

Early Life: Rebels, Refugees, and Russians: The Unusual Path of Allegheny Professors

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Rebels, Refugees, and Russians: The Unusual Path of Allegheny Professors

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First 20 seconds of Richard Nixon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSaDp9sJIA>

Early Life Experiences

First 20 seconds of Richard Nixon Speech

1. Creedence Clearwater Revival - Fortunate Son comes in strong mashed with
2. "hell no, we won't go"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI58QbpVLHw>

John:

In 1970, President Richard Nixon gave his formal authorization to expand the vietnam war into Cambodia. In response to Nixon's decision, large numbers of protests broke out across the nation. And I know what your thinking, I thought this was a podcast about Allegheny College professors, it is, I promise. Because among those protestors was Allegheny English Professor David Miller.

David Miller Audio (3:45):

"Freshman year at Stanford, my Spring Semester, we shut the university down protesting Nixon's decision to expand the war into Cambodia."

David Miller Audio (4:05):

“everybody stayed on campus and we protested all through the spring, we were able to you know finish our courses somehow, on the side, but it was mostly confronting the police, and listening to uh, uh, to **Rebel Rousers**, like Jerry Rubin and Abby Hoffman who were you know these guys who would come around and get everybody worked up about the war and then, um, we'd go off and throw rocks at some of the buildings on the campus and the cops were on campus almost every night, you know, it was very exciting time but also of learning a lot about human nature and politics”

John:

While David Miller was learning a lot about human nature and politics in the protests, one thing he didn't know was that future colleague Glenn Holland a Professor of religious studies, would also be making his first steps into academia at Stanford University. In the coming years, Holland's future would also be unknown to himself. He enrolled into Stanford in the fall of 1970 as a drama major taking the stage.

Glenn Holland

GH:I was in a production of Edward, the second by Marlo, I was in a couple of productions of newly produced plays or first American productions, one called lightening at a funeral. Uh, another one was a Bertolt Brecht play called Punto Lo and his hired man, um, I was in a production of the alchemist. That was lovely and I played Claudius in Rosencrantz and guildenstern are dead. Oh Wow. So there, there are a few others. I, I was played the lead in E.E. Cummings, him in a student production and various other than I was in a lot of shows

John(still need to record we missed this one)

With David Miller attending rallies and Glenn Holland entering the spotlight, on the other side of the world, our third professor found himself in middle of a war for independence. In 1971, an attack on Bangladesh citizens resulted in what is often called the “Forgotten Genocide.” However, the battle for independence is far from forgotten to Allegheny Professor Shafiq Rahman.

Shafiq Rahman Audio:(1:21)

“I had started university education in Bangladesh, but the political situation, uh, started becoming very complicated and there was, at one point I found that, uh, there was some threat to my life and so it was, I, I actively started considering leaving the country.

There was an opportunity at that time and that several countries were offering fellowships. You have to be academically strong in order to get those. And so I applied for one for East Germany and that's how I went there.”

John:

There, meaning Martin Luther University outside of Leipzig, Germany. At this time, Leipzig was occupied by the Soviet Union. So as Professor Rahman traveled east of the Iron Curtain, so did Joshua Searle-White, our fourth professor. Born in San Jose, Professor Searle-White, a Russian Major, used his third year of college to further his education in the Soviet Union.

Joshua Searle-White:

“I was a Russian major and I really liked it. I got out of college and my first real job was working out on a Soviet fishing ship of the coast of Alaska for the summer totally great I learned so much you know about *fish* but also about Russian and about living because it was the working language out there.”

John:

All four of these future colleagues navigated their early lives in higher ed in the context of major world events. Individually these events of their youth shaped who they became as learners, teachers and community members. For example, Shafiq Rahman spoke about how his experiences in Bangladesh affected his view on the world

Shafiq Rahman: 27:00

“I've learned that instead of complaining, solve the problem, right? So, um, you know, where I come from, there has always been a problem between the government and the people. Right? And so people basically grow up with that mentality of, of the government will do nothing or nothing can be solved, right? So you'll see violence in public life, right? Uh, whereas what I learned both with my education in Germany and then coming here is that it is much more productive if instead of complaining, you say, well, here's the problem. What is the solution?”

