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. Let me say how incredibly touched I am that you asked me to speak with you this evening about the life that I have had in sociology. I thought I would follow what Earl Babbie did in terms of a biography of my life in sociology.

Part of the reason is that I think my life in sociology has been quite different from the life of many of you who have pursued both a life in sociology and a life in academia. 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 since I am retiring at the end of these meetings.

As I talk about my own background, I think you will see some things that are quite different than have been spoken about tonight by others. 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 of being trained as doctors, engineers and lawyers, which they were, but they were all "doers". They didn't just practice or have a regular life in their profession. There was a different quality—they were always "doing". I didn't have a father for the first five years of my life because my physician father at the age of 35, when the war started in Europe in the early 1940s, 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 a field hospital to Normandy yet, but rather on the southern coast of England, where he operated for 36 hours without stepping

away from the operating table other than to drink sugar water and to change his gloves. It was that or men who were wounded at Normandy died. He was following his father's steps.

My grandfather, who was 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 family's line of physicians I might add)--he did the same thing in the Civil War.

The engineers in the family didn't just "do" engineering. My great uncle was the first chief engineer on the Panama Canal. (Maybe that's where I get my penchant for travelling!) Others built the Erie Canals and the aqueduct over the Spuyten Duyvil in New York City. They did things that were different and that were exciting.

Lest you think it was only the men in my family who did that, the women did that, too, in different ways as you can understand. In the early 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 it is a middle class professional family I'm talking about? My grandmother went to work in 1900 to put her husband through medical school. Women of her background did not do that. Her response was, "We do what we need to do." Also differently from the backgrounds of many sociologists, all the women in my family have been college-educated since the 1860s. They weren't intellectuals or "bluestocking" though; they were all women who did things.

I grew up in the middle class suburbs of New York City. By the time I was a teen, I was off to New York City (alone or with a girlfriend). It was to do my music, go to the theatre or to museums. I was always doing something that was different from what the other kids in my

suburban high school were doing. 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. But who really knew about them? Nobody in our families talked about these things. It just wasn't done. You saw those things in the newspaper, but you didn't talk about them.

So in my teens, I had my music, my swimming, my books, and my Manhattan. My Manhattan did not just include the fun shopping (which it did) but going to exhibits on Hiroshima and the Holocaust, and also the exhibit of postcards of lynchings. Most of you here are not surprised as many Americans would be to know that small towns that did lynchings made postcards, and then the townspeople sent them to their friends. There exhibit still exists, but nobody I knew would talk about those things in the 1950s. I had to integrate them into my mind without much help.

I followed my aunt and my cousin to Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. I didn't go there y because of my cousin and aunt or because it was a women's college, although that did appeal to me, but because Mount Holyoke was explicitly a science college.at that time in 1959, Mount Holyoke was one of the only places where women scientists could get academic jobs. It was where they could have their laboratories. These women scientists were the only faculty in the entire Connecticut River Valley at that time who could use the University of Massachusetts' new electron microscope because they were the only ones doing research that needed such advanced tools.

So Mount Holyoke was a great place for me because I assumed I was going to be premed. But I was exposed more broadly at Mount Holyoke to books, history and anthropology at a time -- the early 1960s—that the world was changing. It was the time of African

decolonization and the continent of Africa was undergoing massive changes. Anthropology helped me understand those processes. Mount Holyoke expanded my world view so that the things that were going on but never talked about in my family could be understood.

Mount Holyoke was a tremendously exciting intellectual experience for me. But it was also very middle class, very white, and also very politically silent about social issues of the time with the exception of the Civil Rights Movement.

By the end of my sophomore year, I understood that I needed an experience that would help me break out of the bubble that I was in. Not an intellectual bubble but a social and cultural bubble.

This was 1961 and there weren't programs called junior year abroad. But Mount Holyoke allowed me to propose a plan. There were other people at Mount Holyoke who had done it, but we had to find the places we were going to go, contact them, get them 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 help you do that. You had to communicate by letter. You had to figure out how to get you money from home to the other place. You couldn't just use your credit card because we didn't have them. Believe me, junior year abroad looks very different today than it did then.

