

American Sociological Association Opportunities in Retirement Network Lecture (2016)

Sally T. Hillsman

Introduction by John Kennedy: Hello. As Roz [Darling] said, I'm John Kennedy. It's really my honor and pleasure to introduce Sally Hillsman who'll give this year's "A Life in Sociology" lecture. As all of you know - we'll be reading this a little bit because I want to get this right — Sally has been the executive officer of the ASA for the past 14 years. Sally's many, many achievements in this period of time were described in last September's *Footnotes* article when she announced her upcoming retirement. I could sit here and read that to you, but then we would never get to the reception because it was such a wonderful piece to describe all that she's accomplished in the past 14 years. Some of the highlights are is that Sally has really moved the ASA strongly into the digital age. All of you who look at the ASA website recognize that there have been really nice changes done to that.

She's pushed sociologists as resources for research, for policy, and for practice. We have much more thought about all the things that sociologists can contribute outside the academy and inside the academy. She has been heavily involved in COSA [phonetic] and worked through that and working with many, which has much impact on public policies and other things going on in Washington. She's shepherded new publications. As many of you know now, we have a nice number of publications covering a lot of topic areas that are really very interesting to a broad number of sociologists. She's done this moving it to having us, ASA, work with SAGE to do the publishing.

All of these things happened in a period of real economic challenge. Not only would this happen where things happen, but it happened at a time when it was very difficult for these things to happen. I think we all should appreciate all she's done for us collectively, as sociologists in the past 14 years.

Prior to coming to ASA though, Sally had a distinguished career as a sociologist employed in the National Institute of Justice where she was a deputy director with responsibility for the Office of Research and Evaluation. She was vice president of the National Senate for State Courts with responsibility for its research and technology program. She was associate director of the Vera Institute for Justice in New York City and their director of research. She received a PhD in Sociology from Columbia. She's a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration and a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, quite a set of accomplishments.

I also like to bring out some other things about her that I think are just important, just as not only her successes at sociology but her successes as a manager and a person that sociologists have had an opportunity to work with closely over these past 14 years. As I said, the article in *Footnotes* was long. It had many, many quotes from many past ASA presidents, from secretaries, and very nice quotes. I thought that I would then bring up a few more of them just to highlight some of the things surely for those who are also here tonight.

For example, Ruth Milkman, who was a previous president said, "I learned a huge amount from Sally. I relied heavily on her excellent judgment and her rich historical knowledge of the ASA, especially when controversial questions arose. I was repeatedly impressed by her dedication and commitment to both the ASA and the profession. She will be missed."

From another ASA president, Cecilia Ridgeway, “Sally’s competence working with the organizational processes of ASA is legendary, of course. But what’s really impressed me was her commitment to the meaning and value of the scholarly enterprise and sociological principles and knowledge in justice. For Sally, she’s trumped organizational politics every time to get something done.” Another ASA President, Paula England, said, “Sally was absolutely invaluable to me as president many times when I need a deep background on an issue, the history within the ASA and the wider organizational context.”

From a former secretary — for those who know, the ASA’s operations secretary works most closely with the executive officer. It’s a three-year appointment and they’re very much involved with budgeting and many other issues much more than the president is involved for one year. But the secretary really takes on an important role as a member serving on the ASA’s board. Kate Berheide said, “Anyone who has worked closely with Sally Hillsman, as I have and the other secretaries have, can attest how hard she’s worked on behalf of the association. We all owe her a debt of gratitude for her enormous contributions she’s made to the discipline, some of which makes it much more visible now. And she’s been especially important. She’s worked especially hard in the areas of professional ethics and in COSA.”

I think besides that, I think we’re always very appreciative of work with another person, with a peer. But I think to really understand the quality and the value of a person, you have to look at what they do, I think, as a manager and how they work with the people they work with on a day-to-day basis. I asked for some quotes. I got a couple that I really like.

One was from Jean Shin, who’s the Minority Affairs director at ASA, “Sally has the uncanny ability to let you be creative, autonomous, and independent in your work while

simultaneously making sure you know she supports you fully if any problems or sticky issues arise.” That’s no small feat for a boss or a manager in an office environment. I agree. It is a challenge. “Working with her and for her has been a privilege and has shaped my knowledge in the discipline and the profession immensely.”

