

Jim Heilbrun (1925–2008)

Charles M. Gray

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Prominent cultural economist James (Jim) Heilbrun passed away on April 8 in New York City, where he was born 83 years ago and lived most of his life. Jim is a former member of the editorial board of this journal, but most readers would probably be more familiar with him as the co-author of *The Economics of Art and Culture*, and he was working on the third edition of that book at the time of his passing.

Jim received his undergraduate and master's degrees from Harvard University and his doctoral degree in economics from Columbia University. He was a retired professor of economics at Fordham University, where his colleagues described him as a genuine gentleman and scholar. His strong interest in urban economics shaped his early research agenda and resulted in a widely adopted textbook, *Urban Economics and Public Policy*.

His appreciation for the New York City cultural scene, especially the New York City Ballet, naturally attracted Jim to cultural economics. I met Jim at the third international conference of the Association for Cultural Economics in Akron, Ohio, in 1984. While sitting in a hotel bar, we decided that the world needed a comprehensive overview of the economics of the arts, a book that could serve as a combination text, research monograph, and cultural policy guide. Thus began a 24-year collaboration through two editions of the book and a chapter in Cherbo and Wyszomirski's *The Public Life of the Arts in America*. It was at the American Assembly that culminated in that volume that Jim most memorably objected to debasing the fine and high arts by defining them broadly and indiscriminately. As he said at that time, "Legal forms are not art!"

Jim unapologetically drew a sharp distinction between the higher arts and popular culture. He strongly favored life-long arts education as the means of promoting investment in the consumption skills required for a deeper appreciation beyond

C. M. Gray (✉)
University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA
e-mail: cmgray@stthomas.edu

mere entertainment. His research notably examined the decline in the high arts, especially in the US. An examination of US opera companies revealed that while opera has been a growth industry, companies have been shifting their programming toward a more popular and less demanding repertory. Similarly, he found a significant decline in the coverage of high culture by the *New York Times*, including statistical evidence that advertising affected content. Needless to say, Jim was displeased by these findings.

Jim continued to participate in the ACEI after his retirement from Fordham, attending all biannual meetings and several interim conferences up through the 2000 gathering in Minneapolis. Even after extensive travel became too burdensome for him, he continued an active research stream.

Jim was married to well-known feminist scholar and author, Carolyn Heilbrun, long-time professor of English at Columbia University, who predeceased him in 2003. Theirs was a mutually supportive dual career marriage long before that became the norm. Jim is survived by his daughters Emily and Margaret, his son, Robert, and two grandchildren.

Jim Heilbrun was a gifted writer, a perceptive policy critic, and a diligent, imaginative, and productive scholar. His contributions to cultural economics were seminal, and his influence will be felt for many years to come.