

# Section on Aging & the Life Course



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Matilda White Riley once wrote that “if the twentieth century has been the era of increasing longevity, the twenty-first century will be the era of social opportunities for older people to age in new and better ways.” We owe a great deal of debt to Matilda and her followers. She had a magnificent and productive career, and as Anne Foner remembers in *ASA Footnotes*, she was an “inspiring and caring mentor.” And, perhaps important of all, she brought scholarly attention on the significance of age and aging in the discipline of sociology. That work highlighted the need of social scientific studies to examine the dynamic interplay among changing social structures, the ways in which individuals organize and find meaningful roles in work, family, and leisure as they live to be old, and how they are affected by class, inequality, and social policy. Some of the most important concepts developed by her, including structural lag and age stratification theory, continue to inform prominent work in the field today. In this issue, I want to call to your attention to an abbreviated version of the Matilda White Riley Award Lecture given by Charles Longino at the annual meeting in Montreal last year.

Building on these scholarly and professional contributions has provided the inspiration for the section theme: *Getting Better, Getting Worse, Who Wins, Who Loses?* of the Annual Meeting in New York City, NY on August 11-14, 2007. My hope is that the Section on Aging and the Life Course (SALC) Program will stimulate and facilitate research on some of the most important work for generations to come. All of the Session Organizers (Jill Quadagno, Glen Elder, Rick Settersten, Cheryl Elman, James House, Ingrid Connidis, and Dennis Hogan) are now reviewing papers on topics that are certain to offer a refreshing and unique perspective. If you haven't already read the special issue on health inequalities across the life course in the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences* (2005), you'll find it includes an excellent collection of articles related to these issues. The Planning Committee has been busy organizing several special events for Section Day (August 14<sup>th</sup>) and Section Eve (Monday, August 13<sup>th</sup>). Save the Dates!

I am excited to announce that our section will consider sponsoring the Elsevier annual book series on *Aging and the Life Course Research (ALCR)*. Tim Owens of Purdue University has served as the Series Editor, but has approached Council on developing a formal relationship between the Section and this series upon the completion of his tenure in 2010. The annual series has firm footing, circulation of approximately 300 volumes, and is catalogued in major social science databases. Sponsoring the ALCR brings with it a set of new opportunities to increase the visibility of the section, to develop other proposals of section sponsored publications, and to promote scholarly activity by SALC membership. Council has included a resolution on the 2007 Election ballot that will allow you to vote on whether you want the Section Leadership to formally develop an ASA proposal to adopt ALCR. I would be remiss if I didn't thank Cheryl Elman and members of the Ad Hoc Committee for their outstanding work on this initiative.

(Continued.....)

Finally, I want to share the good news that we have reached over 600 members, allowing us to hold an additional paper session. I would like to encourage you to share the membership information below with your colleagues and students.

Best wishes for a productive and enjoyable year.

Cheers!

Jacqui

## **Keep our Numbers Growing!**

by Noelle Chesley

Membership in the Aging and Life Course Section has been growing in recent years and underscores the vibrancy, energy, and dedication of our scholars. Section membership is an inexpensive and easy way to stay in contact with a broad intellectual community (and we have fun parties, too!). To obtain or renew your membership online, visit:

<http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?section=Join+or+Renew&name=Join>

Membership in the Aging and Life Course section is available to all members of the American Sociological Association. A one-year membership is \$13.00 for regular members and \$6.00 for student members. Further inquiries about section membership can be directed to Noelle Chesley (414-229-2398; [chesley@uwm.edu](mailto:chesley@uwm.edu)).

## **SALC Mentoring Dinner**

The Committee on Mentoring and Professional Development and the Section on Aging and the Life Course are pleased to announce this year's Mentoring Dinner in New York will be held on Monday, August 13<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 PM at Trattoria Dopo Teatro located near both the Hilton and Sheraton Hotel. We're looking forward to a party of around 50-75 guests this year, so if you are a student or a mentor, stay tuned for further announcements. The Mentoring Dinner has traditionally been a way for students and young scholars to meet and connect with established scholars in the field of Aging and the Life Course in a relaxed setting. We're hoping to make this year's dinner the best yet!

