

Executive Officer's Annual Report

August 2011, Las Vegas, NV

Submitted by Dr. Héctor L. Delgado, Executive Officer

I would like to begin by thanking you, the Board, and especially Board President A. Javier Treviño, for your support and hard work this past year. On several occasions I asked for your guidance, at times for a quick vote, and in each instance you responded thoughtfully and quickly. I know that Michele Koontz is equally appreciative. Most of our committee chairs and members performed admirably as well.

In the Administrative Office, Michele Koontz continued her excellent work for the SSSP. The way in which she balances so much and produces quality work day in and day out is extraordinary, but it is also a source of concern for me, as I will explain at the end of my report. Kelley Flatford has done an exemplary job for the SSSP this past year as the Society's Administrative Assistant. I hope she remains with us for a long time to come. Sarah Hendrick's service and work for the SSSP as its Graduate Research Associate & Webmaster has been exemplary as well, although she will be "retiring" in August. Her work on the new website has been especially noteworthy, and, among other things, demonstrates the importance of "youth" to the organization. She and other graduate students, and new Ph.D.s, infuse new ideas and introduce us to new technologies that we need in order to grow as an organization. No doubt Sarah will continue to be an active member as she completes her dissertation -- and beyond. Meanwhile we have found in Elizabeth "Lisa" East an excellent replacement. Lisa has experience in website design, publicity, and grant writing, and has a strong background in national, community, and campus organizing and service. Sarah has been working with (training) Lisa for a smooth transition.

Thanks are in order as well to the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK), but especially our project director, Dr. Jon Shefner, Head of the Department of Sociology and long-time SSSP member; Dr. Christine Boake, Associate Dean of Research, Graduate Studies, and Facilities; and Dr. Gregory Reed, UTK's Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement. Their support is indispensable. Our relationship with the University of Tennessee has been a long and fruitful one for the SSSP, for which Tom Hood should take a great deal of credit for establishing and Michele Koontz for nurturing.

From the Windy City to Sin City

This year had its surprises, not the least of which was the ASA's unexpected cancellation of its annual meeting in Chicago. Luckily, we were able to cancel our hotel contract without penalty, principally because of Tom Hood's and Michele Koontz's foresight to put into our contract the right to cancel, without penalty, if the ASA cancelled its meeting. The ASA's cancellation was prompted by a labor dispute. In fact, I had been in touch with our hotel's management team and the hotel's employees' union with respect to an Administrative Labor Judge's (ALJ) judgment against the hotel and the fact that it and the union had not signed a collective bargaining agreement well over a year after workers had voted for union representation. We try very hard to put strong language in our contracts regarding labor disputes, with mixed, but generally good results. We will continue to do that in future contracts.

After receiving the news of the ASA's cancellation, we had to wait a couple of weeks for the announcement of the new location to begin the search for a new hotel. As soon as the ASA made its decision, we moved quickly to find a hotel in Las Vegas. Michele and I, with the help of Marisa Crame of HelmsBriscoe, identified several hotels in Las Vegas to visit, and, with Marisa accompanying us, visited them in mid-January, finally settling on Harrah's and on terms very favorable to the Society and its members (especially on such short notice). The folks at Harrah's have been very helpful, and for the most part accommodating, with only minor glitches along the way. We exceeded our room block very quickly and had to add rooms. The meeting will be one of the best attended, if not the best. I should add our thanks to Miriam Lopez who volunteered her legal advice on the contract. (I will return to the subject of "legal advice" later in the report.) I'm glad that we're acknowledging Marisa's contributions at the banquet. True, she is paid for what she does (by the hotel), but she is someone who goes beyond what is expected and clearly cares about the organization on a more personal level.

In closing, I was very unhappy, and in fact felt that the ASA did not give us the respect to which we are entitled when it announced the cancellation of its meeting in Chicago without warning us much earlier that this was a possibility. I conveyed to Sally Hillsman our desire to be notified much earlier, and she agreed that we need to talk to each other more than we do. I will follow up on that after the meeting in August.