Karen [Edwards] I think said what I really liked. I really liked what she said. She said, “It’s truly been an honor working with and for Sally over the last 14 years. She has a truly unique management style that has encouraged and challenged each of us to work together as a member of a dynamic and creative team to serve the members and the discipline of sociology. In no organization can every idea, even the best ideas, be implemented. But there’s always been room at the table for every voice during Sally’s tenure at ASA. She was the first one to offer to pitch in when help was needed. And her door was truly always open, whether you needed professional input or personal guidance. After mid-September, Sally may no longer be my boss. But she will always be my colleague and friend.”

I think that all of you should recognize how much Sally has contributed, both professionally and helping the organization, the ASA itself, grow in these past 14 years. All of us have benefitted from her. I could probably say that every one of us in some ways should appreciate her, what she has done for us. Please welcome Sally to talk to us a little bit about her life in sociology. I’m sorry. I want to say one more thing. Before that, Roz is going to give an award.

Presentation by Rosalyn Darling: On behalf of the opportunities in Retirement Network that you helped create — I still remember that meeting we all sat at a few years back and how you were so enthusiastic and supportive of this effort — we’re really pleased that you

could be the second speaker, that you retired just in time to be the second speaker in our “A Life in Sociology” series. So this is a small token of our appreciation.

Lecture by Sally Hillsman: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. You all know the glasses. I can see my notes. I will pull the mic down because I know they’re recording this. Let me say how incredibly touched I was that you all asked me to speak with you this evening about the life that I have had in sociology. I thought I would a little bit follow what Earl Babbie did in terms of a little bit of a biography of sociology, my life in sociology.

Part of the reason for that especially is because I think my life in sociology has been quite different from the life of many of you who have pursued very specifically both a life in sociology and a life in scholarship. A life in sociology is not always the same for everyone. I just noticed this afternoon that I lost my tag that says executive officer somewhere during the day today. I think that was probably prescient.

As I sort of talk a little bit about my own background, I think you will probably see some quite different things than some of the things that even have been spoken about tonight. Let me first say that I grew up in a family of professionals, a long history of professionals. They weren’t just professionals in the sense that they were doctors and engineers and lawyers and so forth, which they were, but they were all doers. They didn’t just practice or have a life of their profession. There was a different quality. There was always doing. I didn’t have a father really for the first five years of my life because in fact, my physician father at the age of 35, when the war started in Europe in the early 1940s, my father went to Europe as a soldier, not to fight but to heal.

I remember him talking about D-Day, the Normandy landing. He was at his field hospital, not in Normandy because you couldn't take your field hospital in Normandy yet, but rather on the southern coast of England, where he operated at an operating table for 36 hours without stepping away from the table other [than] to drink sugar water and to change his gloves. It was that or men died. He was following his father's steps.

My grandfather, who's also a physician, did the same thing in World War I and his father before him who was also a physician, and not the first in the line of physicians I might add. He was already the fourth or fifth in the line of physicians. He did the same thing in the Civil War.

The engineers in the family didn't just do engineering. They were the first to engineer on the Panama Canal. Maybe that's where I get my penchant for travelling. They built the Erie Canals, built the aqueduct over the Spuyten Duyvil in New York City. I mean, they did things that were different and that were exciting.

Now, lest you think it was only the men in my family who did that, the women did that, too, in different sorts of ways as you can understand. In the just post-Civil War period, the early reconstruction period, my great-great-aunt packed her bags, went to Tennessee, and opened a school to educate newly emancipated slaves.

Remember this middle class professional family I'm talking about? Okay. My grandmother went to work in 1900 to put her husband through graduate school. Women did not do that of her background. Her response to that was, "We do what we need to do." I might add, again I think differently from a lot of backgrounds of a lot of sociologists, all the women in my family had been college-educated since the 1860s. They weren't bluestocking though. They were women who did things.

I grew up in the middle class suburbs of New York City. By the time I was the teen, got to my name in 13, I was off to New York City. It was my music. It was theatre. It was going with friends to museums and so forth. I was always doing something. It was different from what the other kids in my suburban high school were doing. They weren't doing those kinds of things. This was the 1950s. It was the McCarthy era. It was the early Civil Rights Movement. It was Sputnik.

