

R.I.P. Georgie Anne Geyer (1935-2019)

# A Trailblazing Journalist Who Dared to Connect the Dots

LEON KOLANKIEWICZ

## STORIED JOURNALIST BOARDS HER FINAL FLIGHT

Foreign correspondent and syndicated columnist Georgie Anne (Gee Gee) Geyer passed away on May 15, 2019 at the age of 84 due to complications from pneumonia. In her final years, even as she kept writing, she suffered from cancer of the tongue, silencing an experienced, valued voice that had once been an outspoken participant on Sunday morning TV news roundup shows. “When you come and you can’t speak, people tire of you very quickly,” observed Gee Gee in her straightforward manner.

In addition to her thousands of articles and columns spanning more than half a century, Geyer authored a number of books, including the cheerful 1983 autobiography *Buying the Night Flight*, recounting her travels, adventures, and misadventures in the far-flung corners of the world as a daring, young, and female foreign correspondent.

She also wrote about the balkanization of the United States in her prophetic — and decidedly less upbeat — 1996 work *Americans No More: The Death of Citizenship*. This book warned of an America already suffering from an identity crisis, a fracturing of what it means to be American, because of mass immigration, multiculturalism, and growing resistance to assimilation.

Back in 2016, I wrote a blog post about Gee Gee for Californians for Population Stabilization (CAPS), paying tribute to one of my favorite writers and journalists. I

---

*Leon Kolankiewicz is a long-time environmental scientist, planner, and author. He has been an environmental consultant to the U.S. Departments of Energy and Agriculture, Army Corps of Engineers, NASA, NOAA, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He is the author of Where Salmon Come to Die: An Autumn on Alaska’s Raincoast.*

titled it: “Georgie Anne Geyer: Journalist with a Heart... And a Brain.” My point was that many journalists have hearts, some have brains, but few appear to be equally endowed with both. Many do too much thinking with their hearts: wishful or magical thinking. A realist as well as an American patriot with a pragmatic international perspective, Gee Gee didn’t fall into that trap.



In recent decades, the number of prominent reporters, writers, and journalists who connect the dots, those who both “get it” and express it — on the interconnected issues of population growth, environment, immigration, diversity, assimilation, multiculturalism, and patriotism — has become vanishingly small. Georgie Anne Geyer was a leading light of that select group, which also includes Bonnie Erbé of PBS’s program “To the Contrary” and syndicated columnist Froma Harrop. These women — I can think of only a couple of men at the moment, such as former *Atlantic Monthly* writer Robert D. Kaplan and former *Navajo Times* and *Arizona Republic* reporter Jerry Kammer, a Pulitzer Prize winner

and now a Senior Research Fellow with the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) — who actually pay attention to issues surrounding immigration, population growth, resource scarcity, ethnic tensions, natural resources, and the environment.

What is “getting it” or “connecting the dots” in this context? In a nutshell, an ability to acknowledge and accept limits, including limits to population growth, limits to immigration, limits to the capacity of host societies and cultures to absorb newcomers, limits to natural resources, limits to the ability of technology to furnish “techno-fixes” to every problem, and limits to compassion. It is remarkable that in the twenty-first century, the quality to simply acknowledge and accept that there are limits to what human ingenuity, organization, wealth, and compassion can accomplish should have become so rare.

It is incredible and depressing how few other contemporary reporters, journalists, columnists, TV and radio hosts, anchors, and pundits in the liberal-dominated mainstream media actually do get it. All too many members of the legacy or old guard media and new media alike are infected with a needy urge to signal their virtue, their cleverness, their boundless compassion, and their sagacity. This tendency reaches its apogee in the puerile *New York Times* and the putrid *Huffington Post*.

In a press release marking Gee Gee’s passing, the Federation of American Immigration Reform (FAIR) noted that she had been a member of FAIR’s National Board of Advisors for decades. FAIR president Dan Stein added that:

...she never neglected to write about the nation’s immigration policy and assimilation issues — they were regular features of her columns from the first to the last. Probably no columnist in America wrote more about the challenges mass immigration presented for our nation than Georgie Anne Geyer. She was ahead of her time, always blazing the untrodden paths, the new ideas and the interesting, courageous perspectives.

Geyer’s long and distinguished career boasted friends and admirers well beyond those of us concerned about the effects of mass immigration on the United States; they hailed from across the spectrum and around the globe. One self-described friend, Oussama Romdhani, writing in *The Arab Weekly*, remarked that Gee Gee “was a female reporter who left her mark in a previously male-dominated world of foreign correspondents.”

