

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

# PETER H. JUVILER

1926–2013

ON THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE'S 2011 ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR AND COFOUNDER OF BARNARD'S HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM—THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE UNITED STATES

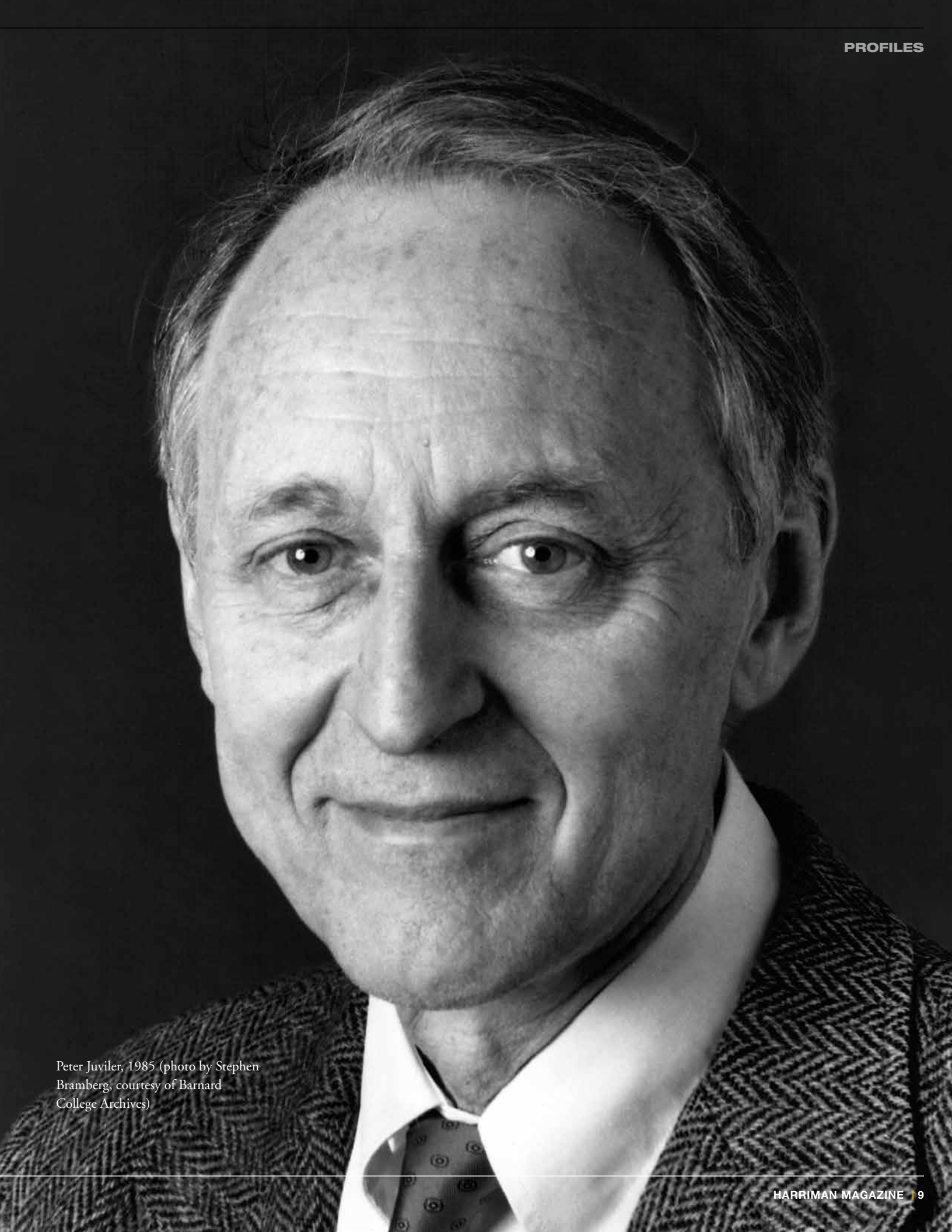
**B**y all accounts, Peter H. Juviler was a gentleman. A man of refined appearance and tastes—blazers, pleated trousers, and an enduring passion for art and classical music—he had an insatiable curiosity about life, and the rare ability to connect and empathize with people regardless of social standing or political leanings. Though he lived through the times of World War II, and suffered discrimination as a Jew, Juviler maintained a firm belief in the intrinsic goodness of humankind. Students and colleagues remember him as a “hero,” a man of unshakable principles and someone who valued their opinions, no matter how trite. Always putting himself on the line for the sake of knowledge, he studied communism at the height of McCarthyism, brought members of the radical Black Panthers Party to Barnard College in the midst of extreme racial tensions, and helped popularize the field of human rights when few scholars took it seriously as an academic enterprise.