I saw all those things on the television. They were all very like, what's this world? I don't know this world. But who knew? Nobody in the families that I knew talked about these things. I mean it just wasn't done. You didn't talk about these things. You knew those things went on. You saw those things in the newspaper, but you didn't talk about those things. So in my teens, I had my music, my swimming, my books, and my Manhattan. Interestingly enough, my Manhattan also did not just include, oh, the fun shopping which I did do.

There was the exhibit on Hiroshima. There was the exhibit on the Holocaust. There was the exhibit of postcards of lynchings. Most of you are not surprised as you to know that small towns and towns that did lynchings made postcards. And people sent them to people. There's a whole exhibit of those that still exist. But nobody talked about those things. I had to integrate this without much help.

So I followed my aunt and my cousin, both of whom have gone to Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts. I didn't go there particularly because it was either my cousins and my aunt or because it was a women's college, although I must say that did appeal to me, but because Mount Holyoke was an explicitly science college.

For those of you who know, it still is. I mean at that time, Mount Holyoke is one of those places that all those women scientists who couldn't get jobs elsewhere, that's where they went. That's where they have their laboratories. That's where the only faculty in the entire Connecticut River Valley who could use the University of Massachusetts' electron microscope. Because they were the only ones who were doing research that could use an electron microscope.

So Mount Holyoke was a great place for me particularly because I assumed I was going to be premed. I mean, where do you think that came from? I was exposed to books, history, anthropology at a time -- because now, we're talking about 1959 to the early '60s. This was the time of African colonization. This was the time when the continent of Africa was really undergoing massive changes. Anthropology sort of helped me understand that kind of process. That just expanded my world view in a way that all these other things that were never talked about sort of melded into. Mount Holyoke was a very tremendously exciting intellectual experience for me. But it was very middle class, very light, and very, very silent about social issues with the exception of the Civil Rights Movement at that particular time.

By the time I reached the end of my sophomore year, I really understood that I was going to have to find an experience that would help me break out of this bubble that I was in. Not intellectually in a bubble but in a bubble in the social and cultural ways that sociologists don't need to have explained to them.

This was 1961 actually. There weren't things called junior year abroad programs. But Mount Holyoke allowed me to invent it, not exactly invent it because there were other people at Mount Holyoke who had done that. We had to find the place where we're going to go. We

had to contact them. They had to allow us to come as matriculating but non-graduating students. We had to find our own places to live. In those days, you didn't have the Internet to do that. You had to do research to do that. You couldn't communicate with anything but either the telephone or a letter. You couldn't just use your credit card because we didn't have them. You had to figure out how to get the money from one place to the other. Believe me, junior year abroad looks very different today than it did then.

So I looked at LSE. It was in London. That was exciting but a little too New York. I looked at the American University in Beirut. That was a little too far. So I went to the University of Edinburgh where I studied economics. So in 1961-'62, I studied economics and social and political philosophy at the university. I was the only woman. You should hear what the room sounded like when I took away all the prizes, all of them. The men in that room were not particularly happy. But they were very polite.

I lived in what in England is called digs [sounds like], they're sort of boarding houses for students. I lived in working class digs. I roamed all over Scotland with my buddies on a motorcycle and also in a Lancaster, which is an old British car. This one happened to leak carbon dioxide or monoxide and whatever that is that comes up from the engine that you're not supposed to breathe. Fortunately, there were holes in the floor so we had air coming in as well.

I did another thing, which was pretty outrageous given the background I've just described, which is pretty conservative. I hitched a ride with eight men from the theology department to the new school at Edinburgh with an Anglican priest who spoke Arabic, who was off to Jordan and Israel on a jaunt to look at biblical, but largely for me, archeological sites. I

went to Jordan. I went to Israel. Israel was pre-6-days war so it was through the Mandelbaum Gate. I went to Petra before there was a road, before there was a Hilton Hotel; I had to go by horseback. I had to camp. That was okay.