Romdhani continued:

As a woman reporter, Geyer said she expected no special treatment while mingling with revolutionaries and guerrilla leaders in the Middle East and Latin America and was never inhibited by the danger.

In much of her work, Geyer conveyed the views of Middle East leaders but never without a healthy dose of skepticism. In [Libya’s strongman Moammar] Qaddafi, for example, she could see the sociological handicaps of “a desert boy, raised in a tent.”

### FROM CHICAGO’S SOUTH SIDE TO SOUTH AMERICA...AND BEYOND

Gee Gee was a proud Chicago native, and this is where her journalism career began; she was equally proud that she hailed from Chicago’s gritty, ethnically diverse, working-class South Side. She graduated from Calumet High School and attended Northwestern University; even as a freshman there in 1952, she had set her sights on becoming a foreign correspondent. Gee Gee earned her diploma from Northwestern’s Medill School of Journalism in 1956, and landed her first reporting stint at a local newspaper. A year later she was hired by the *Chicago Daily News*. In the late 1950s, the *Daily News* was known for its overseas coverage, and its “reporters roaming the world.” Its foreign service was entirely male until Geyer joined their ranks.

In *Buying the Night Flight*, Geyer wrote: “I was 27. And I was clearly a woman. All the correspondents were men in their 50s and 60s.” Age-old sexist habits and perceptions die hard. When Geyer was reporting on an Arab military summit in Morocco, her editor back home in Chicago printed the headline: “Our man at the summit is a girl.” Like every trailblazer defying traditional social norms, Geyer took the sexism in stride, and did not let it deter or embitter her.

Geyer threw cold water on the suggestion that she exploited her femininity to score interviews or persuade world leaders to share state secrets with her in the bedroom. In *Buying the Night Flight*, she wrote: “I just couldn’t picture waking up at 3 in the morning with some stranger lying next to me and saying, ‘Eh, Che, *mi amor*, tell me where your missiles are?’ Men apparently think this is the way it’s done.”

In his foreword to *Buying the Night Flight*, Geyer’s one-time colleague at the *Chicago Daily News*, celebrated syndicated columnist Mike Royko, wrote that Geyer got into journalism at a time when a female reporter would be called “our gal” and relegated to the society or education beats. Royko continued:

This was the man’s world into which Gee Gee somehow elbowed her way...emerging from the women’s pages a tough, determined, brilliant young reporter.

...after a while we began taking for granted the Geyer exclusive from this or that Latin American country. As the years passed, Latin America wasn’t big enough to hold her, and

she became one of those genuine, and rare, globe-hopping correspondents.

Over the course of her career, Gee Gee interviewed firebrand revolutionaries, guerrilla leaders ensconced in the jungle, dictators, and strongmen in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. She sat across from the likes of Fidel Castro, Yasser Arafat, Moammar Qaddafi, Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, Argentina’s Juan Perón, and his charming wife Eva, whose charisma captivated the masses. As Gee Gee jokingly put it in a 1996 speech to the National Strategy Forum in Chicago, “Somewhere along the way I got into the dictator business.”

Fidel Castro, Geyer told the *Chicago Tribune*, was sweet, but “essentially incoherent.” “One of the nice things about interviewing Castro is that you don’t really have to ask him any question,” she told the *Los Angeles Times*. “He starts talking and eight hours later he stops talking.” She authored a 1991 book about Castro called *Guerrilla Prince: The Untold Story of Fidel Castro*. Based on four extensive personal interviews with Castro himself and hundreds of other interviews, *Guerrilla Prince* was “an intimate and revealing portrait, charged with all the electricity of the charismatic man himself.”

Geyer hiked through the mountains of Guatemala with guerrillas, was detained by Palestinian commandos who believed she was an Israeli agent, and was locked up in Angola by nervous officials. In the course of her travels and work, Gee Gee became fluent in five languages.

At its peak, Gee Gee’s column — syndicated first by the *Los Angeles Times* and then the Universal Press Syndicate — was carried by more than 100 newspapers around the U.S. In addition, she was a popular guest on national news talk shows. Gee Gee had an altogether extraordinary career and a remarkable life.

**COMING HOME TO AN AMERICA TRANSFORMED AND TROUBLED**

Yet even as a veteran globetrotter and renowned international journalist, Geyer never thought of herself as some exalted “citizen of the world” or a deracinated globalist who had transcended mere national loyalties. She never forgot that she was first and foremost a patriotic American citizen. If anything, her extensive and intensive international experiences only deepened her sense of American identity. And in 1996, in a book published by the Atlantic Monthly Press, Geyer elaborated on these insights and feelings in *Americans No More: The Death of Citizenship*. A quarter of a century on, in a country now dominated by the cult of multiculturalism and ever more divided into antagonistic tribes, I can’t help but wish that more Americans had heeded her prescient warnings.