### **RESOURCE AVAILABLE**

Angel Harris has developed a power point presentation about establishing a research agenda. The presentation is a tremendously valuable resource in guiding the professional development of graduate students and junior faculty.

See link:

<http://www.prc.utexas.edu/documents/EstablishingResearchAgenda-Harris.ppt>

## **“QUO VADIS, GEROND?:**

A Personal Journey

Chuck Longino

### **Introduction**

I am honored to be here today and I am also keenly aware of the magnitude of the task....to wrap it up. That is, to briefly summarize my research career, to reflect on that journey and, hopefully, to extract some wisdom from it—all in 30 minutes or less.

I can't help thinking of this talk as being similar to Garrison Keillor's summer movie, based on the Prairie Home Companion radio show, with its overarching themes of leave-taking, closure, and death. Of course, "the journey of life" is not a good metaphor for my research program because life's journey still happens, even if one never moves.

On a trip to Washington, D.C. this summer I made a pilgrimage to the National Gallery to see again Thomas Cole's allegorical paintings that he called "the voyage of life." Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School of painters, placed his "voyage" in the Catskills. Childhood—is in a little boat that looks like a manger, and is protected by an angel--represents new beginnings, new hope.

Youth—straining forward with heroic visions of a castle in the sky, represents the expansive, optimistic, and idealistic dreams of youth. The angel is not far away.

Adulthood—endangered by the currents, rapids, and rocks of the steeply descending river, represents the struggles of mid-life, perhaps struggles with economic insecurity, career mobility, family conflicts, divorce, health crises, and, of course, with our faith. It is sometimes a rough ride. And to make it rougher, the protecting angel is on a distant perch, nearly out of sight. Finally, old age—surviving adulthood and showing signs of the struggle--sits in his broken boat, in calm waters, exhausted and now confronting his mortality at the end of the voyage. It is a static picture. There is no mobility here, except in old age's memory. "Wow! What a ride!" he thinks. And guess what: The angels are back.

### **The mobility of a mobility scholar.**

My childhood and youth were full of family moves: Brookhaven, Silver Creek, Lumberton, Hattiesburg, a reprise of Lumberton, and Poplarville.....all in southern Mississippi .....and all before college. To me, moving seemed like a normal and expected thing to do.

My higher education took me from Mississippi to Colorado to North Carolina. And my career moves were from Chapel Hill NC, to Charlottesville, VA, to Lawrence KS, to Miami FL, and finally to Winston-Salem, NC.

So when I finally came to the topic of the geographical mobility of older people, I started with the notion that mobility was normal for everyone, although it is more frequent among the young.

### **Scholarship on later-life mobility**

Because so little had been written on this subject in the gerontology literature, our first few projects simply re-invented general migration research. How do we understand patterns of mobility, and decision processes that lead to these patterns in the context of aging and the life course? Earlier migration research had focused almost entirely on the labor force. So, post retirement migration was nearly virgin territory.

(continued...)

The NIA was generous in supporting my research—six times! I had wonderful teams of fellow travelers for various parts of the journey. It was certainly not a solo effort.

In thinking about this lecture, I tried to identify the five most important, or at least most interesting, findings of my research program. I would like just to mention them here in general terms.

First, the patterns of interstate migration change slowly over time; the master trend is Sunbelt consolidation. More important, however, primary destination states experience long arcs of slowly rising and declining popularity. Florida's apex was in the 1980 census and is now steadily declining a few percentage points per decade. California has been in decline for five decades. There is no reason to believe that Arizona, Texas, North Carolina, and even Nevada, will not eventually follow this pattern.

Nonetheless, the proportion of people over 60 making these kinds of moves is quite stable (at 4.5%) and has changed very little for several decades. This means that the growth of migrants is pegged directly to the growth of the older population. Studying migration patterns is about as exciting as watching grass grow .....once the myth busting is over.

Second, return migration is essentially the same among older migrants as it is among migrants of all ages. Once it was assumed that returning to one's native state in retirement was normative among older migrants. It is not.

Third, we discovered a general pattern of counterstream migration from popular destination states back to popular origin states. When we compared the characteristics of migrants in the major streams with those in their paired counterstreams, we found stream migrants (New York to Florida, for example) to be younger, more often married, and living independently; and counterstream migrants (say, from Florida to New York) to be considerably older, more often female, widowed, and much more often returning to their state of birth. This is a process that should ease the eventual burden of long-term care in popular destination states.

