

2006

## Bio-Bibliography: John Barron Mays (1914-1987)

Michael R. Hill

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, michaelhilltemporary1@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologyfacpub>



Part of the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

---

Hill, Michael R., "Bio-Bibliography: John Barron Mays (1914-1987)" (2006). *Sociology Department, Faculty Publications*. 352.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologyfacpub/352>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology Department, Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Hill, Michael R. 2006. “Bio-Bibliography: John Barron Mays (1914-1987).” *Sociological Origins* 4 (Spring): 111-114.

## Bio-Bibliography: John Barron Mays (1914-1987) <sup>1</sup>

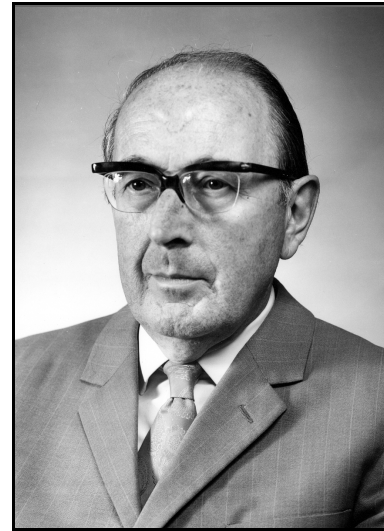
Michael R. Hill

**J**OHN BARRON MAYS developed a humane sociological perspective with multiple roots, including formal training in English, firsthand experience in a settlement house, a distinguished university professorship in sociology, and lifelong work as an active poet.<sup>2</sup> Mays' felicitous professional publications often spoke not only to university colleagues but also to constituencies beyond the halls of academe on a series of interrelated topics, including adolescence, criminology, education, urban life, and poetry.

### BIOGRAPHY

John Barron Mays was born July 7, 1914. His academic training included a B.A. with Honors in English Language and Literature from the University of Liverpool in 1937, followed immediately by a Diploma in Education, again from the University of Liverpool, in 1938. Mays then began a twenty-year period as a school teacher (1938-40), youth worker (1940-46), and finally as Warden and Youth Leader in the University of Liverpool Settlement (1946-55). Teaching and his post in the University Settlement introduced him experientially to several themes (education, juvenile delinquency, and urban life, among others) that he explored more formally during his subsequent life as a university researcher.

May's work with inner-city youth was apparently interpersonally intense and exacted enormous emotional investments. He explored these tensions (and their rural resolution) in a semi-fictional, quasi-autobiographical reflection, *A Hut in the Hills* (Mays 1980).



**John Barron Mays**

(Photo courtesy of the Archives of the University of Liverpool)

---

<sup>1</sup> **SOCIOLOGICAL ORIGINS**, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 2006): 111-114. All rights reserved. Please visit our free website ([www.sociological-origins.com](http://www.sociological-origins.com)) for additional information and other features.

<sup>2</sup> For their kind and expert help in completing this bio-bibliography, I am indebted to Professor Nicholas Mays (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), Professor Ken Roberts (Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work Studies, University of Liverpool), Mr. Adrian Allen (University Archivist, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University Library, University of Liverpool), and Professor Kathleen A. Johnson (University Libraries, University of Nebraska-Lincoln).

Mays completed an M.A. in Social Science at the University of Liverpool in 1953, and a Ph.D. in 1961.

Mays' specifically academic career of twenty-five years unfolded at the University of Liverpool. During the post-war era of expanding research opportunities in English universities, he was appointed Research Lecturer in the Department of Social Science in 1955, and was promoted to Senior Research Lecturer in 1961. In 1965, he was selected to fill the newly created Eleanor Rathbone Chair of Sociology — a post he held until his retirement in 1980. He served as Head of the Department from 1969 to 1976, "guiding it through a phase of major expansion and change in a new Faculty" ("Professor J.B. Mays" 1980: 22).

A distinguishing feature of sociological research at Liverpool was a concerted effort to link theory and methods with pragmatic issues, and to collaborate with the communities under study:

We have always acted on the assumption that a project should not proceed unless there is an understanding and acceptance of its aims on the part of the "subjects" involved. This is not only a moral issue, but also in our experience a pragmatic necessity, at least in the long run. If people understand and endorse a project, they are likely to co-operate more fully; more importantly, one of the main assets of a University in research is its independence, and this is best safeguarded if *all* the main parties endorse a project which may involve or affect them. (Scott and Mays 1960:111).

Building on his early training in English Language and Literature, Mays became an accomplished and well-published poet. He was also "a prominent broadcaster, taking part for many years in *Round Britain Quiz*" ("Prof. John Mays" 1987). With his wife, Angela, he had two children (Alexandra and Nicholas). John Barron Mays died on October 21, 1987, at age 72.

## MAJOR THEMES

Known today primarily among criminologists, Mays (together with Maurice Craft) was also the senior instrumental General Editor for some three decades of Longman's book series on *Aspects of Modern Sociology*. This series sponsored dozens of accessible, up-to-date works on specific topics that opened sociology not only to students but also to a wide reading public under three general headings: The Social Structure of Modern Britain; Social Processes; and Social Research. Titles in the later series included: *The Limitations of Social Research*, *Social Research Design*, *Sources of Official Data*, *History of Social Research Methods*, *Deciphering Data*, *The Philosophy of Social Research*, and *Techniques of Data Collection*. This sequence sought "to offer an informative but not uncritical introduction to some of the methodologies of social science" (Mays and Craft 1980: ix). Mays wrote poetry throughout his life and,

according to Kenneth Roberts, “John always felt that there were affinities between sociology and his original subject.”

