

Executive Officer's Report
The Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)
Seattle, WA - August 19-21
Theme: *Globalizing Social Problems*

Submitted by Héctor L. Delgado, Executive Officer

Events of the past few years remind us that the world in which we live continues to change and to change rapidly, and too often in ways that are troubling and even frightening. This Presidential campaign is one of the most divisive and vitriolic we have seen in some time, and it has brought to the surface a level of racial and religious intolerance that has surprised even the most cynical among us. In a recent poll of likely voters from one of the major political parties in South Carolina, we learned that 20% supported a ban on Muslims from entering the country, 29% supported shutting down Mosques, and 25% supported banning the practice Islam in the United States. We witnessed with tremendous sadness the attack on the LGBTQ and Latina/o communities in Orlando. We have witnessed numerous controversial shootings of unarmed black men and boys by police officers and the emergence of a "Black Lives Matter" movement in response to these shootings and the perceived lack of police accountability, only to be met by shouts of "white lives matter" and "blue lives matter" and accusations that the movement is responsible for the recent murders of police officers by lone gunmen. Deep racial divisions and misunderstandings have been laid bare by these events. Laws have been passed in numerous states either making it virtually impossible for women to exercise their legal right to an abortion or for poor people and people of color to vote. Some states have passed laws prohibiting transgender people from using the bathrooms that correspond with their gender identity. Problems abound and the importance, and purpose, of an organization like the SSSP has never been greater.

The SSSP's stated purpose is to promote and protect sociological research and teaching on significant problems of social life and, particularly, to encourage the work of young sociologists; to stimulate the application of scientific method and theory to the study of vital social problems; to encourage problem-centered social research; to foster cooperative relations among persons and organizations engaged in the application of scientific sociological findings to the formulation of social policies; to foster higher quality of life, social welfare, and positive social relations in society and the global community and to undertake any activity related thereto or necessary or desirable for the accomplishment of the foregoing purposes.

What I would like to do is to challenge us to find new and more effective ways to assist groups on the front lines of social justice struggles; to help our students hone their critical thinking skills and inspire them to make a difference in the communities, society, and world in which they live; and to affect policy at the local, national, and global levels on issues such as racism, misogyny, homophobia, Islamophobia, economic inequality, war, and a host of other social justice issues. The last two years alone have reminded us that this is not a time for complacency, but rather a time for the Society to take stock of what it is doing, how it is doing it, and what it can do *concretely* to do more.

Resolutions

One of the ways in which the Society has tried to make a difference is through resolutions passed at annual meetings. The Society has passed resolutions in the past regarding attacks by white supremacist and other hate groups against academics, the treatment of people with physical and mental disabilities, the corporatization of higher education, racial disparities in the enforcement of drug laws, the school to prison pipeline in minority communities, labor rights, and protections for sex workers, to list but a few. Typically the action taken has been letters sent to people in positions of power. What I have proposed in the past, and wish to propose more formally in this report, is to make much more of an effort to work with and support people on the ground addressing these issues. While letters to governors and other public officials are necessary in many instances, this approach alone has not evoked and in the future is not likely to evoke much, if any, of a response, literally, let alone a positive response. On a couple of occasions we identified individuals who were working on these issues, either as members of organizations or as legislators either at the state or municipal level and in each case we received a positive response and expressions of gratitude. I believe that in the future we can more consistently make every effort possible to identify individuals and groups to whom we can lend our support, from letters and resolutions that they can use to demonstrate support for their position to more direct forms of action, including assistance with research and other resources. In the process we demonstrate an even more serious commitment to social justice issues and begin to develop closer and longer-lasting ties with more and more social justice organizations and activists on the front lines of these struggles. (In some of these cases there are dissertations waiting to be written.) We claim to be “an interdisciplinary community of scholars, practitioners, advocates, and students interested in the application of critical, scientific, and humanistic perspectives to the study of vital social problems.” I simply believe, and hope others share the belief, that there is more that we can do to live up to this claim.

Annual Meeting

This year’s annual meeting in turn reminds us that our focus cannot, and should not, be solely on problems in the United States. David A. Smith, the President of the Board, is absolutely correct when he argues that “... ALL of the social problems we study today, in fact, are impacted by various global forces. Virtually *every* subfield and nearly *all* research – including that which seems to have much more narrow geographic or institutional foci – can be enriched by “bringing the global in, ...” Hopefully this focus will not be left behind in Seattle when the meeting ends, but rather taken with us to Montreal, and then to Philadelphia, and then to New York and to every meeting of the SSSP. In recent years the organization has taken numerous steps to become more international in its reach and membership. Our selection of Oxford University Press (OUP) is a testament to that commitment, as are this year’s annual meeting theme and the most recent issue of *Social Problems*. As Executive Officer (EO), I will do what I can to continue moving the Society in this direction. Let me take this opportunity then, to thank David for his leadership and Yvonne Braun, the Chair of the Program Committee, and her committee for a wonderful program. Without question, my least favorite part of being EO is my inability, because of countless meetings, to attend sessions. Only on rare occasions have I been able to attend sessions. But I hope that all of you attend many of our sessions, to be enlightened, to help a presenter fine tune her or his work, and to simply support your colleagues in the Society. I

also want to extend my most sincere thanks to all of the organizers, presiders, discussants, and presenters.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville-SSSP Contract

This year we signed another five-year continuation contract (2017-2021) with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). Our relationship with UTK and UTK's Department of Sociology and its Head, Jon Shefner, continues to be a mutually beneficial and positive one. I want to thank Luis Fernandez, the Chair of the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee, committee member Claire Renzetti, and Patrick Donnelly, our Treasurer, for joining Michele and me in Knoxville for meetings with UTK officials to assess our relationship with UTK (and for conducting an evaluation of my and Michele's performance as EO and AO, respectively). While on the subject of our relationship with UTK, I regret to announce that Douglas Oser has stepped down as the Society's Graduate Research Assistant (GRA). In the short time that Douglas was with us, he made significant and lasting contributions with his technical skills and strong work ethic. We wish him well and welcome our new GRA, Bethany Nelson. Douglas helped to train Bethany for the position and for that we are most thankful. We have every reason to believe that Bethany will be an excellent GRA for the Society and look forward to working with her.

