shall never forget how we found ourselves one morning at the top of a long, steep hill in Quebec. Gordon was at the wheel, having learned the art of driving on our trip from Cambridge. With the \$15 car and a neophyte driver, we stopped to reconnoiter, deciding to try for a safe landing with Gordon at the controls. All the while we were busy talking about what we called during all our years together "LP," standing for *Lebenspsychologie*—a determination to do what we could to push psychology into a study of real people in real situations. Gordon pursued the quest with distinction throughout his fruitful life.

The second and most outstanding characteristic that all who knew Gordon will recognize and remember in their own terms (as I am doing here in my terms) was his deep and genuine concern for the single individual. He was indefatigable in helping others to be and to become, practicing what he preached. In 1958 I copied an inscription from Tagore that is on the entrance of the main building at the University of Delhi:

A teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame. The teacher who has come to the end of his subject, who has no living traffic with his knowledge but merely repeats his lesson to his students can only load their minds; he cannot quicken them. Truth not only must inform but also must inspire; if the inspiration dies out and the information only accumulates, then truth loses its infinity. The greater part of our learning in the schools has been waste because for most of our teachers their subjects are like dead specimens of once living things with which they have learned acquaintance but no communication of life and love.

I sent a copy of this to Gordon from New Delhi. For it seemed to sum him up with truth and grace. He had it framed and kept it in his study at home. I was happy to be able to read it in his presence at a dinner given in his honor in Washington a few years ago on the occasion of his "first" official retirement.

"A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame" epitomizes Gordon and will be attested to by the hundreds and thousands of students who knew him. And the effect will be experienced by generations yet to come who will probably never connect Gordon's name to the flame that is still being passed on to them, the sort of selfless immortality Gordon would have cherished most.