John:

Although, Professor Rahman is pretty clear in how his youth affected who he is today, our other professors were not. That being said, despite all of their differences growing up, they all had a passion to continue their education. Joshua Searle White, followed his passion for learning Russian by traveling all the way to the Soviet Union. Professor

Rahman left Bangladesh to follow education. And David Miller, as well as Glenn Holland follow their passion for education overseas. Although you probably could have guessed by looking at the geographical path of education these professors took, the fields they studied were equally as unique and indirect.

~pause~

~insert music?~

You may be asking to yourself, why are we telling these stories, what do they have in common? Yes they were around the same age in the same period of time, but their stories all differ from one point to another. And that, is in fact the very reason we have decided to speak on these professors today. As college students, we chose majors, apply for internships, and spend countless hours contemplating where the next five years will take us. We do this all in the hope of preparing ourselves for the unknown, while quickly approaching the “real world”. The four of us who produced this podcast,

Barry Simmons, Fabian Camacho, Vinny Carone and me, John Seiber feel as a student, it is difficult for to see a future where we stray from the current academic track that we are on, whether that be looking towards future higher education or looking towards a future career. Kathy Davidson, speaks to this issue as well by saying, when students make their way through college, they want something more: a career, a vocation, a life path, a way to contribute, a way to make themselves and their families proud and their communities strong. They want to be change makers”(12), She calls this the “quarter life crisis.” Yet listening to the life stories of the professors who help to mold such young minds is a reminder to us unlucky few, or perhaps us lucky few, who are about to embark on a quarter life crisis of our own, that the future's uncertain and full

of opportunities. Opportunities to start over, and opportunities to grow. At Allegheny College, the motto is “Unusual Combinations”, and these professors are just that, Unusual combinations of personal experiences, and educational tracks. Cathy Davidson writes that college is more than just preparation of workforce readiness. As all of our interviews revealed, we all forge unique paths through a complicated and changing world. These early life experiences, coupled with our liberal arts educations, prepare us to imagine new ways of living and being together.

Insert Mediaville Introduction

College/Grad School

***Insert Kathy Davidson Themes to once again construct the overarching themes.

Relate how the fields they studied are different from the ones they now teach***.

“My students call this a “quarter-life crisis.” Instead of celebrations of youthful optimism at the beginning of bright careers, they throw twenty-fifth birthday parties to commemorate their collective indecision and existential sense of uselessness: degrees in hand, perfect grades, excellent credentials, top honors, few job prospects.” -18

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An interesting coincidence we found when interviewing these professors, with the exception of Professor Rahman, is that the fields they chose to study in undergrad are

completely different from their focus in grad school and during their tenure at Allegheny College. In fact, few went to undergrad with the ambition of becoming a professor. Kathy Davidson teaches us that these circumstances are the norm and demonstrates that the way college works today, we are not meant to come out of college prepared to be workforce ready.

She says,

“Indeed, many of the professions for which individuals now train in the most rigorous ways no longer exist in a way that makes sense. For example, many medical students end up earning a second degree in another field because medical school doesn’t prepare them for the way medicine is practiced. Occupations for which an advanced degree—including graduate degrees and professional school degrees—was required are rapidly being outsourced, offshored, or reduced to low-pay, insecure, “ambient” work.”

Because of this, many of our professors ended up jumping between jobs, taking extremely indirect paths to Allegheny, or going back to school for degrees completely unrelated to their original studies. An example of this is Glenn Holland, now a professor of religious studies, who majored in drama at Stanford University with no intention of becoming a professor.

Glenn Holland Interview Quote: 1:33 - 5:40

JS: Sure. So, um, growing up, did you, did you have an attraction towards higher education? Like did you think that you would also become a professor?

GH: Oh, that was something not my original intention. No, that was the decision I made later in life. My father was a professor, but I'm left a teaching psychology in order to practice it as I said, but there was something going on because my, my only sibling, my older sister who is a professor of philosophy and then I became a professor of religious studies. So there was obviously something going on there. Right. And My mother was an educator. My sister is married to a guy who does educational research and I'm married to a retired teacher. So. So as there's something going on there, right, right. I like telling people what to think.

JS: So, um, after high school you went on to Stanford? Yes. Right. And so when you became, you became a student there, did you immediately like go towards philosophy and religious studies?

