

# The lessons that outlive a professor

■ Political theory shaped mind, life

By HECTOR DE LEON

**M**Y favorite professor died two weeks ago. His name was Ross Lence, and he taught political theory at the University of Houston. I did not know him on a personal level, and the likelihood is that because of my less-than-stellar performances in his classes, he did not know who I was. But that doesn't matter. What is important are the lessons of responsibility, leadership and commitment that he imparted to me and other individuals who were fortunate enough to be his students.

The lessons are worth sharing because they are, in essence, timeless.

I can describe the most important lesson of them all in one phrase:

The greatest

deed any individual can manifest in his life is to contribute to the building of a good and just city. From the moment the idea was crystallized in my mind in his Greek political thought class, I was cognizant that everything I did or, or did not do, in my private and public life contributed in a negative or positive way to that high objective.

In other classes Professor Lence also guided my mind to the issue of the common good versus individual or selfish interest. I remember reading John C. Calhoun and examining the idea that individuals have two natural instincts, to be social and to be selfish, and how those instincts in some degree are at the heart of every act perpetrated by individuals in every aspect of life in a civil society.

I also took a course from him that combined sociology and political science titled "The Individual in Society."

In it, he contextualized thoughts of the great thinkers in a way that made me realize that the quality of justice created in a society is directly related to the spiritual, emotional and intellectual development of its citizenry and its leaders. That is, it meant that as an individual I should never stop cultivating my faculties and as a citizen to expect indi-

viduals who want to be public servants not only to understand Robert's Rules of Order but also understand the nature of man and the origins of government.

In taking every political theory course Professor Lence offered, I had the opportunity to examine the life and death of Socrates. Through the experience I not only received a lesson but a lifelong goal.

In Xenophon's version of the death of Socrates, Socrates is arrested and charged. While detained, Socrates' friends visit him and fearing that he would be found guilty and condemned to death, they encourage him to use his great powers with words to persuade the jury to decide in his favor. Af-

ter much deliberation, Socrates responded to his friends' pleas by telling them that he would not heed their advice. "I have come to realize that I have

spent my life in righteousness with God and Man. And that affords me the greatest satisfaction."

I felt that by talking about Socrates' journey, Professor Lence was telling me and all my fellow classmates that whatever we decided to do in life to commit fully and do it without regrets. The advancements we make as a people in regard to how we relate to one another depend on selfless individuals who not only possess great wisdom and an unequal commitment to a cause, but the courage to reason and act beyond the common feeling and popular opinions of the day.

In all, I cannot say if I correctly interpreted Professor Lence's lectures and assigned readings. But I can say that because of him I am a better person who continues to use the tools he provided in the effort to build a good and just city.

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