July 7, 2008

To: SSSP Board of Directors

From: Wendy Simonds and Héctor L. Delgado, Co-Chairpersons
        SSSP 2008 Annual Meeting Program Committee

RE: SSSP Program Committee Report 2008

We were pleased to serve as co-chairs of the Program Committee for the 2008 Annual Meeting of the SSSP. Despite the amount of time this task takes, and the occasional frustrating moments, we have no regrets (although please do not misinterpret this as an invitation to ask us to do it again). First, we want to thank Michele Koontz and her staff, Sharon Shumaker and Sarah Hendricks, for their work and support. Both Sharon and Sarah helped to test the online program information form and proofed the preliminary program. Sharon was responsible for placing and updating the preliminary program on our website and Sarah identified the program participants who had not paid their annual meeting registration. But as always, Michele's support was especially indispensable. We are simply the latest beneficiaries of her extraordinary talents, knowledge, and good sense. We also want to thank and acknowledge the contributions of the other members of the Program Committee: Alison Griffith, Adia Harvey Wingfield, Charlotte Ryan, and Clare Weber. Our gratitude to Nancy Naples as well, for her willingness to help when called upon and for working as hard as she did on the program.

This was the first year that we used an online form for session organizers to complete and it worked beautifully. Still, the SSSP's computer programmer is working on ways to enhance the form, with particular attention to ways of streamlining data entry and session management for session organizers and enhancing the auto-generated annual meeting program. Kudos to everyone involved. Of the 470 papers submitted this year, 464 were submitted online. These figures do not take into account the 18 papers in the individually proposed sessions and 21 papers in sessions that were not listed in the Call for Papers. This year there will be 146 sessions, the highest number of sessions in the history of the organization. But as the great philosopher Yogi Berra once said, "It ain't over 'til it's over," so some of these numbers could still change. For example, as of July 7, the day that this report had to be submitted, there were still individuals who had not paid their dues. This probably will not affect the number of sessions, but could. The Meeting Manager's report will contain the most accurate figures.

As co-chairs we had to find a way not to get in one another's way. We decided to divide up some of the tasks and this worked very well. Wendy took on the formidable, time-consuming task of morphing 100 orphan papers into 13 sessions *that made sense*,

i.e., the papers went well together. Fortunately, we had the room capacity to add these sessions. We do wish that there was a more efficient, less time consuming way to create new sessions from orphan papers; or that there was some way to reduce the number of these papers, or to combat submitters' inattention to deadlines. We should add that in addition to these orphan paper sessions, the program committee sponsored or co-sponsored 35 sessions and assigned papers to other sessions when the session to which they had been submitted was cancelled. We did not receive any resistance from session organizers when we asked them to add another paper. In fact, they were downright accommodating in virtually every instance! Hector took the lead on responding to requests for LCDs and fielding the lion's share of exemption and other requests. We did not always say "yes," at times it was difficult to say "no," but in the end we were guided principally by the rules, consistency, and common sense. We do have a recommendation for a new exemption (see below).

In response to comments from attendees at last year's conference that they did not have enough time to present on panels of six and because we wanted to promote discussion in sessions, we restricted sessions to either five presenters without a discussant or four presenters with a discussant. The risk we took was that cancellations would result in three paper sessions, but as of this writing this did not happen very often. In any event, three paper sessions are not necessarily undesirable, since it allows presenters more time to present and the audience more time to ask questions and engage presenters intellectually. Nancy Naples and we felt very strongly that we should err on the side of allowing participants more time to present and discuss. In fact, we would like to make this a recommendation (see below).

On the downside, we approved numerous requests after the deadline. There was little we could do about this aspect of the job, given the long time honored custom of those serving in our capacity to accommodate everyone who wants to present. We had several presenters cancel for a variety of reasons, but the most troubling (bordering on insulting) were cancellations from individuals who said they had a conflict with the ASA program and chose the ASA. We had several individuals requesting special treatment, but we handled them relatively well, we believe, especially by consulting with one another before responding. We wanted to be consistent (and fair) and believe we succeeded.

The process was fairly smooth, especially given the size and complexity of the task. Having Michele at the center of the process clearly made the process more seamless than might otherwise been the case had we been completely unsupervised. We have only three recommendations (for now at least).

The Program Committee makes the following recommendations to the Board:

1. Allow fee exemptions to individuals from community, labor, and comparable organizations working on social problems or social justice issues who have been invited to serve on a panel or to make a presentation.

2. Utilize a computer database which allows electronic submission to be connected to session formation, in order to make this information easily accessible to session organizers and program chairs.

3. In order to provide presenters with enough time to present and the audience with enough time to ask questions and engage presenters and one another intellectually, sessions should be limited to no more than four papers with a discussant and no more than five papers without a discussant.