Spurred on by these findings, we wrote about the types of moves that older people tend to make as their life course progresses: From amenity moves soon after retirement to assistance moves at older ages where health is a greater motivating factor.

Fourth, when the economic impact of migration was explored, we found that the net income transfer from migrants could amount to billions of dollars a year in the most popular destination states and hundreds of millions in many others.

The economic development agencies in some Sunbelt states took notice of these findings and the image of older migrants has shifted from negative to positive over the course of these studies. In fact, several states are now actively recruiting older migrants.

Fifth, two ideal types emerged from our latest study, which uses HRS data and Cox Proportional Hazards Modeling to predict later-life mobility. The type most likely to move is characterized as better educated, as more experienced with mobility in their jobs. Since they are more likely to move, they also tend to have newer homes, and are more likely to rent, to regularly vacation out of town, and to have vacation homes.

The type least likely to move has not moved much. They are more likely to have grown up in the area where they live, to know lots of people in their community, their children and parents (or parents-in-law) live with or within ten miles of them. They are settled into a social environment in which their needs are well met.

So, social ties (either at origin or destination) may be far more influential in predicting a move than could be known from working with census data alone. This conclusion should not surprise sociologists, should it?

## **The role of the interpreter**

We were totally unprepared for the disproportional media interest in the topic of retirement migration.

In the mid-1980s, our project officer told me that they had filled an entire file cabinet with press clippings that cited the NIA, largely from our third project. The implications of our findings for economic development, housing, and health care delivery seemed obvious to journalists.

## **Wisdom from the journey**

After considerable thought, I found four ideas that might pass for wisdom, if not examined too closely.

First, we are lucky today if we can follow our own interests in research, and spend thirty or more years pulling on a thread to see what unravels next.

Instead, most of us are like aboriginal hunters-and-gatherers who have to support the tribe. That is, we have to meet institutional needs through on-going funding streams, whether we are devoted to the research topic or not. And that is unfortunate.

Second, basic and applied research interests are sometimes compatible. Departments of Health and Human Services, economic development offices, and housing developers could care less about advances in migration theory, but they are happy to wade through those discussions to get to the findings that help them to make better plans.

Third, media interests can translate into funding interests. I am suggesting here that there may be a connection between that file cabinet full of press clippings and our continuous funding by NIA. My point here is that we should not be snobs when relating to journalists. They are our allies.

Fourth, we do not necessarily become what we study. I'll probably not become an "amenity migrant" after I retire. After a lifetime of mobility experience, and higher education, social ties will probably hold us in place. During recent years, friends, children and especially grandchildren have come to reside, in increasing numbers, in Central and Piedmont North Carolina, mooring us there, like a boat to a wharf.

I am relying on the truth of the aphorism that I began with. "Life's journey goes on, even if one does not move."

In Conclusion, Cole, in his "Voyage of Life" series, seems to be saying that wisdom can come from struggle. Old age may seem boring and problematical to people who are younger, but from a life course perspective, for many of us it can be a culmination, and a release.

Finally, let me answer the question in the title of my talk.

**"Quo Vadis, Gerond?" (Translation: Where are you going, old man?)**

**I'm going to Disney World.....with my grandchildren. ....**

Thank you for your attention.

## Opportunities/Announcements

### Section Award Nominations

#### *Matilda White Riley Distinguished Scholar Award*

This award honors a scholar who had shown exceptional achievement in research, theory, policy analysis, or who has otherwise advanced knowledge of aging and the life course. Letters of nomination should describe the candidate's contributions to the study of aging and the life course. Additional letters of support are encouraged but not required. Nominations should be submitted by April 4, 2007 to: Duane Alwin, McCourtney Professor of Sociology and Human Development, 326A Pond Lab

Department of Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802-6207.