Juviler was born in London, into a musical Jewish family. His mother, Katherine, of Russian and German descent, was a professional pianist who had studied under the British pianist Dame Myra Hess, and his father, Adolphe, a successful Polish entrepreneur who imported and sold German musical instruments. The couple led a life of art and high culture, associating with the likes of Marc Chagall and Raoul Dufy. But, in the late '30s, Adolphe fell seriously ill and lost his business. In 1939, they left London for New York with their two sons (Juviler was thirteen at the time, his younger brother, Michael, was three) in search of better medical treatment. The move was supposed to be temporary, but then World War II broke out, London was bombed for eight months straight, and many of Adolphe's kin perished in the Holocaust.

(Surviving friends and relatives visited the Juvilers in New York; the family was once evicted from a home in Queens for having too many Jewish guests.) After a period of financial hardship and constant relocation, the Juvilers settled on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Meanwhile, Juviler was growing into a scholarly teenager. He lined his walls with books like *Lawrence of Arabia* and spent much of the time studying at his desk. (“I was a real nuisance and constantly trying to interrupt him,” remembers Michael, “but he was always very patient with me.”) Having skipped two grades, Juviler graduated from the Franklin School (now Dwight) at age sixteen and received awards in nearly every subject. He enrolled at Yale, studied electrical engineering for three years, and interrupted his course work to enlist in the U.S. Navy. Stationed in Monterey, he oversaw radar on a repair ship and waited to invade Japan. One 1945 August morning, in the navy mess hall, he opened the newspaper to a surprise: the U.S. had bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He was both troubled by the use of atomic weapons and frustrated that he lost the chance to be a hero. The war over, he returned to Yale, finished his B.E. in 1948, stayed another year for an M.E., and was hired by the Sperry Corporation.

It was not long before he became unsatisfied with his career. Not only did he hate being stuck in a lab all day dealing with machines (as a Jew, he was forced to sit in the back—Sperry didn't want him interacting with the clients), but he was also discontented with his position in the context of the international climate. In 1950, as part of Truman's “containment” policy against the spread of communism, the United States entered the Korean War to defend South Korea from invasion by the USSR and China-backed North



Peter Juviler, 1985 (photo by Stephen  
Bramberg, courtesy of Barnard  
College Archives)



Juviler with students in 1986 (photo by G. Steve Jordan, courtesy of Barnard College Archives)

Korean People's Army. In the U.S., the war was portrayed as a battle between good and evil: the communists against defenders of freedom. Juviler, who had spent more than two years designing equipment for military ships, questioned this simplicity. He despised the fact that he felt like a cog in a machine; he wanted to understand how the cogs worked.

In hopes of getting to the root of international tensions, Juviler quit his job and, in the fall of 1952, enrolled in a master's program at Columbia University's Department of Law and Government, where he embarked on a study of the Soviet Union at the Russian Institute. During this period he began to take an interest in the philosophies of Marx and Engels and realized that he was not entirely unsympathetic to their ideas. Unable to advertise these interests during the McCarthy era, he and fellow students disguised any books about communism in white jackets. But classroom

education took Juviler only so far. He wanted to travel to the USSR, where, since World War II, Stalin had allowed few foreigners.

