

To: SSSP Board of Directors
Fr: Kimberly J. Cook, Chair of *Ad hoc* Committee on Long Range Planning
Re: 2006 Report

August 10, 2006

This marks our final year as an *ad hoc* committee in the Society for the Study of Social Problems. To recapitulate our charge; we were required to “consider the issues of revenue development, meeting form and structure [], and how we can provide service to members and the public in the 21st Century.” Members of this committee are: Kimberly Cook (Chair), Karl Bryant, Kathleen Ferraro, Susan Carlson, Donald Cunnigan, Nelta Edwards, Martha Hargraves, Claire Renzetti, and Bob Perrucci. Over the three years of this committee’s work, we have addressed numerous matters that have affected the financial and membership conditions of the Society.

In 2004, we made eight recommendations to the Board, most of which have borne important fruit. For instance, we are most pleased that the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee is pursuing the task of managing the inevitable transition in the Executive Office. We are gratified that the electronic distribution of division newsletters and other materials has made a very smooth transition from the paper distribution. We also recommended that the annual meeting program incorporate more workshop style sessions, and this was certainly the case in the 2005 program, and yet less the case in the 2006 program. We realize this has much to do with the space available at the conference locations and the Society needed to address more pressing matters (such as a Hotel contract on extremely short notice).

In 2005, we offered four more recommendations to the Board. Our first recommendation was for the Board to minimize the financial damage to the Society in light of our sudden change of venue. We are convinced that the Executive Office and the Board handled this situation to its best ability and managed to negotiate a terrific contract with the Hilton Bonaventure in Montreal. Our second recommendation in 2005 was to institutionalize a conversation around the dynamics of privilege and power within the Society so as to offer a more inclusive and welcoming professional setting for scholar-activists who are ethnic/racial minorities. We believe steps have been taken in this direction, and many more need to be considered (more on that later). Our third recommendation specifically requested the President (Claire Renzetti) to be pro-active in nominating people for leadership roles within the Society, and that all committees and divisions also address this issue. President Renzetti has been very proactive in the nominations of leaders, yet it remains unclear how many of the committees and divisions have engaged with this topic. Our fourth and final recommendation in 2005 encouraged a ‘new membership drive’ and suggested changing the name of “Lifetime” member to “sustaining” member. Based on the 2006 membership committee report, it appears that the membership drive was less lucrative than we had hoped.

In 2006 we continued our conversation on the transition of the executive office for the Society. We reviewed the proposed process drafted by the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee and have the following insights to offer. The proposed process does not stipulate what specific qualifications or skill sets the next Executive Officer should have, or what an application package should include. We strongly believe that this presents an opportunity for the Society to develop a new vision for the future of the society and that the next E.O. should embody the elements of that vision. Members of this committee see the Society at a juncture where we must have a systematic and democratic conversation on our Identity, History, and Future. ***Therefore, we recommend that the Board of Directors hold a retreat with a professional facilitator, include all members of the POSPC and as many committee chairs and division chairs as is financially feasible, to discuss/develop our collective vision for the future on the basis of our history and professional identity so that we can move into the future with clearly articulated goals.*** We justify this recommendation, partly, on the basis of our need to promote greater diversity within the Society and address structural privileges and exclusions. The Long Range Planning Committee members fear that if we do the same old things we've always done, we will quite likely reproduce the status quo where vectors of privilege work to maintain marginalization. We also believe that these questions are so vital to the future of the Society that they warrant full democratic discussion, and we urge the Board to consider strategies to avoid the comfortable "group-think" dynamics at play. The retreat should address the following:

- Vision for the future (in the context of the transition to the next E.O., this is an opportune moment for such a conversation).
- How might the new vision inform our explicit qualifications for the next E.O.?
- What might the financial implications of this new vision be?

We also recommend that strategies for invigorating the Divisions be considered. Many people come to the conference and may be at a loss of where/how to fit in; on the surface Divisions are an easy answer to that question. However, many less-involved people find the idea of attending a "Business Meeting" for divisions rather intimidating, or since they're not as active perhaps they feel they don't belong. One idea might be to change the name of the "business" meetings to something more welcoming and inclusive. Furthermore, we are convinced that the Divisions are an underutilized resource for the vitality of the Society. Several ideas were discussed in how to build the strengths of the Divisions into the central lifeblood of the Society.

We recommend that strategies for creative programming and audience involvement in sessions be considered. We have hundreds of potential audience members who slip out for coffee or socialize rather than attend sessions. Workshop sessions appear to be well-attended, yet they are few, relative to the topical sessions. We strongly support having the Program Committee solicit a member whose sole responsibility is to develop workshop sessions, and for the Program Committee to develop more activist-oriented topical sessions where conference attendees will more likely attend the sessions.

Finally, we are most grateful to the Board for supporting our work over the last three years. We are comfortable passing the benefits of our work on to the appropriate standing

committees, especially the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee. Two members of our committee will be serving on the POSPC for the next several years and we are confident that our work will continue to bear fruit for years to come. On a personal note, I want to thank everyone on this committee for their devotion to the spirit of civil discourse on sometimes sensitive topics. Their fearless approach to addressing these issues has been and will remain an inspiration to all of us. Thank you all.