Phone: (814) 863-0438; Fax: (814) 863-8342; Email: [dalwin@pop.psu.edu](mailto:dalwin@pop.psu.edu) or [dfa2@psa.edu](mailto:dfa2@psa.edu)

#### *Graduate Student Paper Award*

The Section on Aging and the Life Course invites original student papers on any topic related to sociology of aging and the life course. Papers co-authored with faculty members are ineligible. Papers already published are eligible if they appeared in print after January 1, 2005. Self-nominations are encouraged. An award of \$250 is presented to the winner at the Business Meeting of the Section, held during the ASA Annual Meeting in August of each year. Send three (3) copies of the nominated paper in the ASA format by May 2, 2007 to: Chris Himes, Chair, Department of Sociology, 302 Maxwell Hall 2346, Syracuse, NY 13244

Phone: 315-443-3252; Fax: 315-443-4597; Email: [CLHimes@maxwell.syr.edu](mailto:CLHimes@maxwell.syr.edu)

### **The Department of Sociology, University of New Hampshire, announces a new fully-funded Graduate Student Fellowships in Community, Health, and Environment.**

The Department of Sociology at the University of New Hampshire is delighted to announce the availability of three new fully-funded 4-year Fellowships for graduate students with research interests in the area of Community, Health and Environment.

Prospective graduate students interested in being considered for these fellowships should apply to the department before March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007, for consideration for admission for Fall 2007. Additional fellowships will be offered in 2008 and 2009.

The UNH Sociology Graduate Program offers intensive immersion in research methods and statistics, sociological theory, and a concentration selected from among five areas of specialization: Community and Environment; Health and Illness; Family; Crime and Conflict; and Stratification.

Fellowship awardees will receive full (12-months) funding for four years, and, will have the opportunity to work with faculty in Sociology, the School of Health and Human Services, and the Carsey Institute, a policy and applied center for research on families and communities. Students will also gain teaching experience.

Please submit your completed graduate application to: The Graduate School, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

More information available from:

Michele Dillon

Professor and Graduate Chair

Department of Sociology

University of New Hampshire

Durham, NH 03824

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## Call for proposals for the 15<sup>th</sup> Sociology of Health and Illness monograph

Proposals are invited for the fifteenth volume in the monograph series to be published by Sociology of Health and Illness in conjunction with Blackwell Publishers. The Board of the journal considers all proposals for the Monograph series at the first board meeting of each year. The monograph will be 65-70,000 words in length comprising contributions of approximately 6,500 words each and will appear both as a regular issue of the journal and in book form. The planned publication date is September 2009.

The proposal needs to contain the following elements:

1. Justification of the proposed topic in terms of its academic merits, how it fits into the monograph series and how links between medical sociology and other substantive areas will be established.
2. A statement of 3 or 4 themes that might be addressed and how these might be broken down into subthemes.
3. Consideration of the proposal's appeal to: regular readers of the journal and to readers who might buy it as a book; medical sociologists and to readers from sister disciplines; sociologists from continental Europe, North America, the UK, Australia & New Zealand and the rest of the world.
4. Competitor publications should be noted and the distinctiveness of the proposal explained in relation to any such competition.
5. An account of how the call for papers would be advertised to reach a range of contributors to include junior and well established authors and international range of contributors.
6. A list of potential contributors who might be approached.

A short biographical note about the proposed editors.

Proposals can be discussed informally with the Monograph Editor (Hannah Bradby of the University of Warwick, UK: email: [H.Bradby@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:H.Bradby@warwick.ac.uk)) before submitting the final document.

Finalised proposals should be sent to [H.Bradby@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:H.Bradby@warwick.ac.uk) by March 29<sup>th</sup> 2007 and will be reviewed and the outcome notified by April 30th 2007.

See <http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journal.asp?ref=0141-9889&site=1> for further details of the series.

**The Journal of Long Term Home Health Care** is interested in articles of about 20 pages that are focused on any aspect of health care and social issues as they pertain to the elderly. Manuscripts may include position papers, reports of research studies, case reports, analyses of government policy, descriptions and/or evaluations of agencies, programs, and not-for-profit organizations serving any component of the aged population. Papers that offer detailed discussions of a topic, forecast developments, or provide readers with enhanced perspective are particularly welcome. The Journal also considers for publication commentaries on previously published articles, book and media reviews, etc.

The readership of the Journal consists of physicians, nurses, social workers, social scientists, and others who work directly with older persons, as well as managers and staff of not-for-profit and government agencies serving the elderly.

