

Jane Anne Morris – In Memoriam

It is with sincere sadness, but also deep responsibility that we share the following “In Memoriam” of one-time POCLAD “principal” Jane Anne Morris. Besides being a colleague and friend, Jane Anne taught us all through her writing and speaking different ways to think about and see the world more clearly.

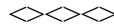
After reading about her life, visit her website, <http://democracythemepark.org/home/>, to see what we mean.

“Gaveling Down the Rabble,” written when she was part of the POCLAD collective, remains a cutting edge anti-democratic critique of the Constitution’s commerce clause. The same is true of many of her articles — several of which were published in our By What Authority newsletter, <http://poclad.org/BWA>.

The linked video, Democracy Theme Park (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4760350/democracy-theme-park>) is pure Jane Anne -- smart, clear and witty.

We painfully mourn her loss, but are heartened knowing that her ideas and work lives on.

Read. Reflect. Share.



In Memoriam

Corporate anthropologist, activist, and author Jane Anne Morris died of ALS in Madison, Wisconsin on May 28, 2019. She was 65.

Jane Anne Morris’s activism began during the Vietnam War, while she attended junior high school. Over the next five decades, she would work on many grassroots campaigns encompassing issues such as local democracy, anti-war efforts, the environment, human rights, labor organizing, energy, police brutality, U.S. intervention in Latin America, health care access, and food security (advocating for rooftop community gardens in the most urban part of Madison).

Morris was a fascinated student of human behavior, nature, culture, and the world of ideas. An exceptional thinker, her ability to ask provocative questions and to see things in a unique light was a hallmark of her scholarship, her activism, and the moral framework by which she lived. Daily, she interacted with the world with a bottomless curiosity for whatever plants and creatures

she encountered (and how the local humans would engage with them), took copious notes, and left no assumption unquestioned. Tacked to her wall, you might find information on how to identify animal skulls by their dental patterns beside a list of “imperfect but compelling rhymes.” E.g. “litigious midges: little flies that spend too much time in court.”

Morris graduated with distinction from Cornell University with a degree in anthropology and philosophy in 1974, then received Masters and Doctoral degrees in anthropology from the University of Texas/Austin in 1978 and 1987.

At a time when anthropologists primarily “studied down” — producing ethnographies of groups far from power and privilege — Morris “studied up.” The “native” subjects of her dissertation were the board and staff of a Texas electric utility, the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA). As Morris described the work in 1988:

My... research grew out of my work as an environmental activist, working with a group of semi-rural people who had

organized to oppose the plans of two public utility companies to stripmine in their county. I made a conscious political decision to NOT focus my research on the environmental group itself, knowing that the compilation and analysis of information about the inner workings and tactics of such a group would be invaluable to utility companies and other seeking to out-manuever them.

I focused instead on the public utility company most involved in the stripmining projects. Most of the research was conducted in the board room, at various regulatory hearings, and in the courts. Most of the “natives” were middle-aged, anglo males in positions of power. By tracing the relationships and actions of board members, staff personnel, and regulatory agency representatives, I was able to map out and extensively document the specific strategies that enable public utility companies such as this one to successfully obtain permit after permit and carry out their plans, despite very vocal, well-organized, well-informed, and to my mind, valid, local opposition.

Morris and her fellow activists succeeded in preventing the LCRA from mining and burning lignite, a dirty coal with an energy content comparable to cow patties, and defeated a referendum for a half-billion dollar bond for a massive power plant. With journalist Bill Bishop, she wrote a series of articles about the LCRA's

shenanigans for The Bastrop County Times. These reports received the First Place Award for Community Service from the Texas Press Association in 1986. The award judges wrote: “Too bad the Times doesn't cover the whole USA. This is the kind of no frills journalism we are sorely missing.”

Using the lessons learned in her decade-long campaign against lignite mining, Morris published her first book with the aim of sharing her insights with other would-be NIMBY activists. Not In My Backyard: The Handbook (1994) was conceived as a manual for the “average citizen” who wakes up one morning and discovers that something new and unwanted is planned for their neighborhood.

Beyond understanding corporate strategies in the face of NIMBY activism, Morris wanted to understand how the laws that enabled those strategies had come about, in order to aim her activism at root causes, rather than at band-aid solutions. What followed was a decade of research into how democracy itself has been subverted by corporate interests. An early member of the Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy (POCLAD), she turned her research focus to the history of corporate law, and the century-long movement to bolster corporate “rights” at the expense of citizens. With POCLAD, she published extensively, traveled throughout the U.S. and contributed to a body of research that helped birth the Community Rights

Movement. She gave talks, interviews and workshops on topics including Democracy and Corporations, the Domestic “Free Trade” Zone and the History of Corporate Law. In 1996, she coined the phrase “democracy theme park” to describe the way decades of corporate strategy have undermined democracy to the extent that citizens are left pulling at the levers of a democratic system, levers that are not connected to anything.

In 2008, Morris published her second book, Gaveling Down the Rabble: How “Free Trade” is Stealing Our Democracy, examining how the interstate commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution is used to promulgate “free trade” between the states at the expense of local sovereignty over issues like food safety and clean water.

In her final years, she produced a substantial amount of research towards a book on the history of the Supreme Court. This work remains unpublished.

Morris was a dedicated bike commuter, gardener, gleaner, forager and strong exponent of avoiding frivolous consumption of resources. The “free” box was her department store; the garden and wild places her larder. She loved music and often participated in community music groups, playing guitar and accordion. She was also known for jotting down ditties she thought would be helpful for explaining legal concepts important to other activists,

such as the “Quo Warranto Polka.”

Jane Anne Morris is survived by her sister Barbara Szymanski of North Muskegon, Michigan; two brothers, Charles Froelich of Aloha, Oregon and Richard Froelich of Morrisville, Pennsylvania; several nieces and nephews, and many loving friends. Sadly, her brother Robert Morris of Pennellville, New York died just five weeks after her.

For the large network of people who read and admired her work, Morris leaves a substantial body of writings – much of which has been republished on her website – for those who want to develop effective strategies for defending the earth, democracy, and all living creatures.

Posted at

<http://democracythemepark.org/>

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By What Authority (ISSN: 524-1106) is published by the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy. The title is English for *quo warranto*, a legal phrase that questions illegitimate exercise of privilege and power. We the people and our federal and state officials have long been giving giant business corporations illegitimate authority. Today, a minority directing giant corporations and backed by police, courts, and the military, define our culture, govern our nation and plunder the earth. **By What Authority** reflects an unabashed assertion of the right of the sovereign people to govern themselves.

POCLAD is a group of 7 people instigating democratic conversations and actions that contest the authority of corporations to govern. Our analysis evolves through historical and legal research, writing, public speaking and working with organizations to develop new strategies that assert people's rights over property interests.

BWA is a tool for democracy proponents to rethink and reframe their work. To that end we encourage readers to engage us with comments, questions and suggestions.

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