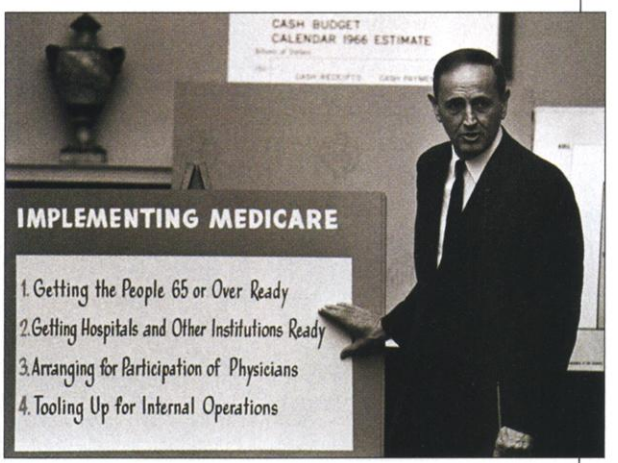
John Gardner: A Salute

On 17 February, John W. Gardner died in Stanford, California, at the age of 90. *Science* does not ordinarily run obituaries, having decided long ago that saluting some worthy lives and ignoring others offered more possibilities to offend than to reward. This page, however, is open to co-option for a more personal kind of editorial farewell. I'm taking advantage of that, but I promise that it won't happen often.

John Gardner's is an American story, but I think it will have meaning for *Science*'s many friends abroad as well. Our long-term readers will remember that he served as secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare during an especially bright period for science, education, and health in the United States. Appointed in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson, Gardner described the still uncharted landscape of the future Great Society in this way: "What we have before us are some breathtaking opportunities disguised as insoluble problems." In the 3 years that followed, he launched Medicare, enforced the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and presided over remarkable growth in the nation's support for biomedical research. He resigned in 1968 at the height of the Vietnam War protest. A decade later, when I had come to head an agency in his old department, I discovered that working folks all over the place still remembered his tenure with pride and affection—not a surprising memory to have about a boss who once said "the first and last task of a leader is to keep hope alive."



John Gardner, 1965, outlines Medicare implementation.

Even the generation of scientists too young to have known that period owe Gardner a debt for having built a big part of the infrastructure that now supports health research in the United States. But we all should be grateful to him for something else, too. Before his term in federal office, he had led both the Carnegie Corporation and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and laid the groundwork for the White House Fellows program. And after he left government, he played a founding or sustaining role in one vital civic organization after another: first the Urban League, then Common Cause, and then Independent Sector. In this later part of his life, he gradually emerged as the nation's civic conscience, arguing powerfully for citizen engagement with public need and then creating and leading new organizations that could implement that vision.

In this work and in his earlier books [for example, *Excellence* (1961) and *Self-Renewal* (1964)], he undertook an uncommonly thoughtful exploration of the relationship between individual and society. He had a deep grasp of the chronic paradox in American life, one noted by de Tocqueville (among other wise European visitors): Our frontier devotion to personal freedom, even license, on the one hand; and our strongly felt commitment to social order on the other. It is a topic visited by many scholars, but Gardner had a unique ability to extract the essence of this age-old dilemma. He once compressed it into a nine-word summary of the social contract. "Freedom and responsibility, liberty and duty: that's the deal." That is, indeed, the deal. In formulating it in this way, he reminds us, as he often did, that we need one another and that our society needs each of us.

He also became a counselor and advisor to a host of younger people. Having started life as an academic (Ph.D. in psychology, University of California, Berkeley; assistant professor of Psychology, Connecticut College) he never stopped being a teacher; and one knew, without being told directly, that his mentorship carried a lifetime warranty. A frequent theme of his advice was that lives are built on the promises we make to others; he once told a group of Stanford students: "People run around searching for identity, but it isn't handed out free any more—not in this transient, rootless, pluralistic society. Your identity is what you've committed yourself to."

A colleague once asked him for advice on a choice, in which the preferred option contained a fairly rich mixture of risk and reward. He thought for a while, and then said this: "You don't want to die with the music still in you." John Gardner left all his music here. It belongs to a legion of beneficiaries, to whom his gift was a special kind of personal inspiration. What a life; what a legacy; what an uncommon man.

Donald Kennedy

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