Author queries should be directed to [DRPWB@aol.com](mailto:DRPWB@aol.com) or forwarded by mail to:

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## Gay Becker Obituary

Gay Becker, 63, Medical Anthropologist, died January 7, 2007 in Bangkok, following an eight week illness that began while she and her husband were traveling in India. Her untimely death in the prime of her distinguished and socially committed career left her family, friends, colleagues, and students with a deep sense of loss and profound sadness. Through her rigorous, astute research and clear, prolific publications to multiple audiences, Gay was an unswerving champion of the overlooked, the disadvantaged, the stigmatized, the unlucky, the pained.

Gay was born and raised in San Francisco, received her B.A. in Anthropology at San Francisco State University in 1972 and her Ph.D. in Medical Anthropology in the joint Medical Anthropology Program, UC San Francisco/UC Berkeley, in 1978. Mentored by Margaret Clark, George Foster and Joan Ablon, she was among the first wave of doctoral students trained specifically in Medical Anthropology. Gay's early interest in how stigma, disability and chronic illness are culturally mediated led to her pioneering doctoral research on the culture of deafness, published as Growing Old in Silence (1980). She was one of the first anthropologists to engage seriously illness and disability as cultural phenomena that could be investigated both through narrative and phenomenological theory and through ethnographic work in communities and medical settings. Her work on chronic illness included studies of stroke and asthma and it led to one of the primary research foci of her career: the multiple and often resilient ways in which individuals live with health conditions that create unforeseen paths in the course of their lives. The richness of people's lives mattered most to her.

Gay taught in the Medical Anthropology Program, the Medical Sociology Program, the School of Nursing and the School of Medicine at UC San Francisco for 25 years while simultaneously achieving a productive research career. Unusual for an anthropologist in the 1980s and 1990s, Gay had a central role in teaching pre- and post-doctoral students in gerontology and geriatric medicine. Beloved by several generations of students for her personal warmth and support, her ethnographic work and accessible publications and her honest, straight-forward style of communication, she was one of the most admired and sought-after advisors throughout UCSF. In 1995 Gay won the Distinction in Teaching Award from the Academic Senate, UCSF. She trained many of the medical anthropologists and medical sociologists working at home and abroad today. She also nurtured and empowered many others – colleagues, research staff, informants, patients and physicians.

Gay's engagement with social issues was channeled into two broad areas of research. The first, encompassing aging, ethnicity, chronic illness and, most recently, structural inequality and the uninsured, stressed the relationships among illness, ethnicity, poverty and life course disruption, and she wrote widely on the chronic illness experience among ethnic minorities, the effects of immigration and globalization on the elderly, displacement, memory, trauma and health status among refugees, the health of the uninsured, and social factors that prevent the creation of universal health insurance. Gay earned the highly prestigious Merit Award from the National Institute on Aging for her work on ethnicity and aging in a 10-year study, "Cultural Responses to Illness in the Minority Aged." Her second area of research (in collaboration with Robert Nachtigall) explored the experiences of infertility, donor insemination, and marketing and consuming the new reproductive technologies. Aware of the profound feelings of pain and grief among many childless couples, she wrote Healing the Infertile Family (1990, new edition 1997), making her findings available to a wide public. At the time of her death Gay had four active NIH projects and a book manuscript in progress titled: "Living Poor in the Land of Plenty: Illness, Disruption, and Poverty in Four Ethnic Groups."

During the last decade of her life, Gay's work was recognized through a multitude of honors and awards. Her publications in the medical literature were lauded for their insights about cultural diversity and relevance to the practice of medicine. Gay served the Society of Medical Anthropology with a great deal of energy, enthusiasm and competence. She was the Editor of the Medical Anthropology Quarterly from 1994-98 and she chaired the MAQ editor search committee in 2005.

Gay was committed to merging research with social justice; she was a model scholar. She was a superb mediator and was modest about her own accomplishments. She was a person of integrity and generosity of spirit. Gay had a great deal of wisdom and ethical clarity about academic affairs and the conduct of life. Her own experience with chronic illness gave her special insights. She lived fully, hiking the Grand Canyon rim to rim, and she died shortly after completing a 70-kilometer trek in Nepal, having seen Mt. Everest.

We miss her quiet ability to solve problems, her responsiveness and her encouragement of others. She is survived by her husband and life partner of many years, Roger Van Craeynest.

(written by Sharon R. Kaufman)

January 17, 2007