One thing that was part of that - I'll tell the bad thing and then the funny thing and then I'll move on. The bad thing was I did spend some time in a Palestinian refugee camp. That changed. I think that was more personal change-oriented than Petra or a lot of those other things. I did spend some time with my eight guys and male Anglican priest in visiting a friend of his who was a sheikh, a Bedouin who lived in a Bedouin tent community. Of course, there was a little problem there because they were all invited into the front of the tent for a meal, I don't know, this kind of stuff. That's the guy thing. The girl thing was a little kind of iffy here because all the girls were out in the back doing the cooking and all that sort of thing. I don't mean to be culturally disparaging here. This was just the way things were.

But the sheikh had been educated in Europe so he had a plan. The plan was I would be identified as the honored guest. That gave me a different status from merely female so I could go in the front. The problem was I had to pay the price for that. The price for that was I was given this little cup as the honored guest. I had to drink it. I looked down at it. It looked back at me. It was a sheep's eye. Fortunately, remember I spent all that time in New York City, right? I looked at the sheep's eye. I said, oyster, oyster, oyster, oyster, gulp - and down it went. The more important thing was down it stayed. That was really breaking out of the bubble.

Then after I finished walking off with all the prizes in economics — we haven't gotten to sociology yet, have we — I spent the summer as so many of us did in the early '60s with a backpack on my back and wandered all over Europe. But this was 1962 and it was Checkpoint

Charlie in Berlin. The wall had just gone up, Checkpoint Charlie. You know, there were lots of things on the Mediterranean Coast and all those kinds of things. Then there was East Berlin. That was a very interesting time for me, a very formative time. I've left out 90 percent of the things that were formative. But you don't want to be here all night.

Back to Mount Holyoke College. Here I had the Edinburgh Adam Smith professor of economics chair trying to persuade me to do economics. But I went back to Mount Holyoke and indeed, I did a full major in economics and a full major in sociology virtually in one year. I decided without a doubt I was going to do sociology. The short reason for that was that all the economic -- this was the high point at the beginning of the econometrics movement. It wasn't the math that scared me. It was all the variables they held constant, which were all the interesting ones. That led me to sociology.

I was going to follow my professors at Mount Holyoke to Yale because that's where they wanted me to go for my PhD. But no. [Indiscernible] wouldn't have a woman graduate student. I mean he was well-known and this is public and in the press and everything else as highly anti-Semitic. Didn't know he was anti-female, but he was. My professors went down to Yale. Women in sociology? He wouldn't have it. So off I went to home, New York City and Columbia. The irony of that was that what paid for my first year in graduate school was something called a Danforth Grant.

Now, those of you who are retired will know that Danforths were only given to men. It just happened that Mount Holyoke had this little thing. I got it. It was a Danforth Grant that was their way of noting that women were on the agenda as well. So I had a Mount Holyoke Danforth Grant. So much for Yale. This was where I really learned sociology. I learned

sociology in Fayerweather Hall with [indiscernible], with Bob Merton, with Paul Lazarsfeld, with Terry Hopkins, with Allan Silver, with Manny Wallerstein, with Herb Hyman, and with lots of others. It was a wonderful theory and knowledge time.

This is when I really learned sociology. I had felt sociology. I had learned a kind of sociology in college. But this is where I really learned sociology. But where I learned how to do sociology was at the Bureau of Applied Social Research, which was set up in 1939 by Paul Lazarsfeld. It was an offshoot of something that he had started that had been started much earlier. That's where I really learned the Bureau of Applied Social Research, really learning how to do research, do sociology. The person who I learned a lot from at that time was Carol Weiss, sadly who has left us. Actually, she left Columbia long after I was there and went to Harvard School of Education. There were also people like Dave Caplovitz, who many of you may not know his name. But you will certainly know his book, *The Poor Pay More*. That's where I learned how to do sociology.

It was not the best of times in other respects other than learning how to do sociology and learning a lot of sociology. This was the '60s at Columbia and it was a very tumultuous time. It was a very difficult time. I'll come back to that sort of later on. Then what fazed me was I had learned sociology, I learned how to do sociology; now what was I going to do in sociology? Well, I was working on my dissertation. This is important because that will come up in a few minutes. I was working on working class girls — black, Hispanic, and white — who were making their first moves into the labor market. I had Social Security data, did quantitative stuff.