So I considered the London School of Economics (LSE). It was in London, that was exciting but a little too "New York". I considered the American University in Beirut, that was a little too far. So I went to the University of Edinburgh. In 1961-1962, I studied economics and social and political philosophy there. I was the only woman in economics. You should have

heard what the room sounded like when I took away all the prizes--all of them. The men in the lecture hall were not particularly happy, but they were very polite!

I lived in what in England is called "digs," boarding houses for students and workers. I lived in digs with mostly working class young people. I roamed all over Scotland with my buddies on a motorcycle and also in a Lancaster, which is an old British car that was so old it leaked carbon monoxide. Fortunately, there were holes in the floor so we had air coming in!

I did another thing, which was pretty outrageous given my conservative background. I hitched a ride with eight men from the theology college at Edinburgh who, with an Arabic-speaking Anglican priest, were off to Jordan and Israel on a study tour to look at biblical archeological sites. I went to Jordan and to pre-Six Days War Israel through the Mandelbaum Gate. I went to Petra before there was a road or a Hilton Hotel; I had to go by horseback and camp. That was terrific at age 20!

I'll tell a bad story and then a funny story. The bad thing was that I spent some time in a Palestinian refugee camp. That changed me more than Petra or the other experiences. I also went with my eight guy companions and male Anglican priest to visit a friend of his who was a sheikh, a Bedouin who lived in a desert tent community. Of course, there was a little problem there for me as a woman because we visitors were all invited into the living portion of the tent for a meal. Being a girl was a little kind of iffy because all the Bedouin women were out in behind the tent doing the cooking. I don't mean to be culturally disparaging; this was just the way things were.

But the sheikh had been educated in Europe so he had a plan for how to permit me into the men's area. I would be the "honored guest". That gave me a different status from being

merely female so I could go in the tent. But there a price I had to pay. As the "honored guest" t was given a little cup that I had to drink from. I looked down at it. It looked back at me. It was a sheep's eye. Fortunately--remember all that time I spent in New York City--I looked at the sheep's eye. I said, raw oyster, oyster, oyster, oyster and gulp—down it went. The more important thing was down it stayed! That was really breaking out of my bubble.

After I finished walking off with all the economic prizes at Edinburgh — I haven't gotten to sociology yet — I spent the summer, as so many of us did in the early '60s wandering all over Europe with a backpack on my back. But this was 1962 and I had to go through Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin because the wall had just gone up. There were lots of beautiful places on the Mediterranean Coast and across Europe that I visited. Then there was East Berlin. Overall it was a very interesting and formative time for me.

I went back to Mount Holyoke College. Here I had the Edinburgh Adam Smith Professor of Economics trying to persuade me to do a PhD in economics. And, indeed, I did a major in economics back at Mount Holyoke but also a major in sociology, virtually all in one year. I decided without a doubt I was going to "do sociology". The short reason was that this was the beginning of the econometrics movement. It wasn't the math that scared me; it was that they held constant all the variables that were the interesting ones. That led me to sociology.

I was going to follow my sociology professors at Mount Holyoke to Yale for my PhD. But no. The Yale Sociology Department Chairman August Hollengshead wouldn't have a woman graduate student. He was well-known as anti-Semitic but my professors didn't know he was as anti-female as he was. My professors went down to Yale to talk to him. Women in sociology? He wouldn't have it.

So off I went home, to New York City and Columbia University. The irony was that what would pay for my first year in graduate school whether at Columbia or Yale was a Danforth Grant. Those of you who are retired will know that at that time Danforth grants were only given to men. It just happened that Mount Holyoke College had a Danforth endowment for graduate school alumna that was Danforth's way of recognizing that women were PhD material. So I had a Mount Holyoke Danforth Grant. So much for Yale.

Columbia was where I really learned sociology. I learned sociology in Fayerweather Hall with Si Goode, Bob Merton, Paul Lazarsfeld, Terry Hopkins, Allan Silver, Manny Wallerstein, Herb Hyman, and lots of others. It was a wonderful place to learn theory and knowledge.