"Now it's the most natural thing to go anywhere you choose," says his former classmate George Sherman. "But at that time the Soviet Union was a big blank for most of the outside world."

The atmosphere changed in March 1953, when Stalin suddenly died of a stroke. A battle for power ensued within the Kremlin, and Nikita Khrushchev, vying for succession, started advocating peaceful coexistence with the U.S. by granting interviews to the Western press. That summer, Juviler went to Middlebury College for intensive Russian language study; soon he and seven classmates wrote to Khrushchev directly, asking for visas. Khrushchev responded, but he granted only four, for travel in the summer of 1954. For unknown reasons, Juviler, along with Sherman, was denied.

**"Now it's the most natural thing to go anywhere you choose, but at that time the Soviet Union was a big blank for most of the outside world." —George Sherman, former classmate**



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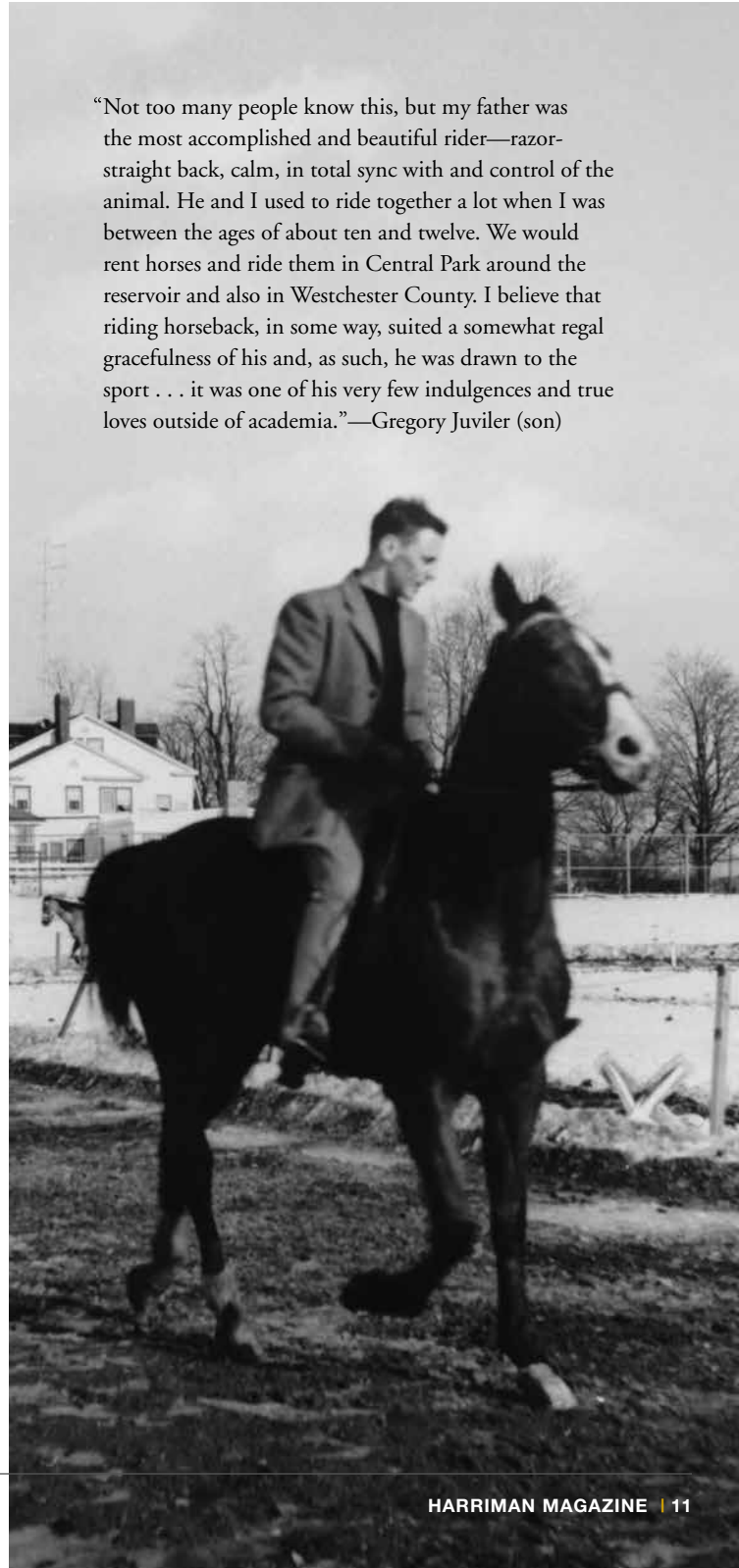
When their friends returned after the monthlong trip and spoke of the wonderful time they had had, Juviler and Sherman sent Khrushchev a telegram. Their program over, Juviler, who had completed his master's thesis on the aims and organization of Soviet education, planned to enroll in the Ph.D. program at Columbia in public law and government, while Sherman went to study at Oxford. In December, Sherman took a vacation to Austria. One afternoon, Sherman remembers, he received a call, at the front desk of a ski resort, from Juviler. Khrushchev had granted them two-week visas.