In the book’s preface, Geyer wrote that:

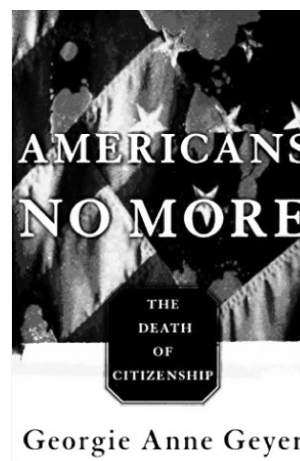
My love affair with the world began when I first traveled abroad to study. This grew into a

passion for traveling all over the world, interviewing whomever I chose, and courteously but insistently busting into anyone’s business with the moniker of “foreign correspondent.”

Yet to Gee Gee’s everlasting credit, this deep passion for foreign lands and cultures did not lead her to any romantic illusions:

...in my experience the world cannot be known or examined through falsity or wishful thinking, and the glossing-over of differences is not the same as cultural respect. Moreover, the fact that I love Latin America enough to have lived there for five years and risked my life repeatedly to tell its story has never in any way challenged or undermined my love for my own country.

Gee Gee wrote that in her travels around the world, from the Balkans to the Middle East and Latin America, she saw peoples from a wide variety of countries and cultures struggling with the fundamental question of “Who belongs?” And the corollaries: who doesn’t belong, and what should be done about it?



*I for Lee -  
What a pleasure working  
with you - and specially writing  
the vord on the final of the phone -  
Warmest personal wishes,  
Georgie Anne Geyer  
"for you"*  
  
*Dec. 14, 1997  
Alexandria*

*Americans No More* was relatively well received, and plugged by such eminent public figures as Ken Bode, moderator of the national TV show *Washington Week in Review*; James A. Baker III, former U.S. Secretary of State; Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Georgetown University professor and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations; and author David Halberstam, who wrote that, “In a world where, sadly, journalistic fame has less and less to do with journalistic accomplishment, [Geyer] remains a beacon of the real thing, a reporter’s reporter, intelligent, tough-minded, brave, admired by the toughest jury of all: her peers.”

**TURNING THE TABLES ON GEE GEE: THE INTERVIEWER BECOMES THE INTERVIEWEE**

In 1997, Gee Gee was gracious enough to take time

out from her demanding schedule to grant me a long, in-depth interview for the journal *Focus*, published by my employer, Carrying Capacity Network. I wanted to explore the themes and issues she raised in *Americans No More*. She responded to my very first question by stating that across the globe, enormous changes were under way. “We have never had such population pressures, we have never had such overpopulation, and we have never had such resource exhaustion.”

The nation-state and citizenship are under serious attack both from the globalizers on the right and the multiculturalists on the left, she asserted.

Based on her study of disintegrating societies in Lebanon, Bosnia, Africa, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, Gee Gee had found elements that were common to all of them, and she shared this list with me in our interview:

- Death of an all-encompassing ideology or set of truths;
- Deconstructing of nations in the name of ambitious individual egos (she cited the case of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia);
- Breakdown of one language as the unifying element in society;
- Growth of one discernible population group at the expense of others;
- Mainstream society waiting too long to confront the situation.

I told Gee Gee that many observers and elites believed that the nation-state “is an altogether quaint if not obsolete notion.” Now that we were poised on the cusp of not just a new century but a new millennium, I asked her why wasn’t it enough just to be a “planetary citizen” of the emerging “global village”? And she replied deftly: “My smart-aleck answer to that is, ‘Don’t call me when you need a cop.’”

Gee Gee continued full throttle:

Now, how exactly can you be a planetary citizen? Where do you owe your loyalties? What are going to be your laws? Are your laws going to be the Muslims’ laws of India or Saudi Arabia? The whole idea to me is so dangerously utopian, it’s almost criminally utopian. I have difficulty in sustaining the very idea of it. Where do you vote? Where do you live? What do you belong to? What do you pledge allegiance to? To the company, to the United Nations? When you think about it, it just doesn’t make any sense.

She went on to decry the American elites who are “leaving the country behind.”

Many of them really don’t care about the average working person. They’re having din-

ner in Singapore and lunch in Bellagio, and interacting with the same elites from all over the world. But the working man or woman in Chicago or Detroit or Kansas City is not having dinner in Singapore and lunch in Bellagio. I think our elites are extraordinarily dangerous and selfish for this country, in that they don’t see their responsibility in preserving the principles of this country and standing up for them, even though they enjoy all the privileges of our great democratic republic.

