Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus J. Rogers Hollingsworth

J. Rogers Hollingsworth, Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, died on October 23, 2019. He was 87.

Hollingsworth was born in the small town of Anniston, Alabama. He earned a B.A. in History and Philosophy from Emory University in 1954 and in 1960 a Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago, where he worked with Walter Johnson in American politics, Daniel Boorstin in intellectual history, and William H. McNeil on western civilization. His first academic appointment was at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He joined the University of Wisconsin–Madison faculty in the Department of History in 1964 and after 1985 also held an appointment in the Department of Sociology. He retired from Madison in 2000 but afterward accepted a series of Visiting Scholar appointments at the University of California, San Diego: at the Department of Physics’ Institute for Nonlinear Science over 2002-2010, the BioCircuits Institute over 2010-2018, and at the Kavli Institute for Brain and Mind in 2019.

Hollingsworth’s work ranged over a very wide area of topics, including the dynamics of nation and state building, state-formation, varieties of economic governance and industrial policy, American hospitals and comparative health services, and the organizational bases of scientific discovery. His approach to all these topics was consistently materialist, historically informed and comparative, and always appreciative of the importance of institution forms and organizational routines in shaping social interests. Hollingsworth enjoyed the company and collaboration of an unusually wide range of U.S. and foreign scholars. From early in life to his end, his favorite collaborator was his beloved wife Ellen Jane, herself a distinguished social scientist.

Reflecting both his range of interests and indefatigability, Hollingsworth travelled widely in his research, not just in the U.S. and Europe but throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and South America. During his time in Madison he was also a visiting scholar at a range of other universities and research centers, in the U.K., the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden. Among his many honors, he received an Honorary Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Uppsala, Sweden in 1995 and from Emory in 1997. But the recognition that gave him most satisfaction was his 1996 election to the Presidency of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics, which he helped start.

Among the hundreds of colleagues and thousands of students who knew him, Hollingsworth will be remembered not just for his many intellectual contributions and distinctive voice, but for his appetite for and fearlessness in inquiry, high standards of research, and sheer determination in getting a good unlocking explanation of whatever social puzzle he’d taken on. Many will also remember his steadfastness as a friend, his basic decency, his quiet but steady social activism, and his visceral loathing of injustice and bullying. Born and raised in a community and region of exceptionally violent economic oppression and racism, Hollingsworth never forgot that past or thought it dead. Aware of progress since and ever hopeful of more in the future, he had few illusions about people or this country but lots of love for both.

Hollingsworth is survived by his sister Lenora Brownlee, his wife of 62 years Ellen Jane Hollingsworth, their daughter Lauren, son-in-law Jeff Goldman, and grandchild Dashiell.