Social Problems Journal

The Chair of the Editorial and Publications Committee will be reporting on our journal in more detail, but, briefly, we can expect to receive less revenue from the journal in the years to come, if not permanently. Prior to this year the Society received 60% of its revenue from the journal. The problem is not the quality of the journal. Ted Chiricos and his staff produced excellent issues over the past three years and the journal continues to be one of the top social science journals; and we believe that we have a very strong editor in Becky Pettit who will assume the reins of the journal this fall for the next three years. (Thank you Ted, welcome Becky.) Rather, the economy and technological changes are the "culprits." It is much easier for libraries to provide access to journal articles without subscribing to the journals. To make matters worse, we did not know that the University of California Press was providing access to current issues of *Social Problems* through ProQuest. As soon as we learned about this, we moved quickly and now *Social Problems* is no longer on ProQuest. I especially wish to thank Susan Carlson for her work in finding the problem and working with the BFA Committee, and in particular Stephani Williams, and our office, to fix the problem. The E&P and BFA committees, and the administrative officer and treasurer, will be monitoring the situation closely.

Revenue Generation

In the 2010 meeting in Atlanta, the Board created an ad hoc Revenue Generating Committee to try to come up with ways to generate new revenue streams for the Society. This work has become even more important in light of what is occurring with our Journal, *Social Problems*. A separate preliminary report on the committee's discussion thus far has been given to the Board.

New Website

The launching of the new website was delayed several times, but by the time you receive this report it will have been launched (I trust and hope). I hope that you have had or will soon have

the chance to check it out and we hope that it meets with your approval. The Information Technology Options Committee, made up of Susan Carlson, Sarah Hendricks, and Louis Esparza, did a masterful job in finding a very talented *and affordable* web designer in Mark Naylor of *Distant Grass Design* and working with him and our office to produce what I believe is a much improved website, both in its appearance and functionality. Any suggestions on how it can be improved are of course welcomed.

Frances Fox Piven and Glenn Beck

For over a year, Frances Fox Piven, a respected scholar and activist, and former president of the SSSP, has been subjected to a relentless assault by Glenn Beck and other extreme right “talking heads” on radio and television. The misrepresentation of her work and demonization of Frances has resulted in threats on her life. The SSSP wrote letters to Fox News and News Corporation, the parent company of Fox News, urging them to rein in their employee. We also wrote to a law school professor who sits on the News Corp. Board. We posted a copy of the letter and a photo of Frances on our website, along with other information pertaining to the case. I addressed the issue in my newsletter column and Frances, Barbara Katz Rothman, and another of her supporters wrote excellent pieces as well. Predictably, we did not get a response to our letter from News Corp. or Fox News, but the attacks have become more infrequent and Beck no longer has a show on the Fox channel. Frances was very appreciative of our efforts on her behalf and she will join us for a session at our meeting in Las Vegas entitled *Demonology as Propaganda: Frances Fox Piven, the Tea Party, and the Role of Intellectuals*. She will be joined on the panel by me, as the presider, and by Barbara Katz Rothman and Sanford Schram.

Troy Davis

A couple of years ago we passed a resolution on a murder case in which a man, Troy Davis, was convicted of and received the death penalty for murdering a police officer, Mark MacPhail, largely, if not exclusively, on eyewitness testimony, which most criminologists and many people in the criminal justice system recognize as not very reliable. If that were not enough to cast doubt, all but two of the eyewitnesses recanted. The fact that Mr. Davis is black and the police officer is white probably did not help Mr. Davis’s case. Mr. Davis did receive a hearing by a federal judge, who, despite sufficient evidence to at least warrant commuting the sentence from death to life, upheld the death penalty conviction. At this juncture, only Georgia’s State Board of Pardons & Paroles can commute the sentence to life. We sent a mass e-mail to our members encouraging them to write to the Board and we placed on our website information for members to review to see if they could write a letter (or not write a letter) in good conscience. We, of course, have not taken, and should not take, a position on Mr. Davis’s guilt or innocence, but rather on whether he received a fair trial and against the death penalty, especially given the court’s heavy reliance on eyewitness testimony.

Cutbacks at UNLV

The flailing economy has hit institutions of higher education very hard and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas is no exception. The Dean at UNLV was contemplating the elimination of junior positions in several departments, including three junior positions in sociology. I exchanged numerous e-mails with the department’s chair to ascertain the best way we could help. This resulted in a letter to the Dean of the College attached to an e-mail to expedite the process, followed by a hard copy of the letter sent to the Dean, Provost, and Department Chair, advocating for the retention of these positions and positions in Women’s Studies and the

program itself. The elimination of the positions in sociology was averted, but Women's Studies did not fare as well, although there was an attempt to preserve its "essential mission" by folding Women's Studies' one tenured faculty member and a tenure-track faculty member (and a visiting assistant professor and administrative assistant) into UNLV's Interdisciplinary Program. The ASA joined us in our efforts, as did other organizations and individuals, and these efforts may have had an impact on the "final" decision. While this was a specific case, it is symptomatic of larger issues and should serve as a reminder to us that we need to pay more attention to trends in higher education, in addition to responding to short-term crises.