Years later, the same elites Gee Gee was disparaging would be mocked with the moniker “Davos Man”, referring to Davos, Switzerland. This glitzy mountain resort is where wealthy global elites gather every January at the World Economic Forum to gawk at the snowy Alps and each other, make deals and connections, and marshal the relentless march of globalization. Yes, that globalization — the breaking down of national borders and barriers to commerce, capital, investment, and the free flow of labor and merchandise — from which they derive such obscene profits. And this self-aggrandizement and profiteering are often at the expense of millions of ordinary folks left behind in gutted, crumbling towns and cities, struggling with the “diseases of desperation”: elevated alcoholism and suicide rates, entrenched opiate addiction, and disintegrating families.

Two decades on, I hear the echo of Gee Gee’s prophetic remarks when I think of 2016 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. She was the quintessential anointed one, the clear choice of like-minded globalists, bankers, and elites. Clinton mocked the rank-and-file “deplorables,” the suffering white working classes in the hard-hit rust belt towns and cities of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin. This arrogance and tone-deafness helped cost her the presidential election, losing to a political novice derided by many as an egotistical clown, but one who at least spoke to the concerns of downtrodden blue-collar workers.

During the course of my fascinating, wide-ranging, three-hour discussion with Gee Gee, she also touched on the topics of legal and illegal immigration, the demand for cheap labor, amnesty, dual citizenship, irredentism, American exceptionalism, citizenship testing, civics education, civic pride, language issues, voting by non-citizens, multiculturalism, female genital mutilation (clitoridectomies), Puerto Rico, Mexico, right-wing militias, and the co-opted Ford Foundation’s funding of radical left-wing causes and specifically their bankrolling of the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (the notorious MALDEF).

I heard of Italian communist Antonio Gramsci for the first time, and his now infamous phrase “the long march through the institutions.” She told me about

Horace Kallen, the “father of cultural pluralism.” And she mentioned, to my surprise these 22 years later, that she had been a great friend of fellow Chicagoan Saul Alinsky (whose reputation I was unaware of at the time), the community organizer, activist, and author who has become notorious in some quarters in recent years because of the inspiration he provided to both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton in their youth. More recently yet, it appears that more and more conservatives have been consulting Alinsky’s *Rules for Radicals* for advice on how to most effectively attack and undermine the liberal and leftist power structures that now govern many American institutions.

In *Americans No More*, Geyer wrote glowingly of Alinsky:

...I learned basic principles [in how organizations work] from a rare genius in this field, the tough and brilliant Chicago organizer Saul Alinsky. In the early sixties, Saul was a treasured and highly instructive friend and mentor to me, and he instilled in me a passion for analyzing strategy and power, real and mythological, which I then employed working in virtually every culture across the globe.” (p. 191)

In our interview, Gee Gee described herself to me as a “radical moderate.” And she declared passionately:

I think that’s what we need above all — we need radical moderates. Moderates who are not afraid to get up and say... “I believe we should control our borders; I believe we should upgrade our citizenship; I believe we should teach American principles to our children in schools.”

If you say this today the first thing you are called is a racist, then a xenophobe and nativist. I am exactly the opposite of all those things and I resent it very, very deeply and I won’t put up with it. I wish we had more radical moderates who are willing to say “I won’t put up with it either.”

So do I, Gee Gee. So do I.

### GODSPEED ON YOUR FINAL JOURNEY, GEE GEE

Gee Gee was a featured speaker at a 1998 conference I attended marking the 200th anniversary of the publication of Thomas Robert Malthus’ *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Held in Airlie a conference center near Warrenton, Virginia, an hour outside of Washington, D.C., it was organized by the long-time, dedicated population writer William Dickinson of the Biocentric Institute. Bill was a former editor and vice president of Congressional Quarterly, Inc., as well as the first editorial director/

general manager of The Washington Post Writers Group.

Dickinson attracted some heavy hitters to headline and speak at this event, including Geyer, Worldwatch Institute founder and president Lester R. Brown, *The Atlantic Monthly’s* correspondent Robert D. Kaplan (author of its widely read 1994 cover story about overpopulation, “The Coming Anarchy,” who could almost match Geyer in his wide-ranging traveling and reporting), immigration reform pioneer and former Sierra Club and ZPG population activist Dr. John Tanton, former State Department diplomat and Center for Immigration Studies executive director David Simcox, and Washington State University Professor William R. Catton, Jr., author of the influential book on carrying capacity and fossil fuel dependency and depletion, *Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change*.