They would finally have the chance to see the Soviet Union firsthand, and they wanted to play a role in easing international tensions by exposing Soviet life to the Western world. Though neither of them had any journalism experience, they pitched a series of articles about their upcoming trip to prominent newspapers, like the *New York Times* and *Herald Tribune*. Ultimately, it was the *Observer*, in London, under the liberal leadership of David Astor, that agreed to publish their accounts of ordinary life in the USSR.

But before they could even get to the USSR, they had to immunize their motives against McCarthyism. As a precaution, Juviler wrote a letter to the prominent Sovietologist Philip Mosley, at that time director of the Russian Institute. "I have no sympathy for the Soviet system," he stated, "but am undertaking the trip in order to improve my qualifications as a student, and I hope eventually, scholar of the Soviet area. It would seem that the better we know the USSR, the more surely we'll be able to guard our democratic way of life." Sherman theorizes that Juviler's letter was intended to protect Mosley in the event of any scrutiny about supporting his students in this endeavor.

The trip took place in late March of 1955 (still the dead of winter in the USSR). Juviler and Sherman landed in Leningrad and traveled straight to Moscow, where they were surprised that the living conditions of their mighty adversary were in shambles. "Words cannot convey the drabness of the gray and rundown cityscape," says Sherman. "But it made all the more striking the warmth and eagerness among many of the ordinary people we encountered." By their dress, he and Juviler were immediately identified as Westerners, and sometimes they had trouble making it past the entrance to the hotel before crowds gathered and asked them mundane questions about life in the U.S. What were their wages? Did everyone really own refrigerators? Homes? Then the police would approach and ask the crowds to move on. Juviler and Sherman would move on as well, and stragglers followed. A few blocks later, the whole scene would repeat itself.

"Not too many people know this, but my father was the most accomplished and beautiful rider—razor-straight back, calm, in total sync with and control of the animal. He and I used to ride together a lot when I was between the ages of about ten and twelve. We would rent horses and ride them in Central Park around the reservoir and also in Westchester County. I believe that riding horseback, in some way, suited a somewhat regal gracefulness of his and, as such, he was drawn to the sport . . . it was one of his very few indulgences and true loves outside of academia."—Gregory Juviler (son)



**“As a citizen in this *free* country,” Juviler wrote to the postmaster in May 1965, demanding his issues of *Kommunist*, which the post office had stopped delivering, “I do not expect to find the same obstruction of my scholarly work that my counterparts experience in the Soviet Union.”**

In the allotted two weeks, Juviler and Sherman also visited Leningrad and Kyiv. They rarely had time to sleep and were together constantly, often charged with making stressful decisions in an unpredictable environment. But there was not a tense moment between them. As a travel companion, Juviler remained calm, reasoned soberly, and extricated them out of even the stickiest situations, speaking fluent, graceful Russian. (They frequently faced police scrutiny for taking unwanted photographs and were once forced to sign a confession for accidentally photographing a colonel swigging cognac in a café.) Smoothing things over was “one of Peter’s many talents,” says Sherman. “He had a great tenderness and established rapport with all types of people almost instantaneously.”