GH: I did, I took courses in philosophy. I took courses in religion. Um, but that was not my main focus. My primary focus was drama. I was originally a drama major at Stanford, which is really not the place to be a drama major. Um, and uh, did a, uh, a fairly widely spread body of a steady outside of that, including English literature and history and psychology and a bunch of other stuff.

John:

As a student, it's extremely comforting to look at someone with the cool demeanor of Glenn Holland and to know that at this point in his life he was uncertain about his future, as many in the classroom are. I myself had the personal pleasure of interviewing

Professor Holland. A professor of more than thirty years, who attended Stanford for Undergrad, Oxford for Grad School and completed a phd program at University of Chicago who is able to lecture as if he were acting on stage is not the type of guy you would consider to be uncertain at a young age. That being said, it is his experience and versatility that makes him such a valuable member of the allegheny college community as well as the meadville community. The message Cathy Davison wants people to know is college should be more than preparation of workforce readiness. She states, “we must prepare our students for their epic journey, the mountain, and the cliff’s edges”

(13).

Professor Joshua Searle-White is an example of a young student who went to the cliffs edge and yet was also uncertain about his future. He majored in Russian and ended up fishing off the coast of Alaska for his first real job, but he knew eventually he wanted to do something different. He decided to go back to and ended up getting his Ph.D. in Psychology. From there, he received an internship as a Clinical Psychologist in Washington D.C and Boston. After he received his degrees he worked at two colleges before coming to Allegheny.

Joshua Searle-White Interview Quote:

I went to college and I knew from the first day I stepped foot in that place I would be a Russian major/language. When I got there I took Russian my second year I lived in a Russian house my third year I lived in the soviet union and my senior year I took an

introduction to psychology in the fall and abnormal behavior in the spring and that is the only psychology I took.

but I knew I didn't want to make Russian my career so after I got back I kinda kicked around worked a little bit more and said well i might as well go to graduate school for the stupidest reasons in the world I decided to get a Phd. which was because my mother had one year no real reason I didn't know what field so I went and got one of those little books how to figure out your career took the test in the back and it said you should be you know, a psychology person and I said oh that's sound cool I didn't know anything about psychology I took three more classes while I was working so I had five classes total in psychology before I applied. Then I applied to psychical psychology to one place, personality psychology, development psychology, and critical psychology to another place and the critical psychology place is what gave me the most money so i went there which was the stupidest process in the world do not recommend that you do that but it worked out for me because the place I went turned out because they liked me because I was different because i wasn't a psychology major because I was a Russian major they thought that was cool and they figured they can put a stamp on me when I was there which they did and that how I got into psychology graduate school.

John:

As mentioned before, it is difficult for me to see a future where I stray from the current academic track that I am on. I think this is also the case for many upperclassmen in higher education. We spend upwards of 16 years of education preparing ourselves for the rest of our lives. That's a pretty heavy concept, especially since you have to start

making these life changing decisions at the age of seventeen when you first start applying for college. I'm sure many would agree with me when I say that we change a lot from the age of 17 to 21. Who's to say we won't change even more from the age of 21 to 24. The wonderful thing is, that by looking at these professors, we can not only guarantee that we will change, but also that it is ok to change. For now, the most important decision we can make in our life is to make sure we continue to move forward by engaging in a variety of learning experiences. This final excerpt regarding undergraduate studies from our interview with David Miller is another phenomenal example of how difficult it can be to find your calling while also developing through life experiences.

David Miller Interview Quote: left off here

"I wrote a dissertation, eventually, on the Swamp as an image in American culture in the 19th century as both in painting and in literature, but also in folklore and popular culture, an all of these things. But having been so interdisciplinary it was difficult for me to get a job in English, which I had decided was the field I wanted to go into. I wanted to teach literature, even though I had, I was equally well versed in, in, in History and had, uh, a pretty large, uh, um, uh, (sort of) uh, uh um, informal background in Art History, um, so you know, I had to develop a basically credibility as a English Teacher, but luckily and I, I almost came to the end of my career after a first year at Bennington College, which, is kind of a wild wholly place. Um, when I hadn't really I had, I had, been holding out to get a permanent Job, it-it was just a visitors position, but uh, uh circumstances didn't work out. And that summer, um, I had no prospects whatsoever, I was going to teach on an

aircraft carrier in Guam, for six weeks and then maybe travel, um, whatever money I managed to save. So that was sort of the way I was thinking, I didn't, I didn't, you know really, um, worry much, about what was going to happen next”