BFA Meeting in La Verne

This year we held the BFA meeting on the University of La Verne campus in La Verne, California. It was a productive meeting and ULV was an excellent host. I especially wish to thank Judi Stilwell who was responsible for securing meeting space on campus, setting up the conference call with our auditors, making hotel reservations, and setting up breakfast and lunch for us. I wish to thank the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Jonathan Reed, for covering the cost of breakfast and lunch. For the most part we will continue to hold BFA meetings in Knoxville, but from time to time, may consider a different venue (as long as the cost is comparable).

Division Sponsored Workshop Policy

The Board approved the following policy on division sponsored workshops, including providing Michele Koontz with compensation for services rendered beyond her responsibilities as Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager.

SSSP DIVISION SPONSORED WORKSHOP POLICY

In an effort to allow Special Problems Divisions to sponsor workshops at the Annual Meeting, SSSP has created the following policy.

The Board of Directors must approve all division sponsored workshops. Hotel contracts are signed at least three years in advance. Unless you plan three years in advance, meeting space cannot be guaranteed.

All division sponsored workshops must be scheduled the day before the SSSP annual meeting begins or the day after it ends. There will be no exceptions. The maximum number of meeting rooms that can be reserved for a division sponsored workshop is two. If the hotel charges a meeting space rental fee, the division will be responsible for payment.

If approved by the board, the Meeting Manager will work closely with the workshop organizer(s) to ensure a successful workshop. In exchange for providing the following services, the division will pay the Meeting Manager a \$500 fee at the conclusion of the workshop. If additional services are required and the Meeting Manager can provide them, there will be an additional charge determined by the Meeting Manager in consultation with and with the approval of the Executive Officer:

- **Serve as liaison between the workshop organizer(s) and the conference hotel**
- **Coordinate room set-up needs**
- **Coordinate audio-visual needs, if applicable**

- **Coordinate catering needs, if applicable**
- **Incorporate the workshop program into SSSP final program, if desired**
- **Answer all questions via e-mail**

Legal Advice

From time to time we have received pro bono legal advice from Miriam Lopez, a union-side labor attorney with a great deal of experience with contracts and copyright law, but we've grown increasingly uncomfortable asking for advice without compensating her for her time. She is willing to provide occasional advice, if her fellow partners agree. For the most part, the advice we are likely to seek will be on contracts. Michele and I are recommending increasing the amount of funds set aside in the budget for legal advice from \$100 to \$1000, which was approved by the BFA Committee and must now be approved by the Board. Since Miriam Lopez is my spouse (full disclosure), I recommend we entertain bids from other attorneys and if we find an attorney with comparable expertise, who is also affordable, we should retain her/his services, in order to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest with Miriam. In any event, if we decide to take this route and if Miriam is one of the attorneys being considered, I will not be involved in the selection process.

Administrative Officer and Office Workload

As I indicated earlier, and as I indicated in my 2010 report, I am concerned with the amount of work that falls on Michele's shoulders. The responsibilities of the Administrative Office and expectations of the membership have changed, in some cases significantly; partly, no doubt, because of technological changes. The rate of change is fairly rapid, which requires us to adjust to new demands and expectations and to plan for more changes in the coming years.

The expectations of the Administrative Officer position have expanded. This position fields continuous requests from officers, board members, division chairs, committee chairs, committee members, program participants, and members; supervises more people; tests and consults the online management system; provides feedback for website design; administers the Society's fiduciary requirements; etc. For example, individuals responsible for submitting reports, and this has occurred with the newsletter, routinely ask Michele to edit their work. On occasion, she may have the time to provide this assistance, but for the most part she does not. We need to do a better job of informing members that that is not her job. In addition, Michele spends a great deal of time sending reminders. While we understand that SSSP is run by volunteers who have numerous commitments at their own institutions, we need to recognize as well, especially as a social justice organization that tries very hard to practice what it preaches, that we not exploit Michele by taking advantage of her commitment and devotion to this institution. The demands of the Administrative Officer position have grown beyond what can be effectively accomplished in a 50-hour, let alone 40-hour, week. I plan to discuss this in much more detail with Michele and get back to the Board on this issue.

Thank You

It really is an honor serving the SSSP, but especially working with people like Michele, Kelley, Sarah, and the members of the Society, which of course includes the Board of Directors. Even under difficult conditions, and we've had some since I became EO, it's nice never to feel alone. Thank you.