

[A Tribute to Sally Marks](#)

Discussion published by George Fujii on Friday, January 19, 2018

H-Diplo

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Published 18 January 2018

[The H-Diplo Editorial Board and Editors thank Professor Keylor for writing this tribute to Sally Marks, a tireless supporter of H-Diplo and long-time member of its Board. We send our sincere condolences to Sally's family, and note with great sadness the passing of a friend as well as a fine and generous scholar. —Diane Labrosse].

[\[An obituary was published in The Providence Journal from Jan. 17 to Jan. 21, 2018\]](#)

by **William R. Keylor**, Boston University

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Dr. Sally Marks, who died peacefully on January 13, 2018 after a brief illness, was many things. She is perhaps best known in the profession as the author of two landmark general studies of international history: *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe* and *The Ebbing of European Ascendancy: An International History of the World, 1914-1945*.^[1] She also devoted her formidable scholarly energies to a much more specialized topic: *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*,^[2] a masterpiece of archival digging and clear narrative that was awarded the AHA's George Louis Beer Prize in International History in 1981.^[3]

But for those scholars who have labored in the vineyards of the peace settlement of 1919, her articles and book chapters that upended the standard historiographical assessment of the topic of German reparations after the Great War are her most enduring legacy. The harsh verdict of the British economist John Maynard Keynes, delivered only a few months after the treaty was signed, won almost universal acceptance among scholars and the general public for the next half-century: The voracious, vindictive Allied powers, particularly France, had imposed on defeated Germany a "Carthaginian" reparation obligation that led directly to the rise of Adolf Hitler, the collapse of the 1919 peace settlement, the Second World War, and the Holocaust.

It is difficult to imagine a more forbidding task than sorting out the complex set of technical issues related to the requirement in the Versailles Treaty that defeated Germany pay the costs of repairing the extensive material damage to neighboring countries caused by its military forces during the war. But Sally waded into the weeds, plumbing archives in numerous countries, and, in the company of other scholars such as Marc Trachtenberg and Stephen A. Schuker, conclusively demonstrated that

Keynes had it wrong. From her article “The Myth of Reparations,”^[4] to “Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, 1918-1921,”^[5] Sally Marks precipitated what might be called the post-Keynesian version of the economic portion of the peace settlement of 1919 that has won widespread acceptance in the profession.

Sally was also a valuable participant in several conferences treating the Versailles settlement, including an international gathering at the University of California, Berkeley in 1994, which produced a volume to which she contributed a lucid chapter summarizing her findings about her favorite subject.^[6]

She accomplished much of this scholarly work in spite of two handicaps: First, she felt that her academic institution, Rhode Island College, did not appreciate her sufficiently, so she took early retirement in 1988 and became an independent scholar, with the financial challenges that such a status entails. Second, she was afflicted with a painful physical ailment that hampered her ability to travel to conferences. But she continued to research, write, and publish.

She was very generous with her time when asked by colleagues to comment on their work. She gave me excellent advice about many scholarly matters and was a penetrating reader of my drafts. She never hesitated to express her opinion about an argument, even if it was negative, but she always conveyed her constructive criticism with tact and respect.

I cannot close without mentioning her valuable longstanding service to the Board of Editors of H-Diplo. When the occasional controversial issue was brought to the attention of the Board, we all profited from her calm, sensible advice about how to reach a logical resolution. She also chaired the Editorial Board’s search for new members, and ensured that female scholars were fairly represented.

Sally Marks will be greatly missed by her colleagues, friends, and admirers.

Notes

^[1] Sally Marks, *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe, 1918-1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1976; second edition, 2003); Marks, *The Ebbing of European Ascendancy: An International History of the World, 1914-1945* (London and New York: Arnold and Oxford University Press, 2002).

^[2] Marks, *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

^[3] She also wrote the masterful *Paul Hymans: Belgium* for the ‘Makers of the Modern World: The Peace Conferences of 1923 and their Aftermath’ series published by Haus Publishing (2010).

^[4] Marks, “The Myth of Reparations” *Central European History* 11:3 (September 1978), 231-255.

[5] Marks, "Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, 1918-1921," *Journal of Modern History* 85:3 (September 2013), 632-659.

[6] Marks, "Smoke and Mirrors: In Smoke-Filled Rooms and the Galerie des Glaces," in Manfred Boemeke, et al., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 337-390.