While Fayerweather was where I learned sociology, the Columbia Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) set up in 1939 by Paul Lazarsfeld was where I learned how to "do" sociology. The person from who I learned a lot was Carol Weiss, who has sadly left us. There were lots of others including Dave Caplovitz, who so many of you may not know but you will certainly know his book, *The Poor Pay More*.

It was not the best of times at Columbia in other respects. This was the 1960s at Columbia and a very tumultuous time. I'll come back to that shortly. What faced me professionally was that while I had learned sociology and learned how to do sociology, I needed to figure out what was I going to do with sociology? I was doing my dissertation on working class high school girls — black, Hispanic, and white — who were making their early moves into the labor market. I had Social Security data and did quantitative analyses of their easy courses.

But I also spent a year doing field work in the high school that they had transitioned from into the labor market in order to understand the micro processes that resulted in large

racial differences in their careers. It was the first study of working class women since before the Second World War.

I was finishing my dissertation in 1968 while Columbia was experiencing major political upheavals between the students and the administration. I was very supportive of many of the political issues raised by students. Columbia, even today, is not always the nicest institution which does not say anything negative about the students or the faculty who were there or are there now. As an institution, however, it has many things to account for.

The Columbia trustees finally brought the city police on campus in 1968. The consequence was a police riot in which many students were injured. I was on campus that night, to bear witness to the police action. As the police riot became clear I escaped the campus with Murray Milner and Michael Baker. We went back to my office at the BASR. By 5:00 in the morning, we had a survey out on campus to collect data the interactions between police and students, what the police had done. We asked students and others on campus to give us their names and to describe the physical coordinates of where the events they described happened.

We were able to cross-check all of the information to have multiple accounts of the same events. We published the book *Police on Campus*, one of only two empirical studies of a police riot in the United States. (*The Walker Report* on the Chicago Democratic Convention in 1968 is the other.) That was Columbia.

I was now a sociologist. But, what was I going to do? Well, I did what a lot of people did. K through PhD and into the professoriate. I went to Queens College as an assistant professor; it was 1971 and wonderful.

At Queens, I discovered women closing in on middle age who were going to college for the first time. This was a great teaching opportunity for me, and I also had wonderful colleagues. But I would sum up my experiences with academy by saying that when one of my colleagues said to me, "Why is studying working class women sociologically interesting?" I thought "Am I in the right place?" Many of you could not even imagine that such a statement could ever have been made, but it was. The department voted my tenure, but the chair blocked my 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 in Washington. I didn't think I could do the other research I wanted to do in the university at that time. That would not be true today but was at that time. I felt the Civil Rights Commission would fall apart soon, that it would become politicized so that doing scholarly work there was going to be very difficult and so I didn't go there. That prediction was correct.

For some years, Paul Lazarsfeld had been consulting with the Vera Institute of Justice in New York. In 1975, I went there to do research. One digression. Before I decided on Vera, I thought perhaps I would go back and get a medical degree and combine my sociology with that. I went to talk to the Columbia Medical School. "Oh, you're 30. We don't take applications from women who are over 26." This was 1975! So I went to the Vera Institute of Justice and I spent 15 happy and productive years there doing research.

It was during the 1960s and 70s that Vera labeled what it was trying to do as "action research". (I have a long paper on what action research was all about.) It was a new concept at that time and it was clear to me that action research was what "doing sociology" meant for me.

What did I actually do? I went there initially because Vera had a big research grant for 1975; it was a million dollars. That was a lot of money to do an RCT-- random uncontrolled trial--in the New York City courts. Two major research organizations in the country had tried and failed to do it. Vera had undertaken to do it and hired me to do it. I did it. I'm still on the Vera Board of Trustees.

What else did I do? What were the impacts? I could tell you lots of research stories, but instead here are some things that I learned from experience could be done. You can do a random assignment in the courts; it has been done since then too. You can defend research confidentiality while studying illegal behavior and criminals. When a subpoena comes and police internal affairs demands to interview your researchers, you can defend research confidentiality. You can bring empirical measures of performance into city government and even into the world of elected prosecutors.