Then I spent a year doing field work in the high school that they were transitioning from and into the labor market. It was the first study of working class women and particularly including women of color since before the Second World War. There just was this huge gap. But the other thing that happened was 1968 when Columbia experienced its major disruptions. I'm not going to go into those. I am going to say that I was very supportive of a lot of the issues that were on the table then. I mean Columbia, even today, is not always the nicest institution which does not say anything about the students or the faculty or who are there. As an institution, it has many things to account for. That's another story.

But the Columbia trustees brought the police on campus. The consequence of that was a police riot. Many people injured again. What did I do? I was on campus that night. They were like protesting in that particular way despite the fact that Frances Fox Piven is one of my closest friends. It was not my style. What did I do? I left campus. Murray Milner and I — many of you do know Murray Milner — and Michael Baker went back to my office at BASR. By 5:00 in the morning, we had a survey out on campus to collect data on what the police had done and the interactions between police and students. We asked students to give us their name and to describe the coordinates of the physical location where the events happened.

We were able to cross-check all of the information. So we had multiple views of all the same events. We published *Police on Campus*, one of the only empirical studies of police riot that has been done in the United States. *The Walker Report* on Chicago Democratic Convention 1968 is the other one. That was Columbia. And I was a sociologist. I knew how to do it. Still, what was I going to do? Well, I did what a lot of people do. You know, K through PhD and into the professoriate, there I went. I went to Queens College. It was wonderful, 1971.

One of the things that I discovered was that there were all these women closing in on middle age who were going back to college. This was a great opportunity, a teaching opportunity for me. One of the things that happened during the time that I was there, I have wonderful colleagues. I would just sum it up by saying when one of my colleagues said to me, "Why are working class women interesting sociologically to study?" I thought to myself, "Am I in the right place?" Any of you who are listening to some of the things that went on yesterday will not even imagine that such a statement could have possibly ever had been made, but it was. The department voted my tenure. The chair blocked that tenure at the presidential level. That's another story, which I will not put on record.

So I got ready to leave. I had a tenured associate professorship offer. I had an offer to do research at the Civil Rights Commission. But first I said, "I have other research to do." I can't do it in the university at that time. That would not be true today but at that time. Civil Rights Commission, I looked at it politically. I knew it was falling apart. It was going to become politicized and doing scholarly work - that was going to be very difficult and so I didn't do it. That prediction was correct.

In 1975, Paul Lazarsfeld had been consulting with the Vera Institute of Justice in New York. I went there. One little point before I go there was I thought when I finished my PhD at Columbia, maybe I should combine this what to do, how to do sociology. Maybe I would go back and get a medical degree and combine my sociology with that. I didn't know where that comes from. I went to talk to the medical school at Columbia. "Oh, you're 30. We don't take applications from women who are over 26." This is 1975. So I did go to the Vera Institute of Justice. I spent 15 years there.

I could tell you all kinds of stories. But I'm going to say a couple of things. It was at that time that Vera actually invented the concept, not necessarily they're doing it, of action research. I actually have a long paper on what action research really was all about. I'm not going to go into all of that. It was kind of a new concept at that time. That was me. I knew that doing sociology, it was called action research. That's what I wanted to do.

What did I do? I went there because they wanted to do — they had a grant, a big grant. In those days — this is 1975 — it was a million dollars. That's a lot of money in 1975 to do an RCT, random assignment in the courts. Two major research organizations in the country had failed to do it. Vera had undertaken to do it. And we really didn't at that time have anybody who could do it. So they hired me and I did it. I'm still on the board of trustees, I should say.

What were the impacts? What did I do? I could tell you lots of research stories. I'm not going to. Here are some things that I learned could be done. You could do a random assignment in the courts. It has been done since then. You can defend research confidentiality. Studying the criminal world, when a subpoena comes and when internal affairs of the police department demands to interview your researchers, you can defend research confidentiality. You can bring empirical measures of performance in the city government and into the world of elected prosecutors. We all are increasingly realizing how important prosecutors are.

You can develop alternatives to jailing the poor for not paying fines and fees and all the kinds of things that we make the poor criminal defendants pay for our criminal justice system. During that period of time, I testified before Congress on that matter. I testified before the U.S. Sentencing Commission. You know because it's all back in the news right now but they didn't do anything about that. But we did have an empirically tested, randomly assignment, four

different sites that we could do it. That was all funded by the Justice Department. The other thing I learned is you can bring theory to the design and evaluation of the interventions. You can bring sociological theory. After 15 years -- I'm running way over here. My time has run out. Let me go quickly.

