

## Barry R. Gross 1936–1995

Barry Gross was NAS's most resolute optimist, dauntless whatever the challenge. He acquired his fighting spirit in an unusual way, not on any playing field but through the practice of the connoisseurship to which he was devoted. For Barry loved all things of quality, be they wines, food, clothing or, better yet, brilliant ideas, elegant turns of logic, or finely crafted arguments. Devoted to excellence and constant in its pursuit, he never doubted that the life of the mind, once it had recomposed itself, would resume its steady advance toward enlightenment.

This dauntless optimism, coupled with Barry's other formidable talents, comprised an immense organizational asset. Always the happy warrior, he cheerfully entered innumerable lions' dens, trusting steeled analysis and his dextrous wit to see him through. Only Barry could have transfixed a conference of affirmative action officers with a lecture on the perils of Balkanization, or fascinated an audience of Wellesley students and faculty with a wry dissection of gay studies, or ventured up to Harlem to debate, among others, Al Sharpton. (Wisely, Al didn't show.)

Barry's intrepid advocacy, though sharp when necessary, was never ugly. Indeed, unfailing courtesy and respect for others were hallmarks of his deportment. Moreover, his appreciation for the charms of the human personality was as well developed as his other tastes, and he enjoyed the company of—and could readily put at ease—many with whom he profoundly differed. In not a few such cases friendships blossomed.

A natural diplomat, patient in the pursuit of his ends, Barry gentled numerous people into our fold who would otherwise have kept a suspicious distance. Prolonged conversation with Barry, usually over a savory repast, convinced a parade of skeptics that we were not the mirror images of the zealots we opposed, but persons of substance, nuance, humor, and—obviously—cultivation. Even when Barry could not persuade, he always provided a model of reasoned discourse that, by embodying what he most prized, still advanced his cause.

Barry was one of the founders of the NAS, and worked tirelessly within it for more than thirteen years, serving as a board member, treasurer, and national program director. The worth of his services and friendship were deeply appreciated by all his colleagues, and, increasingly, by a widening circle of admirers outside the association. Indeed, at the time of his passing he stood on the threshold of a new phase in his career, which—had it been crossed—would have provided a wider stage for his talents. Particularly through his work as president of the New York Association of Scholars, Barry had begun to make himself a staple of local broadcasting. As an authority on the troubles of The City University of New York (in which he taught), his opinions were solicited with growing frequency by both journalists and government officials. Among his immediate prospects was elevation to a position of substantial authority within the CUNY system. We can be certain that had this occurred,

Barry's influence on policy would have been lasting and important. We can be equally sure that he would have had a great time exercising it.

Barry decided to leave the largest part of his estate to the NAS as an endowment. Yet this last, generous gift is hardly his principal legacy. He will be most remembered for the superb example of courage, conviction, good humor, and style he afforded all who knew him. Barry was, quite simply, a class act.

Steve Balch  
President, NAS