

ASA RETIREMENT NETWORK NEWSLETTER

PostScripts

Greetings all,

All ASA members who are in the Retired membership category are also members of the ASA Retirement Network (ASARN). We intend this newsletter, PostScripts, as a way of keeping in touch with your colleagues and your profession. Please also use our ASARN listserv for announcements and notices; for this, contact the listserv administrator Laura Kramer, lkramerphd@gmail.com.

ASARN is led by an elected advisory board of its members. It organizes programming and social events at the ASA Annual Meeting and throughout the year. See our ASARN [webpage](#) for more information.

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New Discussion Series

The ASARN Advisory Board has begun a series of online discussions—three this spring/summer and three in the fall—on topics of interest to sociologists. The one-hour sessions will be scheduled for the **third Thursday of the month at 4 p.m. Eastern**. The topic of the first session in May was “What’s Happening with Sociology in Florida?” The topics for the June 20 and July 18 discussions will be announced on the listserv. The ASARN Board is committed to creating more opportunities for retired sociologists to interact on topics related to our discipline. We hope that you will be able to participate.

Our Program at ASA in Montreal

If attending the ASA Annual Meeting in Montreal in August, we welcome you to the Retirement Network's sponsored events which will occur on August 10 and 11, the Saturday and Sunday of the meeting.

- **The Many Ways of Being a Sociologist After Retirement** -- Sat, August 10, 10:00 to 11:30am, Palais des Congrès de Montréal, Floor: Level 5, 524B

The panelists will share their experiences and ideas about the many different ways sociologists continue their sociological work and presence after retirement. Among the ideas they will address are continuing research activity, continuing to teach, volunteering, participating in community leadership and education, generating intellectual community, and other framings of ongoing engagement in retirement. We encourage those who are retired and also those nearing retirement to attend and share your own retirement experiences, plans, or concerns.

Presider: *Laura Kramer*, Montclair State University

Panelists: *Steven E. Barkan*, University of Maine; *Christine E. Bose*, University at Albany – SUNY; *Pamela Elaine Oliver*, University of Wisconsin-Madison; *Wornie L. Reed*, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

- **ASARN Advisory Board and Business Meeting** -- Sat, August 10, 2:00 to 3:30pm, Palais des Congrès de Montréal, Floor: Level 5, 516E
- **You Don't Know What You've Got Til It's Gone: Continuity of Scholarly Resources After Retirement (Workshop)** -- Sat, August 10, 4:00 to 5:30pm, Palais des Congrès de Montréal, Floor: Level 5, 516E

The facilitators will lead a discussion of the challenges of maintaining continuity of scholarly resources after one retires. They will address issues of IT support, office space, library access, web presence, emeriti status, as well as professional identity concerns. After introductory remarks, they will invite comments, questions, and discussion among session participants, inviting workshop participants to share their experiences and their solutions to these dilemmas.

Facilitators: *David J Ekerdt*, University of Kansas, and *John M. Kennedy*, Indiana University

- **ASARN Life in Sociology Lecture: Barbara Katz Rothman, "Born a Sociologist."** Co-sponsored with the Society for the Study of Social Problems, and with Sociologists for Women in Society. Sun, August 11, 12:00 to 1:30pm, Palais des Congrès de Montréal, Floor: Level 5, 515C

Barbara Katz Rothman, PhD, is Professor of Sociology, Public Health, Disability Studies and Women's Studies at the City University of New York. She has her BA and MA from Brooklyn College, and PhD from NYU. Her books include *In Labor; The Tentative Pregnancy; Recreating Motherhood; The Book of Life; Weaving a Family: Untangling Race and Adoption; Laboring On* (with Wendy Simonds); *A Bun in the Oven: How the Food and Birth Movements Resist Industrialization*; and most recently *The Biomedical Empire: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic*. She is Past President of Sociologists for Women in Society; the Society for the Study of Social Problems, and the Eastern Sociological Society. She was the Fulbright-Saastamoinen Foundation Distinguished Chair in Health Sciences 2018-2019, and is a proud recipient of an award for "Midwifing the Movement" from the Midwives Alliance of North America.

Engagement: Not "Too Old" to School the Media

The chronological age of political candidates has been stirred into this year's election cycle. President Biden, we keep hearing, is "too old for the job." More generally, the ages of America's political leaders have come in for similar critique. The "gerontocracy" has seemingly reached a point of generational exhaustion, as drawn in this cover of the New Yorker. Washington needs new blood.



For a sociologist, it is always reasonable to discuss whether people—of any age—have the capacities and competence to fulfill their roles. And it is reasonable to discuss succession within groups and institutions. To survive their mortal members and endure, human organizations such as governments, teams, political parties, businesses, religious bodies, schools of higher education, etc., must find ways for junior talent to succeed senior leaders.

What is not OK is the casual equation of older age with incompetence and cognitive decline. That is ageism. The author [Ashton Applewhite](#) has recently written that "generalizations about the capacities of older people are no more acceptable than racial or gender stereotypes. You would never say someone is 'too fat to be president,' or 'too gay to be president,' or 'too

dark to be president.' It is just as hateful and biased and ignorant to say someone is 'too old'."