I went to the National Center for State Courts in 1991. I did research in technology on behalf of the 56 chief justices of the state and territorial courts. I put the first Intranet in the Supreme Court. I have developed the Trial Court Performance Standards and implemented them in the trial courts of the United States. I brought the federal government to not only fund research on torts in the civil jurisdiction. Despite the highly political dimensions of this, I insisted that it be done at the state level so that states could look at their own data on this. Never been done before.

Then in 1995, Norval Morris and Jeremy Travis – some of you may know Norval Morris was a professor of law, Chicago. Jeremy Travis has since become the head of John Jay School of Criminal Justice. They persuaded me to come to the NIJ, the National Institute of Justice, which is the independent research arm of the Justice Department because we have the Crime Act. There have been lots of criticisms about what the Crime Act has done including overpopulation of prisoners. But it was the largest flow of research money into justice research ever, ever in the history of the United States. We did the first major set of studies on violence against women, community policing, illegal firearms, prisons. That funding set the basic research portfolio on which we have subsequently built.

During that period of time, I consulted with England's Home Office on justice issues. I spoke in Australia a lot about justice issues. I worked with the police in Israel who were dealing

with tremendous problems having to do with, at that time, immigration from Russia, not the Palestinian issues but Russian immigrants, and the Council of Europe on matters of police ethics.

Then when the new director of NIJ started talking about why we didn't have equal representation of Democrats and Republicans on the NIJ peer review panel, I thought I either change the perspective here as to what research is all about. If I don't succeed in that, they're going to send me to Siberia because they couldn't fire me. But they could send me to Siberia so that I would be lost forever. I wasn't able to do any change.

Suddenly, there in *Footnotes* was Felice Levine announces she's retiring from the ASA." I've been doing sociology as a career. That's what I felt I was doing. I was doing sociology. I never think of myself as kind of a sociologist but as a person who does sociology. That was my career. Now, I had an opportunity to do for sociology.

I will say two things. Then I will stop. One, I had very much been a solo sociologist during all that time. Many of you don't even know what that is like. Everywhere I was, I was often not the only researcher — I had 60 researchers working for me at various points in time — but the only sociologist. In all those worlds of practice where I was dealing with prosecutors and judges and so forth, they didn't know what a sociologist was. They didn't know what we were. So doing sociology was bringing what that could mean to populations. But I was running solo.

During all the time that we've been talking about, I had no mentors. There were no mentors for the career that I had because it wasn't a career. I sort of made it up as I went along. They were people like Carol Weiss and many of those illustrious sociologists who I

mentioned who are very good to me and who did all kinds of things intellectually to advance my career. But they weren't mentors in a way that you all in this room think about what mentoring is.

At the end of my career at age 60, I came to the ASA to go back to my home, go back to my discipline, bring what I had learned from all this sort of weird doing sociology experiences and in the kinds of organizations I did them. So that developed a whole series of skills because I wanted to bring them back to my discipline. What I would like to say, you all can decide what at the ASA part I've accomplished.

One of the things that I will say is that I have had fun, great fun. I was talking to some people who were mentoring some students. I said tell them that they're going to have a great time. They're going to have a wonderful time. I have had such fun from the beginning of my career to the end of my career. I have mentioned a couple of places where fun was not exactly the appropriate word. But the doing sociology was fun. The experiencing some of those things was not such fun. But doing sociology was incredible fun. I feel as if I was able to worm sociology into places that would say, sociology what? You know the old is that social work? Is that socialism? That was really great.

I came to ASA because there were new challenges. From 60 to 75, I have found all kinds of new challenges. Who knew about getting city revenue bonds to fund a nonprofit buying a real estate deal? What sociologist knows about that? I believe that there are a few, but I didn't. Who knew about the business of publishing? I was just an author. I had to learn from Karen how to do publishing. All those things that they attribute to me with all this publishing,

they belong to Karen. That was all her accomplishments. So doing sociology has meant doing a lot of things and having a great deal of fun. Thank you.