

Sadly Benjamin R. Barber (1939-2017) passed away yesterday at the age of 78. He came to Rutgers in 1969 and for more than thirty years played a principal role in providing our political theory section with a national reputation. Ben was among the most important proponents of what is known as “democratic theory” and, in keeping with his roots in the 1960s, he was always an advocate of civic



participation at the local level from his first book, *The Death of Communal Liberty* (1974), to his last works such as *If Mayors Ruled the World* (2014) and *Cool Cities* (2017) that appeared days before his death. Deeply influenced by Rousseau and American pragmatism, his classic *Strong Democracy* (1984) provided the theoretical foundation for his understanding of democracy.

He was also deeply concerned with foreign affairs, and America’s standing in the world. His most popular work, *Jihad and MacWorld* (1995), was a critical intervention into what now appears as the stale controversy regarding the “clash of civilizations.” While among the most important political theorists of our time, however, Ben was also an activist. He served as a principal advisor for Howard Dean’s 2004 run for the presidency and then also as an adviser to President Bill Clinton during his presidency. That commitment was carried over into the last years of his life as a commentator on political affairs, as a media personality, and as the founder and guiding spirit of various non-governmental organizations. For us, here at Rutgers University he will perhaps be best remembered as a teacher and colleague who advised any number of graduate students and made a lasting impression on everyone. Ben was a larger than life personality; our discipline and our society will be the poorer without him. Stephen Bronner and Dennis Bathory.

Link to Ben’s 2013 TED talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_barber_why_mayors_should_rule_the_world