The "too old" trope is as old as the hills, and lazy journalism amplifies it. But one can push back.

The [National Center to Reframe Aging](#) participates in a movement to improve the public perception of aging and spread awareness of implicit bias against older people. For example, the style manuals of leading journals in the biomedical and social sciences now advise authors to adopt "older adult," "older persons," or "older people" as the preferred terms for describing individuals aged 65 years and older as opposed to "seniors," "the elderly," and "the aged." Authors are also asked to refrain from characterizing population aging in apocalyptic terms, such as "silver tsunami."

The Center has put out a brief [guide](#), *Responding to Ageist Election Coverage in the Media*. This resource offers a template for crafting a timely letter to the editor or an op-ed piece. It notes clichés to avoid. Avoid, as well, attempts to rebut harmful stereotypes about older people because that only reinforces them. Rather, "lift up the values and contributions of older people without making negative comparisons to other ages." Best to write affirmatively about the relevant benefits of getting older. (The ASA likewise has guidance about [writing compelling op-eds](#).)

Not only print media, but local broadcast TV and radio may need prods toward bias-free language in their reporting about older people. Direct messages to local editors, reporters, producers, and on-air personalities can have the benefit that the writer becomes a source to be contacted for future reporting. In the words of Robert Havighurst, this is a "teachable moment," and we have the voice and the tools.

Later Life with a Sociological Lens

"Once a sociologist, always a sociologist" was Kenneth Land's reflection for our Life in Sociology lecture at the 2023 ASA Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. Here are some more reflections from ASARN members about experiences that are common in later life, but inevitably seen through a sociological lens.

Travel:

As "mostly retired" sociologists, we know that travel for new experiences, learning, and leisure is a privilege; it is also a gift while health, resources, and obligations are in good stead. This brief excursion focuses on one aspect of being a sociologist-cum-traveler—should and do we see differently when we travel because of our sociological imaginations?

Yes, and yes. While trained to see familiar and "new-to-us" public issues and private troubles, social problems, and institutions in all social settings, we are equally prepared to attend to the amazing intricacies and consequences of human culture and history. In new settings we have a chance to marvel at what human collective life can create. For many of

us, this is why we became sociologists--to engage Durkheim's question: "How is it there is social order?"

In simplistic terms, travel in global and domestic venues typically involves preparation, experience, and reflection. Each stage can lend itself to our sociological practices. Do we read up on a new country or community before we leave? Good grounding is key to any inquiry. During travel, do we take notes? Keep journals? Take certain kinds of photos? Data are gathered. As we process after the travel, what sense do we make of what we experienced? What made the most impact: Social interactions? Material culture? History? Other countries' bureaucracies and politics? Rituals? Art? Food? Analysis and interpretation follow.

I'm not suggesting we turn our travels into research projects, of course. But I do think that our sociological mindsets can never really completely turn off. At some level most of us can't *not* see what we see.

A recent trip to beautiful Costa Rica was particularly sociological for me wherein the usual suspects—Durkheim, Weber, Marx, DuBois, and Gilman—were really helpful. Our group (not solo!) traveled from the capital of San Juan (colonized by Spain); to the fascinating, subsistence level, and accessible-by-boat-only community of Tortuguero nested in a national park on the Caribbean coast; to the northern volcano communities; and back to the elite beach condos and resorts on the Pacific coast. Rich culture, hard work, mechanical and organic communities, income inequality, stratification, racial and ethnic heritage, gender expectations were all expressed within beautiful rain forests and by the welcoming people. Pura Vida.

Happy trails to you.

~ Diane L. Pike, Professor of Sociology *emerita*, Augsburg University,
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The annual college reunion:

I have some observations about my 2023 Alumni Weekend at the University of Chicago. I spent my first day grouching with my fellow emeriti about insufficient involvement for us elders. The scene changed on day two, at a wine tasting, when a table for four opened up nearby. I sat, thankful to save my tired legs. I wondered how many more reunions I would be physically able to attend.

A happening was at hand. Three young women with loaded plates politely asked if they could join me, and I was delighted to welcome them. They admitted being undergraduates and enjoying the spread without being alumnae or registered. I admitted feeling out of place myself. Then came the obvious question, "When did you graduate?" This really

meant, “How great is the difference between us?” I was 86 and celebrating my 65th reunion. The three undergrads gasped, “No way!” I explained that I’ve always had problems from people misjudging me from my “baby face.” I told them of an experience back when I started teaching. I had entered the faculty lounge when a woman there immediately came up to me. Without a word she grabbed my collar and pulled me out of the lounge. “She thought you were a student!” “Yes, she did,” I replied, “and so did the faculty and administration.” This was about the same reception I got in general. Throughout life I found that my contributions were not taken seriously, and I struggled against this stereotype for decades.

This problem of not fitting in is universal, especially strong among the young, and it’s reimposed for us emeriti. Here I was at a “reunion” without anyone else present from my graduating class to unite with. Instead, I shared a table with three undergraduates sensitive to issues of marginal social place and gaining acceptance.