## CRITIQUES

Mays’ sociological work generally received favorable notices. Kenneth Roberts reports that *Growing Up in the City* was a “hit,” and “is still in reading lists today.” In a characteristic Chicago school-style broadside, however, Donald Cressey (1955: 509) approved of *Growing Up in the City* to the extent that Mays utilized the “writings and research of Thrasher, Shaw and McKay, Whyte, and Glueck,” but faulted Mays for having made “no mention of Sutherland.” In reviewing Paul Meadows and Ephraim Mizruchi’s reader on *Urbanism, Urbanization and Change*, Mays (1971: 222) got in a sharp retort: “It is something of a relief in fact to find a reader in urban sociology *not* having to quote at length from the Chicago school but getting on with more up-to-date contributions . . . .” Mays’ poetry typically received brief but appreciate comment in literary magazines. The linkage between Mays’ poetry, on the one hand, and sociology, on the other, went largely unappreciated by Mays’ critics, at least in print. Ken Roberts noted that “At the time, when British sociology was professionalising, a section of the profession queried whether John Mays’ work was proper sociology,” and that when *The Poetry of Sociology* first appeared, “One colleague argued caustically that the publishers must have mis-set the title — surely it should have been the sociology of poetry.”

## REFERENCES

### **Selected Works by John Barron Mays**

- 1940. *Poems of Love and War*. Liverpool: Foggo. [poetry].
- 1953. *The Seasons Change*. London: Fortune Press. [poetry].
- 1954. *Growing up in the City: A Study of Juvenile Delinquency in an Urban Neighbourhood*. Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool.
- 1959. *On the Threshold of Delinquency*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- 1962. *Education and the Urban Child*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- 1963. *Crime and the Social Structure*. London: Faber and Faber.
- 1965. *The Young Pretenders: A Study of Teenage Culture in Contemporary Society*. London, M. Joseph.
- 1967. *The School in its Social Setting*. London: Longman.
- 1968. *The Introspective Society*. London: Sydney, Sheed & Ward.
- 1968. *The Poetry of Sociology: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered 28 October 1966*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- 1970. *Crime and Its Treatment*. London: Longman.
- 1971. Review of *Urbanism, Urbanization and Change*, edited by Paul Meadows and Ephraim Mizruchi. *British Journal of Sociology* 22 (June): 221-222.

1973. *An Earthquake Somewhere Else*. Liverpool: Rondo Publications. [poetry].
1975. *Urban Problems and Moral Issues*. London: Lindsey Press.
1977. *Nicer Than Humans*. London: Autolycus Publications. [poetry].
1979. *Penelope Hall's Social Services of England and Wales*. Edited on behalf of the Sociology Department of Liverpool University by John Mays, with Anthony Forder and Olive Keidan. London: Routledge & Paul.
1980. "Editors' Introduction." (John Barron Mays and Maurice Craft). P. ix in *The Philosophy of Social Research*, by John Hughes. London: Longman.
1981. *The Gift of Blood: A Selection of Poems*. London: Enitharmon. [poetry]
1985. *A Hut in the Hills*. Penzance, Cornwall: United Writers Publications.

For a comprehensive list of publications and poetry by John Barron Mays, see the bibliography in David M. Downes, *Crime and the City: Essays in Memory of John Barron Mays*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1989).

### **Works Related to John Barron Mays**

- Cressey, Donald R. 1955. Review of *Growing Up in the City*, by J.B. Mays. *American Sociological Review* 20 (4): 508-509.
- Downes, David M., (Ed.). 1989. *Crime and the City: Essays in Memory of John Barron Mays*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.
- May, Hal and Susan M. Trosky, (Eds.). 1988. "Mays, John Barron 1914-1987." P. 250 in *Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 123. Detroit: Gale Research Company.
- "Prof. John Mays." (Obituary). 1987. *The Times* (23 October): 18.
- "Professor J.B. Mays." (Senate Resolution). 1980. *The University of Liverpool Recorder*, No. 84 (October): 21-22.

### **Archives and Unpublished Materials**

- Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work. Records of the Faculty of Social and Environmental Studies, 1886-1995. Archive of the University of Liverpool.
- Mays, Nicholas. May 21, 2006. Personal communication.
- Roberts, Kenneth. April 7, 2006. Personal communication.

### **Internet Resource**

- Wilks-Heeg, Stuart. 2005. "The Appliance of Social Science: A Hundred Years of Sociological Teaching and Research at the University of Liverpool." Available [http://www.liv.ac.uk/sspsw/conference/100\\_years\\_of\\_sociology\\_at\\_the\\_University\\_of\\_Liverpool.pdf](http://www.liv.ac.uk/sspsw/conference/100_years_of_sociology_at_the_University_of_Liverpool.pdf) Accessed April 10, 2006.