(Dramatic Pause Leading into the next segment) or (Soundscape of airplane taking off)

Post-Grad - Finding Allegheny

John:

These unusual combinations made our professors perfect fits for Allegheny College; however, even after graduate school they weren't quite on track to teach at Allegheny College just yet. For Professor David Miller, a recent PhD graduate from Brown University this meant a quick professorship at Bennington College for a short year before working in New Mexico for a summer. He thought this may be what his profession would be for a while until a late summer's day...

David Miller quote

“I was doing yard work with my brother, who was getting, you know, developing a contracting business in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and I think it was mid-August two weeks from the start of school. I had really no, no prospect other than that. And, um, I had my, my um, sister-in-law called out the back door when I was in the backyard at one point, and said ‘David, Harvard's on the phone.’”

John:

One would think there's no moving on from Harvard. If you go to Harvard to study or teach, there's really no way to go up from there. However, in the case of David Miller, Cambridge, Massachusetts just didn't feel like home. Professor Miller taught there for a couple years before moving on again. This time to Reed College in Portland Oregon.

Finally, after Stanford, Brown, and Harvard it was Reed College that pushed David Miller to be unusual enough for Allegheny. He left Harvard mostly because he thought he was going to get a tenure at Reed College. Fortunately for Allegheny, it turns out that the school misled him with a position. He felt like he was moving too much and had no sense of home until he came to Allegheny College. Even though, the jobs were interesting he wanted to stay grounded in a college that would commit to him.

After a visit to Allegheny and Meadville, he felt at home. He has been at Allegheny College for 33 years.

David Miller:

"everybody was very friendly, both at the college and also downtown. And I was impressed that people seemed to remember me even after several months of, you know, if I came into their shop and hadn't been there in a while, they seemed to know who I was"

John:

David Miller obviously felt at home right away here at Allegheny and Meadville, and that is a feeling many of the professors and staff we interviewed felt. This is obviously an

important part of their journey to Allegheny and if you're interested in hearing more about it be sure to check out our next podcast segment entitled "Meadville, Changing

the Gap."

~pause~

music

Conclusion

John:

After looking at our professors graduating from high class universities with various degrees and honors you would expect them to be immediately employed. However, like many of us who are graduating from Allegheny and looking for jobs or further degrees, they were lost. Kathy Davidson also relates to this in her book *New Education* where she says, " my students call this a "quarter-life crisis." Instead of celebrations of youthful optimism at the beginning of bright careers, they throw twenty-fifth birthday parties to commemorate their collective indecision and existential sense of uselessness: degrees in hand, perfect grades, excellent credentials, top honors, few job prospects." Yet for as indecisive and intense of their sense of existential uselessness was, our professors figured it out. They kept applying, they kept changing, they kept moving forward. Eventually, their unique paths and early lives made them indispensable at Allegheny College. Glenn Holland, although officially a professor in Religious Studies, used his drama degree from Stanford to participate in the Allegheny College drama club, the Meadville Community Theatre, and Allegheny's own radio station WARC. Shafiq Rahman's experiences growing up made him the professor he is today where he encourages students to solve problems, and has been deeply involved in the public

library where he responsible for numerous book donations. David Miller used his unique background to lead a regional studies program, unique freshman seminars, going on EL trips to Italy, and now teaching Art History classes in the city of Meadville. Finally, Joshua Searle-White has used his interesting combinations to teach different Freshman Seminars at Allegheny, including a class on human potential movement which focuses on the protests and movements that he was surrounded by at Stanford and in California. Most importantly, these professors have used the various aspects of their early life to mold and grow thousands of young minds while encouraging them to take risks and experience life.

Although we weren't able to cover all of the professors we interviewed. Thankfully, they fit perfectly into our other podcasts, which will cover the Meadville and Allegheny communities coming together as one, the structural changes of Allegheny College, and the relationships between students and faculty. So moving forward, we would like to thank you for taking your time listening to our podcast Rebels, Refugees, and Russians: The Unusual Path of Allegheny Professors and we hope you tune into our classmates podcasts as well!