Our emergent theme was the University and how well it prepared us for life outside its halls. Two women who were studying in interdepartmental committees had difficulty deciding which disciplinary area to choose. It had been the same with me. I graduated without a major because my committee, Human Development, hadn’t organized one (though later I received my masters in that area). We discussed psychology as a problematic discipline and how Human Development included courses in six disciplines to master. The women described their academic interests and how they were managing to focus under uncertainty. I was left with many unanswered questions as the wine-tasting event ended, we were ushered out of the tent, and we went our separate ways.

Afterwards I reflected on how well we four were able to communicate about such basic life questions: Why are we here? Where is my place? Today’s world is different from the world I studied in. It is more fluid and changing, and these young women were facing the same uncertainty that I had when I came to Chicago and which I still face. The academic disciplines don’t align with the economic and social structures that are expanding and developing around us, and the University’s attempts to respond with interdepartmental committees and programs of studies tailored to individual interests have their own problems.

So, these questions have no answers. They only reveal our choices and the limitations we accept with them. My recent choice now includes attending Reunion 2024, when there were no other graduates from the Class of 1958 to reunite with.

~ Keith Roberts Johnson, Retired/Independent Scholar, keithjohnson101@gmail.com

Being an election worker:

In 2022 I became an “election judge“ because of the testimony of Georgia election worker Shaye Moss to the January 6th Committee, how she was falsely attacked by Rudy Giuliani

and the awful impact that had on her life. The ongoing attacks on election workers are horrifying. The bubble where I live in Montgomery County, Maryland, feels quite safe, but there is a shortage of workers.

I recently worked three “early voting” days and primary day. In Maryland one works a full shift (6 a.m. to the closing up of the polling place, which takes hours after voters leave at 8 p.m.), or one works a half shift – merely nine hours. Maryland pays election judges, not a lot but more than jury duty. Yet people sign up to perform this work, and some choose to forgo the pay.

When I realized just how many people connect to the act of voting almost as sacred, I found myself thinking, “This is civil religion!” Many people who opted for the mail ballots during COVID have changed their requests so they can come to the polling place (although voting by mail in Maryland is quite easy). Going to vote with family members is a common practice. Many voters come as couples. Members of two different generations come together. A parent often comes in with a young voter. Older voters sometimes come with an adult child. And future voters—small children—come in with a parent. I remember accompanying my father to the polling place and going into the booth when I was seven or eight; my partner and I went to the polling place together for decades.

One woman in her twenties had a decorative clip in her hair that said “Vote” in glittery letters. Several people wore shirts with large U.S. flags. When given the choice of marking a paper ballot with a pen or using a touch screen (“ballot marking device”), most don’t have a preference. Some prefer the touch screen (people with tremors or visually impaired); many people want to know which will be faster. But some voters want the traditional way (and they are not necessarily older voters). As a participant in this civil religion, I find myself proselytizing to others—explore the polling-place roles that might be open to you!

~ Laura Kramer, Professor Emerita of Sociology, Montclair State University,
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Recent Books by ASARN Members

Keeping Family Secrets: Shame and Silence in Memoirs from the 1950s, by Margaret K. Nelson, NYU Press, 2022. [More.](#)

The Farm and Wilderness Summer Camps: Progressive Ideals in the Twentieth Century, by Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson, Rutgers University Press, 2023. [More.](#)

Don't Take It Personally: Personalness and Impersonality in Social Life, by Eviatar Zerubavel, Oxford University Press, 2024. [More.](#)

School Resources, the Achievement Gap, and the Law: Reconsidering School Finance,

Policies, and Resources in US Education Policy, by David Armor, John R. Munich, and Aron Malatinszky, Routledge, 2024. [More.](#)

Medical Marijuana: Dr. Kogan's Evidence-Based Guide to the Health Benefits of Cannabis and CBD, by Mikhail Kogan and Joan Liebmann-Smith, Avery, 2023. [More.](#)

Research Handbook on the Sociology of Migration, by Giuseppe Sciortino, Martina Cvajner and Peter J. Kivisto (Eds.), Edward Elgar, 2024. [More.](#)

If Only You Could Bottle It: Memoirs of a Radical Son, by Jack Nusan Porter, Academic Studies Press, 2023. [More.](#)

Saving Societies From Within: Innovation and Equity Through Inter-Organizational Networks, by Jerry Hage, Joseph J. Valadez and Wilbur C. Hadden, Routledge, 2024. [More.](#)

Erving Goffman and the Cold War, by Gary D. Jaworksi, Lexington Books, 2023. [More.](#)

We Can Change the World: Tales from a Generation's Quest for Peace and Justice, by Douglas L. Murray, Ideas Into Books: Westview, 2024. [More.](#)

Sociology of Mental Disorder (12th ed.), by William C. Cockerham, Routledge, 2024. [More.](#)

Creating Life Before Death: Before Disaster Strikes the Ship of State (2nd ed.), by Bernard Phillips and others, Sociological Imagination Publishing, 2024. [More.](#)

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