We were disappointed, however, by actions taken by Tennessee's Legislature that in effect undercut UTK's commitment to diversity by defunding the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Before the final decision was made, David A. Smith and I sent a letter on behalf of the Board to Senator Dolores R. Gresham and university officials on March 15, 2016, urging legislators not to defund the office. In part, the letter read,

We live in a society that has undergone dramatic demographic and other changes in the past fifty to seventy years. On occasions such as this, it is especially important to remind ourselves that it is our and UTK's responsibility to prepare students to work and live in a world that will require them to be knowledgeable about and sensitive to these changes. Recent events involving race, including a presidential election primary season that has witnessed numerous expressions of racial and religious intolerance, remind us that issues of diversity and inclusion still need to be addressed. When polls show that significant portions of our population believe that it should be illegal for individuals to practice Islam and an even larger segment of that population believes that practitioners of Islam, practiced by nearly three and half million Americans (a quarter of whom are African-American) and by roughly twenty-three per cent of the world's population, should be prohibited from entering the country, there is cause for concern and clearly underscores the need for offices such as the one. The message that this sends is troubling and could not come at a worse time.

We were unsuccessful, as many others were, in our efforts. The office was defunded, but our commitment to a more just society and world has never been stronger.

Social Problems (the Journal)

Social Problems, currently housed at the University of Houston (UH), continues to be an important source of revenue and prestige for the SSSP, thanks to past editors and our current

editor, Pamela Anne Quiroz, and her staff. If you recall, because Pamela accepted a position at UH as Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies and Professor of Sociology, we moved the journal from the University of Illinois, Chicago to UH, and the latter could not have been more gracious and cooperative during the transition, especially given the tight time constraints under which we were operating. We were able to make the move without disrupting the journal's publication, and for that we had UH, Pamela, Mary Bernstein (the Editorial and Publications Committee Chair at the time), Michele Koontz, and Miriam Lopez (occasional consultant) to thank. I am very pleased with the job that Pamela and her team are doing and hope that you agree. It continues to be one of the top journals in the social sciences and I continue to be pleased with our relationship with OUP. We are especially pleased with how OUP and our Social Media Committee are collaborating to promote the Society and *Social Problems*. OUP, for example, has launched two very successful Google AdWords campaigns that complement the extraordinary efforts of our Committee on Social Media.

Let me then take this opportunity to extend a special expression of gratitude to the members of the Committee on Social Media. The committee, established in 2014 under the stewardship of Pamela Anne Quiroz, was created to enhance the Society's social media presence and thereby promote the journal and organization. In addition to co-chairs Devon Goss and Kasey Henricks, the members of the committee are Erika L. Del Villar, Nick Rochlin, Lydia Hou, Michael L. Rosino, Trenton Haltom, and Jason Smith – all Ph.D. students/candidates and a perfect example of how important graduate students are to the Society. I urge everyone to read the committee's report, but here I want to highlight a portion of the report. Between 2015 and 2016, our Facebook audience grew by 119.4%, our Twitter audience by 203.1%, and our YouTube audience by nearly 1,159%. For 2015-2016, our top five Facebook posts reached between 4.4 thousand to 5.9 thousand people each month. We now have our own channel on YouTube and since its inception in 2014 it has generated almost 13,000 views. Both the SSSP and OUP embed these videos on their respective webpages. This is just the tip of the iceberg, so, again, I encourage you to read the committee's report. It even contains an analysis of our social media audience.

Finally, this coming year we will be conducting a search for the next editor of *Social Problems* and we urge you to encourage colleagues and friends to apply if you believe they have what it takes to edit a prestigious and highly-regarded journal. The E&P Committee will be taking the lead. Institutions are not as interested as they once were to house the journal, principally for financial reasons, and this, we believe, has affected adversely the size of the applicant pool. However, while we still hope to get support from applicants' home institutions, the need is not as great as it once was because of the support that the Editorial Office receives from OUP. Consequently, institutional support will not be a decisive factor or even play a significant role in our selection of the new editor. Hopefully this will increase the number and diversity of applications we receive.

Policy Press and the *Agenda for Social Justice*

We now have a relationship with Policy Press. Policy Press is the publisher for our *Agenda for Social Justice: Solutions for 2016*, an edited volume of articles summarizing social science research on some of the most pressing social problems facing us. I especially want to thank Board Secretary Glenn W. Muschert for taking the lead in forging this relationship and for

editing the volume with Brian V. Klocke, Robert Perrucci, and Jon Shefner. The excellent articles in this volume address social problems in Gender, Sexuality, and Injustice; Public and Environmental Health; Race, Labor, and Poverty; and Criminal (In)Justice.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like once more to thank and bid farewell to Douglas Oser and welcome Bethany Nelson. But I also want to thank Marisa Stone, our Administrative Assistant, for her important contributions to the SSSP, and Sharon Shumaker, our IT Specialist, for her extraordinary contributions that go well beyond her IT work. Finally, Michele Koontz continues to be the SSSP's most valuable asset. Her organizational and interpersonal skills are second to none. It is difficult to imagine the SSSP without her. As honored as I am to be the SSSP's EO, I am equally honored to have Michele as a colleague and friend. Thank you Michele, and thank you *everyone* for everything that you do for the Society.