Upon their return, Juviler and Sherman urged the Ford Foundation, which had funded their trip and was starting to take a prominent role in international affairs, to create a student exchange program with the Soviet Union. Three years later, Khrushchev and Eisenhower formally agreed to establish the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants, which eventually became the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and laid the foundation for future exchange programs. Juviler participated in the first exchange,

spending the 1958–59 academic year studying the Supreme Soviet at Moscow State University. While his contemporaries studied Soviet issues from a military perspective, Juviler applied himself to cultural and social issues, such as family reform, gender, sexuality, and the criminal justice system—topics that paved the way for his eventual interest in human rights.

In 1964, after four years of teaching at Hunter College, Juviler returned to Columbia as associate professor in the Department of Government (later the Department of Political Science) at Barnard College. Once again, his professional environment frustrated him. Only this time, it was U.S. government censorship he encountered as a scholar. Peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union now seemed a faraway dream: the countries had come close to destroying each other in the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, and the U.S. was only heading deeper into a proxy war against communism in Vietnam. “As a citizen in this *free* country,” Juviler wrote to the postmaster in May 1965, demanding his issues of *Kommunist*, which the post office had stopped delivering, “I do not expect to find the same obstruction of my scholarly work that my counterparts experience in the Soviet Union.”



Juviler was deeply distressed by the Vietnam War. In early 1966, he wrote to the editors of the *New York Times* asking, “Are we going to continue these brutal yet ineffectual raids for the sake of some tenuous boost in South Vietnamese morale?” Privately, he opined in a letter to his more conservative neighbor Maggie, “I feel deep despair, tinged only by a touch of hope, for the next few years. Taxes for war crimes, silent assent in the most heinous acts of barbarism committed in the name of saving a country we are destroying to prove what? . . . Maggie, it’s too late to say this, but read only the parts of the letter you agree with.” The exchange was typical for Juviler, who welcomed conversation with those who opposed him. At his country house in Delhi, New York, where he spent weekends and sabbaticals with his first wife and their two sons, he would frequently entertain his neighbors, Republican farmers. “It was almost like he used to hold court there,” says his youngest son Geoffry. “He listened, and also challenged, when discussing political issues.”

In April 1968, the legendary Columbia protests broke out. Students were angry about the University’s relationship with the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), a think tank affiliated with the U.S. Department of Defense that supported the Vietnam War, and the school’s plans to build a gymnasium, opposed by the Harlem community, in city-owned Morningside Park. Juviler initially watched the events with bemusement from Barnard, through a window that overlooked the Columbia campus. But, as students took over buildings, separating along ideological and racial lines, the tension grew palpable. As an alumnus of Columbia, a professor of Columbia students, scholar of communism, and in general, somebody quite concerned with the issues, Juviler could not stay on the sidelines for long.

One night, while at home listening to the radio, he realized there would be trouble. He walked to campus and joined other faculty members trying to mediate between the demonstrators and the administration. From then on, Juviler was a member of the Ad Hoc Faculty Group, spending days and nights patrolling in front of Low Library, separating the occupiers from those who might threaten them. On April 30, at 3:00 a.m., the police stormed occupied buildings using tear gas and hitting protesters with their clubs. An officer kicked Juviler—outside, barricading the protesters from the police—in the ribs (he ultimately had to have surgery), but Juviler, who never liked drawing attention to himself, reported it only when his testimony protected a fellow participant.

