



A MESSAGE FROM INTERIM PRESIDENT

**Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.**

## **“Remembering Peter Roman (1941-2020): People’s Social Scientist”**

Dear Hostos Family,

It is with great sadness that I announce the loss of Hostos Professor Emeritus Peter Roman.



Not only was Dr. Roman a long-time professor of Political Science at Hostos and a Coordinator of the Social Sciences Unit. He was also one of the founders of the College, and – as Chair of the Behavioral and Social Sciences Department Ernest Ialongo points out – “one of its defenders when needed”. Dr. Roman joined the faculty in 1971 and, in 1976, was an active member of the “Save Hostos” Committee when New York State threatened to close the institution. He retired in 2019 to pursue a variety of editorial and political activities. Dr. Roman died in July 2020, but we only recently received the sad news.

Dr. Roman was, as Dr. Ialongo said, “a staunch and unfailingly determined defender of academic freedom in and out of the classroom”.

We mourn the loss of this gifted and much-respected member of the Hostos family.

In sympathy,

Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.  
Interim President

### **Remarks from Professor Marcella Bencivenni, Professor of History in the Behavioral and Social Sciences Department**

#### **“Remembering Peter Roman (1941-2020): People’s Social Scientist”**

Peter Roman, Professor Emeritus in the Behavioral and Social Sciences Department and a well-known scholar on Cuban politics, died on July 20, 2020, at the age of 79. Prof. Roman taught at Hostos for nearly fifty years, from 1971 to 2019, when he eventually retired. Uncompromising, unconventional, and fiery, he was an outstanding political scientist and educator who inspired and mentored countless numbers of students with his powerful teaching and his activism.

Peter was born on March 16, 1941 in Los Angeles, and as a boy there (a fact that will surprise many) he had a brief run in Hollywood, starring in the film *You Gotta Stay Happy* (1948), the family TV series *The Pepsi-Cola Playhouse* (1953), and *Tales of the Texas Rangers* (1955). Peter later attended the University of California at Berkeley, graduating cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1961. He then studied at Princeton University, earning MA and Ph.D. degrees in Political Science.

Peter began his academic career at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, where he taught from 1967 to 1969. After working briefly as a journalist for *The National Guardian* in New York he joined Hostos Community College in 1971. One of the first faculty hired in the Behavioral and Social Sciences Department, Peter quickly distinguished himself as a captivating teacher, active unionist, and crusader for academic freedom and faculty rights. In 1976, when New York State planned to close Hostos, he was active in the Save Hostos Committee, fighting successfully along with students and other faculty to keep the college's mission alive.

During the late seventies, Peter served as chairperson of the Behavioral-Social Sciences Department and chapter chairperson of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the faculty union at CUNY. He then became the coordinator of the Social Sciences Unit, a position he held until 2018, a year prior to his retiring. Among other notable contributions to the college, he spearheaded the "Social Sciences Speakers Series," bringing to the campus eminent scholars such as Eric Foner, David Nasaw, David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz, among many others.

A recipient of numerous scholarly awards (including six PSC CUNY Research awards and four CUNY-Caribbean Exchange Program Grants), Prof. Roman published *People's Power: Cuba's Experience with Representative Government* in 1999. The book made a strong impact on Cuban studies and comparative government. Offering a candid discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Castro's socialist democracy, Peter compelled readers to look at Cuba in a different way. "This well-researched and -written book," wrote *Political Affairs*, "will come as a revelation to many readers. *People's Power*, based on years of field work and first-hand experience of Cuban elections and the workings of representative bodies, demonstrates that there is a functioning popular democratic political culture as the basis of the Cuban government." A testament to its influence on the field, the book was reprinted in 2003 by Rowman & Littlefield.

Following the book's publication, Peter was promoted to Full Professor and in 2000 served as a professor of political science at the Graduate School of the City University of New York (CUNY Graduate Center). In addition to *People's Power*, he coedited several special journal issues on Cuba and published numerous articles and reviews in political science periodicals, including "Electing Cuba's National Assembly Deputies," for the *European Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* (2007); "The Lawmaking Process in Cuba," for *Socialism and Democracy* (2005) and "The National Assembly and Political Representation," in *Cuban Socialism in a New Century* (University Press of Florida, 2004). His latest, unpublished, research focused on Cuba's new constitutional and electoral laws.

In addition to his CUNY affiliation, Peter Roman was an associate member of the Columbia University Latin American Seminar and had served on the editorial board of the journal *Socialism and Democracy* since 1985. Between 1979 and 1988, he was an editorial associate at the Institute for Theoretical History and was also a

frequent guest on the Canadian radio program “The Cuban Hour” and on public radio programs in New York City and Colorado.

A popular and well respected instructor, Prof. Roman regularly taught American government at Hostos and developed a new course on the Comparative Political Systems of Latin America, for which he regularly invited diplomats and scholars of Latin America as guests to the class. Among the most impressive events he helped organize was the campus visit, on May 9 2013, of Rodolfo Reyes Rodriguez, the Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, who spoke to students, faculty and staff in a packed A-Atrium about Cuba's history, the U.S. embargo, and the island's future.

Peter believed it is important that students learn and understand the historical significance and relevance of world events that are often not readily available and worked relentlessly to facilitate an open dialogue and learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Peter Roman is survived by his wife of over fifty years and two children.



Peter Roman as a boy actor



Peter's book cover

<https://www.hostos.cuny.edu/Administrative-Offices/Office-of-Academic-Affairs/Departments/Behavioral-and-Social-Sciences/Faculty-Staff/Peter-Roman,-B-A,-M-A,-Ph-D>



October 1, 2014: "Social Sciences Unit Speakers Series" hosting historian Eric Foner at Hostos.  
From Left to right: Professor Synos Mangazva, Professor Peter Roman,  
Professor Ernest Ialongo, Dr. Eric Foner, Professor Linda Anderson,  
Professor Kristopher Burell, and Professor Marcella Bencivenni.



Peter Roman, third from left, on the Cuban ambassador's visit at Hostos on May 9, 2013.

Dr. Roman was interviewed for the Hostos Oral Collective, which was created as part of the College's 50th anniversary projects and captures the memories and reflections of past and present faculty, students, and community members. His interview can be heard at:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-659383919/peter-roman-faculty-professor-of-political-science?in=user-659383919/sets/faculty>

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