

## Epilogue

# The American Sociological Association at its Centenary

### **Mission**

Over the last two decades the American Sociological Association (ASA) honed its mission and identity. As the chapters to this volume show, the Association's development has been marked by both stability and change. At its centenary, ASA continues to describe itself on its homepage with the language and vision clarified in 1992:

Founded in 1905, [the ASA] is a non-profit membership association dedicated to advancing sociology as a scientific discipline and profession serving the public good. With nearly 14,000 members, ASA encompasses sociologists who are faculty members at colleges and universities, researchers, practitioners, and students. About 20 percent of the members work in government, business, or non-profit organizations.

As the national organization for sociologists, the American Sociological Association, through its Executive Office, is well positioned to provide a unique set of services to its members and to promote the vitality, visibility, and diversity of the discipline. Working at the national and international levels, the Association aims to articulate policy and implement programs likely to have the broadest possible impact for sociology now and in the future.

Its mission is defined as:

- Serving Sociologists in Their Work
- Advancing Sociology as a Science and Profession
- Promoting the Contributions and Use of Sociology to Society

The Association is chartered as a 501(c)(3) organization in the District of Columbia with headquarters at 1307 New York Avenue NW in Washington, DC, with an annual budget in 2005 of about \$4.6 million.

### **Key Components of Success**

The year 2005 marks the 100th anniversary of ASA's founding, and is therefore the occasion for reflection, commemoration, and celebration. The discussion in the preceding chapters has focused on highlights of Association history over the past quarter century around key topical areas. None of this would have been possible without the evolution of both a strong professional staff and the continued commitment, engagement, and contributions of ASA's members and its elected and appointed leadership.

Like other scientific and professional societies, ASA depends on a spirit of volunteerism by its members to contribute their services and talents to organizational functions. Members serve in leadership positions on Council, on committees and task forces, in sections, Annual Meeting events and activities, and in other ways that advance the organization, the profession, and the discipline of sociology. In a world that has become accustomed to instant emails, listservs, teleconferencing and other rapid forms of communication, it is perhaps worthwhile to recall that only two decades ago, none of these modes of communication existed, and yet the Association was still able to rely on the energy, commitment, and engagement of its members as it can today.

Matilda While Riley is a unique illustration of such professional dedication and support. Riley, who died in November 2004 at the age of 91, served the Association and her profession for more than half a century. She was the first Executive Officer of ASA (1949–60) and served as the 77th President of the Association in 1986. Dating back to the beginning of Riley's career, active and committed sociologists volunteering to work in and for the Association as well as an able, dedicated staff have been a hallmark of the American Sociological Association and the source of its strength and successes.

In a recent column in *Footnotes* (February 2005), Executive Officer Sally Hillsman reflected on the consequences of the strong commitment and engagement of the Association's membership and staff for the past accomplishments and future directions for the Association as it marks its 100th anniversary: "Positive trends in the discipline at the commencement of our second century as a scientific society and professional association contribute to ASA's vision. While I am neither a gambler nor a crystal ball gazer, I predict that ASA's fundamental strength, its integrity of purpose, and its ability to face and meet the real challenges that lie ahead, will carry us vigorously through our next 100 years to the celebration of our bicentennial."