Later that spring Columbia acquiesced to the students’ demands, cutting off its ties with the IDA and shelving its plans for the gymnasium, and the protests subsided. But tensions lingered. Juviler, who had voted against amnesty for protestors because it was against his principles to expect pardon after calculated acts of civil disobedience, was frustrated by the toxic environment on campus and wanted to channel these tensions into productive classroom discussion. He created Modern Political Movements, a course that would examine the intersection of “ideologies and situations” and function as a safe space for students across the ideological spectrum to discuss contemporary issues, air grievances, and gain real-life

Left (facing page): Juviler with fellow faculty in 1990 (photo courtesy of Barnard College Archives); right (below): April 23, 1968, Sundial Rally—crowd of people moving toward Low Library (photo by Gerald S. Adler)







From left to right: Faculty (with white armbands) speaking with student occupiers sitting on Low Library ledge outside President Kirk's Office, 1968 (courtesy of the Office of Public Affairs Protest & Activism photograph collection); view of gymnasium construction site in Morningside Park, 1968 (photo by Steve Ditlea); Harriman director Timothy M. Frye awarding Juviler with the 2011 Alumnus of the Year Award (Columbia University Photography)

exposure. To produce political theater, twice per semester he would invite speakers from these movements in consecutive lectures and have them offer opposing views.

Around this time, Juviler interviewed the Ghandi scholar Dennis Dalton for a position in the department. Dalton was an American who had been teaching happily at the London School of Economics. But his father had fallen ill in New Jersey, and he was planning to move back to the U.S. He was torn about taking the untenured Barnard position, until he returned to London, where a long supportive letter, sent by special delivery from Juviler, was waiting for him. "That was the clincher," says Dalton, who was immediately struck by Juviler's openness and the unique combination of charm and humility the scholar projected.

When Dalton arrived at Columbia later in the year, long after the protests had passed, he was shocked by the strained atmosphere and confessed to Juviler that he was anxious about which side of the conflict to take. Juviler listened calmly (he had the tendency to close his eyes during such moments), smiled, and said, "Dennis, just be yourself."

The two quickly became close friends, and Juviler, feeling that Dalton's interests in nonviolence and civil rights aligned naturally with his own, invited him to co-teach *Modern Political Movements*. They would each give five lectures, Dalton's Ghandi-centric and Juviler's delivered through the prism of his Soviet expertise. After months spent perfecting the syllabus (trading a stack of annotated, typewritten onion skin pages over snail mail throughout their summer travels), they wondered if anyone would even show up. When they walked into the classroom, it was so crowded they had trouble making their way to the podium.

Juviler was already an extremely popular professor, but Dalton had never lectured a class close to that size (there were more than 250 students). Trying to calm his nerves, Dalton asked Juviler how he was feeling.

"Well, Dennis," Juviler said, "I didn't sleep a wink last night."

Juviler was an unforgettable lecturer. He had complete command of his subject, delivering information in an engaging and logical manner, and sometimes used song lyrics to illustrate his points. (Dalton calls him "a real punster" and credits much of his own teaching success to mimicking his colleague.) *Modern Political Movements* soon earned the moniker "The Peter and Dennis Show," and its students earned an unmatched education. A multitude of speakers visited the classroom, including the Marxist American dissident Lyndon LaRouche, followed by Ernie Brosang of the anticommunist and anarchist John Birch Society. Perhaps the most memorable class featured members of the Black Panther Party arriving at Lehman Hall in full regalia, flanked by two armed body guards, touting an ideology of "violent insurrection" and characterizing Juviler and Dalton as "incurable racists." The goal was to expose the students to as many opinions as possible, and the Panthers' presentation (they read Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, followed by a lengthy conversation with the students) was soon contrasted by an appearance from David Dellinger, a pacifist and leader of the antiwar movement. No matter how heated the classroom became (one time a student got so angry he jumped up and started chasing a speaker around the room), Juviler was "a model of civility," says Dalton. "Again and again we advocated Justice Holmes's classic judgment that we must defend 'freedom for the thought that we hate.'"