You can develop alternatives to jailing the poor for not paying their fines and fees for all the many things we make poor criminal defendants pay to support the criminal justice system. I testified before Congress this and before the U.S. Sentencing Commission. This is all back in the news right now because despite my research, politicians didn't do anything about the debtors' prisons. In the 1980s, I did an RTC funded by the US Justice Department in four different sites, proving that we could change this.

Finally I learned you *can* bring sociological theory to the design and evaluation of real world interventions.

After 15 years at Vera I went to the National Center for State Courts in 1991. I lead research and technology efforts on behalf of the 56 chief justices of the state and territorial

courts. I put the first Intranet in the Supreme Court. I worked on Trial Court Performance Standards and implemented them in the trial courts of the United States. I convinced the federal government to fund research on torts in the state courts. Despite the highly political dimensions of this study, I insisted that data be collected at the state level so that they could look at their own data to make policy changes. It had never been done before.

Then in 1995, Norval Morris and Jeremy Travis (Norval Morris was a professor of law at Chicago and Jeremy Travis is now the president of John Jay College of Criminal Justice) persuaded me to come to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), which is the independent research arm of the US Justice Department as Deputy Director for Research and Evaluation. Congress had just passed the Crime Act and NIJ faced a huge job of making research grants in the social sciences. There has been criticism lately about what the Crime Act did, especially in fueling prison overpopulation. But it was also the source of the largest flow of research money into justice research, ever in the history of the United States. NIJ funded the first major studies on violence against women, community policing, illegal firearms, and prisons that set the research foundation on which we have subsequently built. I was pleased to be a part of this.

During this time, I consulted with England's Home Office on justice issues, and spoke in Australia about justice research. I worked with the police in Israel who were dealing with tremendous problems stemming from Russian immigration, and spoke to the Council of Europe on police ethics.

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 panels, I thought I either had to change this misconception about what a federal research agency was all about, or if not,

I'd be sent to Siberia because they couldn't fire me. In the long run I wasn't able to sufficiently influence the needed change.

Then in 2002, Felice Levine announced in *Footnotes* that she was leaving ASA. I'd been doing sociology as a career, and now, I had an opportunity to do something for sociology if I was selected to replace her.

I had always been mostly a solo sociologist during my career. Many of you in the academy don't know what that is like. While I was, I was typically not the only researcher (I had 60 researchers working for me at various points in my career) but I was often the only sociologist. And, worlds of public policy and practice I worked in, key decision makers didn't know what a sociologist was o what we could contribute; but again, I had to meet this mostly as a solo challenge.

I also had no professional mentors for the career I had chosen because it wasn't a traditional career at that time; I made it up as I went along. There were people like Carol Weiss and many of the wonderful Columbia sociologists I mentioned who are very good to me and who did many things to advance me intellectually. But they weren't mentors in the usual way that we think about mentoring.

At the end of my federal career at age 60, I joined the ASA staff to come back home to my discipline, and to bring what I had learned from all my nontraditional "doing sociology" experiences in many types of organizations. I had developed a set of skills that wasn't common in 2002 and I wanted to bring others with to my discipline.

Others will decide what I've accomplished at ASA. But I can attest that I have had fun, great fun. I was talking earlier today to faculty who were mentoring undergraduate students at

the Annual Meeting. I said to tell the students that they're going to have a great time in sociology. I have had a great deal of fun doing sociology from the beginning of my career to the end. While occasionally "fun" was not exactly the appropriate word, but "doing sociology" was always fun. I was able to worm sociological thinking into policy conversations where sociology was thought to be social work or socialism. That was really great.

I came to ASA because there were sociological colleagues and new challenges. For 14 years I have encountered all types of new challenges. What did I know about getting city revenue bonds to fund a nonprofit like ASA to buy real estate? What did I know about the business of publishing? I was just an author. I had to learn from Karen Edwards how to do scholarly publishing. All the things about ASA publishing advances that people attribute to me belong to Karen; they are all her accomplishments. For me "doing sociology" has meant a career of doing many things sociological and on behalf of sociology and having a great deal of fun. Thank you.