One evening at the conference, I got to share informal conversation and a beer at a quiet local bar with Geyer and Kaplan. I was all ears. It was mesmerizing, truly one of the most fascinating evenings of my life, sitting across from these two experienced, insightful globe-trotters in an intimate setting. Between the two of them, they had traveled to, closely observed, and written about every continent and scores of countries with penetrating, shrewd gaze.



Geyer interviews a rebel fighter in Guatemala, above, in this undated photo; Geyer, below, is shown on assignment with a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (Henry Gill photo).



Of course, their accounts were not mere travelogues, but keen, interdisciplinary analyses of the underlying geographic, environmental, demographic, economic, social, and cultural factors and trends shaping the world. And both of them were in broad agreement that these mixed, but on the whole, threatening trends virtually guaranteed a world of greater trouble in the future. And this was three years *before* the atrocity of September 11, 2001 shook America and the world.

I don't think either Geyer or Kaplan would be surprised by the findings of a 2018 global Gallup poll based on 151,000 interviews with adults living in more than 140 countries. The poll found that "the world is sadder, angrier than ever before," in spite of unprecedented economic and social progress over the previous two decades, with more people pulled up out of abject poverty than ever before in human history.

In any case, the years flew by, and eventually I fell out of touch with Gee Gee, preoccupied with my own career and family, though I still occasionally saw, read, and enjoyed her syndicated columns. I saw a clip of her in a U.S. Senate hearing chastising a blushing Senator Edward Kennedy for his duplicitous, despicable role in gaining congressional passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality (Hart-Celler) Act, which opened the floodgates to mass immigration from non-traditional sources that has changed America forever, overloading assimilation, exacerbating income inequality, and boosting environmentally damaging population growth, among other things.

I heard in 2018 that Georgie Anne had been stricken some time earlier with tongue cancer and found speaking difficult or impossible, which must have been incredibly frustrating for this great communicator. But she could still write, and that she did, churning out column after column right into 2019.

One piece, dated February 19, 2019, was headlined "Victimization, American-Style." In it she commented on the parallels between contemporary American media "show trials" and those of the Soviet Union in the 1930s under the "demented" Joseph Stalin. While she granted that the media drubbing faced by Virginia's Democratic Governor Ralph Northam (for having allegedly dressed in blackface at a 1980s party) fell far short of the Marxist cruelty unleashed in 1930s Moscow, it still dismayed Gee Gee that news stories like this lasted more than two days because of the destructive, cynical political correctness that had overtaken America. She asked poignantly: "Has victimization become a profession?" And she took her own profession to task, deploring the "dwindling number of journalists who will stand up for the intelligent middle ground."

Gee Gee wrote:

Racism is reprehensible and always has been.

Dressing in blackface is disgusting. But we cannot keep going back, judging others' acts THEN by values that we embrace NOW without the most dangerous moral disruptions to our society. It disfigures our public discussion; it destroys the reputations of otherwise decent men and women; and it is quite simply inherently unjust.

On May 15, 2019, in her weakened condition, Gee Gee succumbed to complications from pneumonia at the age of 84. Over the Memorial Day weekend, a funeral was held for her in a Washington, D.C. chapel. A number of old friends from Chicago and fellow journalists were in attendance, including Lynn Sweet of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, who wrote a nice story for the paper paying tribute to her departed friend. At the close of the funeral service, a pianist played Gee Gee's favorite song, the classic "Come Rain or Come Shine." And thus, the final page of the final chapter was written and the book closed on this amazing life.

The Interim Dean of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, Charles Whitaker, issued a statement on Twitter on behalf of Gee Gee's alma mater. It read:

Gee Gee was a towering figure in American journalism. She became a foreign correspondent at a time when overseas reporting was dominated by men, and she used her keen insights to help the readers of her articles, columns, and books understand how events around the globe shaped their lives and experiences. Her decades of experience, which included interviews with top foreign leaders, provided her with a unique vantage point, from which she applied her incisive wit to chronicle and comment on world affairs. While not all agreed with the opinions, she shared her thoughts from a place of passion. We were fortunate to count her as a member of our Medill family. She will be missed.

To that I can only add that I will always remember Gee Gee as a brilliant and brave personality, as well as a woman of great personal dignity, elegance, integrity, and passion. She was one of the rare few in her journalism profession to thoroughly grasp the interlocking, difficult dilemmas that we Americans (and other nations around the world) face, as a result of the staggering demographic, cultural, and environmental changes of the past century.

Thank you, Gee Gee, for your tireless efforts to publicize and help us understand key trends and threats, and for your wholehearted encouragement to your fellow Americans to save our beautiful but beleaguered country. ■