Teaching became the main solace to Juviler's despair about domestic politics. "More than ever I feel that the hope for our beleaguered country lies with the youth who went through the last few years with eyes opened in ways never before . . . and a new determination to make a difference as a group," he wrote to a friend in January of 1970. "Teaching, so often a frustrating experience in the short run of chaos and trouble for the schools, gains new meaning in longer perspective. Although we all have been

landed on time and again for those terrible things we teach the poor innocent students, I am really proud of the sort of people our graduates turn out to be.” And he went to the ends of the earth for anyone who came through his classroom (once, after slipping on ice on his way to class, he taught a lecture, unflinching, then went to the doctor to discover that he had taught with a broken leg). “He didn’t just have two children; he got tremendous satisfaction from nurturing his students through the four years of Barnard,” says Juviler’s son Geoffry, who remembers his father receiving calls from his pupils at all hours.

The year 1975 opened a new chapter in Juviler’s career. Thirty-five nations signed the Helsinki Accords, a compromise geared to improve relations between the West and the Communist bloc: the West would respect the East’s borders, and the East would adhere to the fundamental values of human rights. This led to the creation of human rights groups, such as Helsinki Watch (eventually Human Rights Watch), throughout the world and most importantly, within the borders of the USSR. The period was both fascinating and uplifting for Juviler, who, as his former student and colleague Flora Davidson puts it, “was involved in human rights before it was even called human rights.” He began to research the field in a broader sense, expanding his focus to other parts of the world, such as South and Central America and the Middle East. Meanwhile, a community of human rights scholars was emerging on the Barnard and Columbia campuses, and Juviler immersed himself in it. In the late 1970s, he became involved with the budding University Seminar for Human Rights—a discussion-based interdisciplinary seminar series—which he would eventually cochair. He also helped shape the development of the Center for Human Rights (now the Institute for the Study of Human Rights) at Columbia, serving as both a member of its Executive Committee and as codirector. In 1988, he became the first U.S. scholar to lecture on human rights in the USSR at the Institute of State and Law, the USSR Academy of Sciences, and the Moscow University Faculty of Law. And, in the year 2000, when he was seventy-four years old, he managed, despite significant opposition, to create the first undergraduate program for the study of human rights in the United States, at Barnard College.

In his quiet and gentle manner, Juviler channeled his unrelenting passion for human rights to the next generation of human rights practitioners. “People need to use human rights to empower lives,” he once told his colleague, George Andreopolous, after being delayed to a meeting because of a student, “and there is no limit to the time it takes to teach them.” Barnard graduate Paula Franzese will never forget Juviler’s office hours, which were supposed to take place on Tuesdays from 2 to 4 p.m. A line would extend down the fourth floor hallway at Lehman Hall. Students would wait for hours, sometimes until as late as eight o’clock. When they arrived at his door wondering if, perhaps, they should reschedule, Juviler would smile and say, “I’m so happy to see you.” □

BOOKS

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*Human Rights for the 21st Century: Foundations for Responsible Hope: A U.S. Post-Soviet Dialogue*, edited with Bertram Gross (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1993)

*Gorbachev’s Reforms: U.S. and Japanese Assessment*, edited with Hiroshi Kimura (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988)

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*Soviet Policy-Making: Studies of Communism in Transition*, edited with Henry Morton (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967)

PETER JUVILER FUND

In memory of Peter Juviler, who touched the lives of thousands of students and colleagues and who dedicated himself to the promotion of religious tolerance, responsible citizenship, and human dignity, Barnard has launched an initiative to endow a fund in support of the study and practice in the field of human rights. The Juviler Fund will ensure that new generations of Barnard Human Rights majors will continue in Juviler’s footsteps, as they address ethical and practical issues in our increasingly interconnected world.

The Juviler Fund will support awards for travel and research, and strengthen the promotion of the major. Over time, Barnard hopes to expand the Fund to include additional aspects, including faculty support, fellowships, internships, and financial aid assistance for Human Rights majors. The initial goal is to raise \$100,000 to endow the Fund, which will ensure that Juviler’s work and legacy are memorialized in perpetuity.

To make a gift, please visit [www.barnard.edu/gift](http://www.barnard.edu/gift) and enter “Juviler Fund” in the “Restricted Funds” box. For more information, call 212-870-2569 or write Robin Roy at [rroy@barnard.edu](mailto:rroy@barnard.edu).