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Charles Moskos, Policy Adviser, Dies at 74

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Charles Moskos, a sociologist who regularly advised policy makers, senators and generals on military matters, including coming up with the armed services' "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gay personnel, died on May 31 at his home in Santa Monica, Calif. He was 74.

The cause was prostate cancer, according to Northwestern University, where Dr. Moskos taught.

Dr. Moskos drew inspiration from his own Army service and intellectual ammunition from research in more than a dozen battle zones to write on subjects ranging from the average soldier's life to the changing definition of conscientious objector in books translated into 21 languages. His research on blacks and women in the military was particularly influential.

Dr. Moskos — barrel-chested, crew-cut, with a decidedly plain-spoken manner — had a knack for relating to soldiers in the field; in 1993, he told The Wall Street Journal that he aimed to be a walking "tribune of the enlisted man." He said he wrote not for academic audiences but for "the intelligent public."

He received many military decorations, including the army's Distinguished Service Award, its highest civilian award. The militaries of other nations, including France and the Netherlands, honored him.

Gen. David H. Petraeus, the American commander in Iraq, said in a statement released by Northwestern that Dr. Moskos was "a renowned scholar who repeatedly offered thoughtful advice on the challenges with which we have grappled over the years."

Dr. Moskos's best-known policy advice was devising a way for gay men and lesbians to serve in the military, which President Bill Clinton had promised in his 1992 presidential campaign even though it was against the law. Dr. Moskos's solution was to end the practice of asking enlistees about sexual orientation. In turn, gay men and lesbians were to be silent about the topic.

Dr. Moskos first suggested the policy to Senator Sam Nunn, Democrat of Georgia and then chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. The Joint Chiefs of Staff refined it, with President Clinton accepting the result.

Dr. Moskos's original language, "don't ask, don't tell, don't seek, don't flaunt," was shortened to "don't ask, don't tell." While others framed the issue in terms of the cohesiveness of fighting units or morality, Dr. Moskos, after interviewing many soldiers, emphasized what he saw as a heterosexual's right not to be inescapably confronted with intimate gay behavior.

"Charlie, through his force of reason and impartiality, moved the discussion from an emotional to an intellectual level with empirical data he got, not from his computer, but by talking to soldiers," Col. William Smullen, spokesman for Gen. Colin L. Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said when President Clinton signed the bill in 1993.

Dr. Moskos acknowledged his solution was imperfect, but said it meant that gay men and lesbians no longer had to lie.

“Sure, it’s a bit of hypocrisy,” he said in an interview with The Chicago Tribune in 1993. “But hypocrisy is necessary now and then in a civil society.”

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force disagreed, saying in a statement, “The closet isn’t a compromise.”

Charles Constantine Moskos Jr. was born on May 20, 1934, in Chicago and grew up in Albuquerque. He graduated from Princeton and was drafted into the Army, serving as an engineer in Germany. He earned a master’s degree and doctorate from the University of California, Los Angeles.

He taught for two years at the University of Michigan, then moved to Northwestern, from which he retired in 2003.

One of Dr. Moskos’s most influential books was “All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way” (1996), written with John Sibley Butler. It argued that the Army had succeeded in bringing blacks into leadership positions at all levels not by lowering its standards but through exceptional dedication and training.

Dr. Moskos honed his talent for on-the-ground research by living with troops in Vietnam in the 1960s. He noted that the men were not motivated by patriotism, but considered antiwar demonstrations a personal insult. They despised South Vietnamese troops and had no regard for the country itself, he said, and they grudgingly admired the bravery of the Viet Cong.

Dr. Moskos is survived by his wife of 41 years, the former Ilca Hohn; his sons Andrew, of Amsterdam, and Peter, of Astoria, Queens; and two grandchildren.

In justifying his view that heterosexual soldiers have a right to privacy from gay people, Dr. Moskos said that opponents of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy should oppose sex-specific toilets.

In an interview in 2003 with The Northwestern Chronicle, a student newspaper, he said, “Sexual orientation is sexual orientation, and at my age, I wish I had any sexual orientation.”