

Studs Terkel

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Louis “Studs” Terkel was a famed broadcaster, author, and historian, best recognized for his interviews on the long-running *Studs Terkel Show*. The nationally syndicated series from WFMT in Chicago ran for 45 years, resulting in more than 9,000 episodes. Among the famous guests who appeared on his program include Simone de Beauvoir, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Margaret Mead, Leonard Bernstein, Bob Dylan, Martin Luther King Jr., Frank Zappa, and 90-year-old Bertrand Russell during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Terkel was born May 16, 1912 in New York City to Russian Jewish immigrants Samuel Terkel, a tailor, and Anna Finkel, a seamstress. When he was eight, the family moved to Chicago, where he remained most of the rest of his life. He earned a bachelor’s degree in 1932 and a J.D. in 1934 from the University of Chicago. Even though he was admitted to the Illinois Bar, Terkel decided against practicing law, instead wanting to be a concierge at a hotel and an actor. In 1939, he married Ida Goldberg, and they had one son.

Terkel joined the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Writer’s Project, working in various roles in radio. It was there where he met Oscar Brown Jr. and Richard Durham. One of his earliest roles was in Richard Durham’s *Destination Freedom*, which ran 1948-1950. From 1945 to 1952, he also starred in an unscripted television show titled *Stud’s Place*, about the owner of a greasy-spoon diner in Chicago who encountered interesting people through his work. His political views as an unapologetic leftist, however, led to it being canceled after he came to the attention of Joe McCarthy’s anti-communist House Unamerican Activities Committee. In 1952 his most recognized show, the *Studs Terkel Show*, began running for an hour each weekday on WFMT until 1997.

He also served as a distinguished scholar-in-residence at the Chicago History Museum and was the author of several non-fiction books. His first was *Giants of Jazz* in 1956. His first collection of oral histories was published in 1967, *Division Street America*, about race in Chicago. He won a Pulitzer Prize for 1985’s “*The Good War*”: *An Oral History of World War Two*, which chronicled the accounts of ordinary people during World War II.

In addition to a Pulitzer, Terkel received many other awards over his storied career. In 1982 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the University of Chicago. In 1997 he was awarded the National Humanities Medal from President Bill Clinton. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Dayton Literary Peace Prize in 2006, and in 2010 was inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. He was also a recipient of the George Polk Career Award and the 2003 Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award. Finally, at the insistence of Haki Madhubuti, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame of Black Writers, despite not being Black.

Terkel passed away October 31, 2008 at the age of 96 as a result of a fall in his home earlier that month.

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