

Sally Falk Moore (1924-2021), Nuremberg Prosecutor ... and So Much More

*John Q. Barrett**

I am very sorry to report that Sally Falk Moore, age 97, died on May 2, 2021, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She was one of the last surviving Nuremberg prosecutors. She also was an internationally-acclaimed anthropologist.

Sally Falk lived her early life in New York City, and in the law. She attended Barnard College, graduating in three years in spring 1942, when she also got married. In Fall 1942, she enrolled in Columbia Law School. She earned her LL.B. degree there in 1945. She then became “an intense young lawyer,” working first as an associate at a New York City law firm, Spence, Parker & Duryea.¹

In Spring 1946, Sally embarked on her path to Nuremberg. In Washington, D.C., she was recruited by General Telford Taylor, who then was heading the Subsequent Proceedings division of Justice Robert H. Jackson’s U.S. prosecution staff at Nuremberg.

She soon was in Nuremberg. She worked there for six months on preparation of the criminal cases against I.G. Farben industrialists, whose activities, including with enslaved persons as laborers, facilitated much of Nazi Germany’s war production and military aggression.

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¹ Sally Falk Moore, *Part of the Story: A Memoir*, 70 *ETHNOS* 538 (2005), reprinted in SALLY FALK MOORE, *COMPARING IMPOSSIBILITIES: SELECTED ESSAYS OF SALLY FALK MOORE* 3-29 (2016).

During Sally's time in Nuremberg, her marriage to a fellow prosecutor ended. She thus left Taylor's prosecution team and Nuremberg in December 1946, before the *Farben* trial started in 1947.²

After Sally Falk left Nuremberg, she returned to New York. She still was interested in law, legal topics, and legal work. She could have continued to work at a distance for General Taylor on Nuremberg prosecutions—he invited her to work in his Pentagon office.³ But it had become clear to her in Nuremberg “that the leaders being tried ... were only at the surface of a much wider and deeper phenomenon.”⁴ Her Nuremberg work had made her more fundamentally interested in humanity—what makes our species what we are, in ourselves, in our behaviors, and in our living with each other. So in 1947 she returned to Columbia University and began to study anthropology. On a trip to Haiti in 1948, she met David Cresap Moore, a young man on break from his college studies. They married in 1951, had two daughters, built their respective academic careers (hers in anthropology, his in history), and were happily together until his death in 2001.

In 1957, Sally Falk Moore, having taken breaks in her studies to have children, earned her Ph.D. in Anthropology from Columbia University. She then embarked on a path-marking (often she was the “first woman”) and extremely distinguished academic career. She was hired to the faculty at the University of Southern California. She became a full professor there in 1970 and also taught for five years at USC Law School. After a year as a visiting professor at Yale University, she moved from USC to the University of California at Los Angeles. Later, after field work in Africa and a visiting year at Harvard University, she moved in 1981 from UCLA to Harvard's Anthropology Department. Her tenure at Harvard included service as dean of the Graduate School, serving (with Cresap) as Master of Dunster House, an undergraduate residence, and teaching in the Human Rights Program at Harvard Law School.⁵

² See *id.* at 4-5: “I was the youngest and least important lawyer on the prosecution staff. I left Nuremberg six months later, principally to get a divorce.”

³ See *id.* at 5.

⁴ *Id.* at 6.

⁵ See *id.* at 12-13, 18, 21-22, & 23-24.



In 1946, Sally Falk left Nuremberg without staying to be a courtroom (podium) prosecutor there, as she might well have become.

In subsequent years, she left the law, at least formally, for what she regarded as deeper studies in the grand discipline that encompasses it.

But one should not get the impression that Sally Falk was not a serious or great lawyer or much of a Nuremberg prosecutor. Her former boss Telford Taylor, an excellent witness, thought otherwise.

In 1949, Sally Falk contacted Taylor, himself just back from Nuremberg after completing his service as chief prosecutor in the twelve cases (*Farben* among them) that the U.S. prosecuted in Nuremberg before U.S. tribunals. She asked him about the prospect of finding interesting legal work at the United Nations.

Sally Falk's inquiry caused Taylor to write about her to his friend Abe Feller, then a senior official at the U.N. Taylor's letter is,

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among other things, a rave reference for Sally Falk as a lawyer and as a person.⁶

War Crimes Division, JAG
Department of the Army
6 July 1949

Honorable Abe Feller
General Counsel
United Nations Secretariat
New York, New York

Dear Abe:

I seem to recall from what you have written me on prior occasions that opportunities for employment of American attorneys at the U.N. are rather few and far between. However, from time to time I continue to get inquiries from friends and former associates who are interested in this type of work.

In this instance, an exceptionally able young woman attorney - Miss Sally Falk - has raised the question. She was a member of the prosecution staff at Nurnberg, and prior to that time had worked with one of the large downtown New York law firms. Since her return from Nurnberg she has been studying at Columbia, with a view to the publication of a work on the relation between anthropology and law, of a nature far too abstruse for me. She is now finding that she has studied enough, and is anxious to get back into some kind of active law work, but has no financial need to go into a law firm, and would like to do something rather more in the "public interest". She is exceptionally able, and her Nurnberg experience brought her into contact with international law questions. If there is no opportunity for her in the legal end of the United Nations, perhaps you could give her some good advice on where else she might fit in. As I have indicated, although she wants a full time paid job, money is not her prime objective.

I am sending her a copy of this letter, and no doubt she will call your office in the near future.

Sincerely yours,

Telford Taylor

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⁶ See Letter from Telford Taylor to Abe Feller, July 6, 1949 (unsigned carbon copy), in Telford Taylor Papers, Columbia University, Series 5, Subseries 3, Box 2, Folder 11.

To learn more about Sally Falk Moore, here are some links—

- Here is a great autobiographical lecture that she gave in 2018:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iH8WJoQwzk>.
From time counter reading 18:56 until 28:30, she tells a truncated version of her work at Nuremberg as a prosecutor on the *I.G. Farben* case.
- In 2005, she was an interviewee in Rebecca Richman Cohen's film, "Nuremberg Remembered":
<https://www.facinghistory.org/books-borrowing/nuremberg-remembered>.
- In 2016, Sally Falk Moore published [Comparing Impossibilities: Selected Essays of Salk Falk Moore](#) (HAU Books, University of Chicago Press). The book includes her (brief) memoir of her life (quoted and cited above) and some of her fascinating essays on anthropology, including her work in and on Africa, mythology, law, social change, and politics.
- Here is Harvard's Department of Anthropology In Memoriam page:
<https://anthropology.fas.harvard.edu/news/memoriam-sally-falk-moore-victor-s-thomas-professor-anthropology>
- Here is a lovely account of Sally Falk Moore's life, placed in the *New York Times* by her family:
<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/nytimes/obituary.aspx?n=sally-falk-moore&pid=198559946>.
- Here is a *Harvard Gazette* story:
[https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/05/sally-falk-moore-dies-at-97/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily%20Gazette%2020210518%20\(1\)](https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/05/sally-falk-moore-dies-at-97/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily%20Gazette%2020210518%20(1)).

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