

Executive Officer's Annual Report (2020) **Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)**

Submitted by Héctor L. Delgado, PhD

I would like to begin my annual report, as I usually do, by thanking the many people who make this organization run; from the many volunteers serving as Division Chairs, on committees, task forces, and Board, to our staff, beginning with the indomitable Michele Koontz, Administrative Officer and Meeting Manager. For over a quarter of a century no one has ensured the smooth operation of this organization more than Michele has. We are deeply indebted to her. Helping her and serving the SSSP in extraordinary ways are Rachel S. Cogburn, Information Technology Specialist; Kelsey Whitaker, Assistant to the Administrative Officer; and Zaina Shams, Graduate Research Associate and Webmaster. My deepest gratitude to them and everyone else who serves this organization.

Annual Meeting Cancellation

By now you know that we had to cancel the in-person Annual Meeting in San Francisco. The Board, led by Dr. Heather M. Dalmage, met on a regular basis over the past few months to monitor the situation and to decide whether to proceed with the meeting. The decision was made all the more difficult by a contract provision that would have resulted in a \$100,000 penalty if we had cancelled in a manner not permitted by the contract. While there was never a question that our primary concern and basis for our decision to cancel would be the well-being of our members, and by extension their families and friends, we were hoping to cancel without penalty. When the American Sociological Association (ASA) cancelled, however, we were able, contractually, to cancel without penalty. We were disappointed, especially because the annual meeting is more than simply a time and place to present papers. It is a time and place for old friends to re-connect and attendees to make new friends and network. Once the decision to cancel was made, these meetings were used to plan an alternative to the in-person meeting in August and the 2021 meeting in Chicago.

Virtual Annual Meeting, August 7, 2020

The Board approved a 1/2-day virtual annual meeting for August 7th, to include the Presidential Address, with a short Q&A period; Business Meeting, including a discussion of the proposed resolutions; awards recognition; and a special plenary on the pandemic, titled *Pandemics Clarify: Another World is Possible, Another World is Necessary*. The Board decided that SSSP membership was the only requirement to participate in the virtual meeting.

2021 Annual Meeting in Chicago

For the 2021 Annual Meeting in Chicago, led by President-elect Dr. Corey Dolgon, the Board decided to include 28 virtual sessions, for several reasons. First, if the pandemic is not sufficiently under control by next spring or summer, there is the possibility that we will have to cancel the in-person meeting in Chicago. We hope and trust that that will not be the case, but

by organizing 28 virtual sessions we can move much more easily to a full-blown virtual annual meeting if necessary – something we could not do this year on such short notice. Second, even under the best of circumstances, we may want to have virtual sessions in all future annual meetings in order to accommodate members who, for a wide variety of reasons, cannot travel to the annual meeting. Third, if institutions of higher education continue to decrease travel funds, more and more meetings of this kind may become exclusively virtual. While this is unlikely, we want to be prepared. We found from our research, that there is more to organizing a virtual conference than first meets the eye. Meanwhile, we are moving ahead as if the in-person meeting will take place in Chicago and are looking forward to it with even greater anticipation than usual in light of a tiny, invisible virus that is shaking up our lives in so many ways.

Let me end this portion of my report by praising President Heather M. Dalmage and the rest of the Board for their dedication and hard work on behalf of the SSSP these past few months. The Board met on several Saturdays via Zoom, for nearly two hours each time, to make important decisions about the future of the organization. It has always been an honor for me to be the Society's Executive Officer, and this dedication to the Society by the Board served as yet another reminder of why it is such an honor. My thanks, again, to them.

COVID-19 Volumes/*Agenda for Social Justice*

Members will have digital access very soon to the first of two volumes on the pandemic from a sociological and social problems perspective. I cannot praise enough the Justice 21 Committee, chaired by Glenn Muschert, for their hard work in pulling together so quickly two special issues of such high quality on Social Problems in the Age of COVID-19. They received nearly 100 submissions and from this group of submissions they selected 16 for the first volume, focusing principally on the United States. They are now in the process of soliciting and reviewing proposals for a second pandemic volume, focusing principally on International Perspectives. Members have free access as well to the regular 2020 issue of the *Agenda for Social Justice*. We encourage members to read these articles and to share them widely, especially because they are written for a much broader audience than the one for whom standard sociological academic journals typically are written.

Social Problems

Our flagship journal, *Social Problems*, continues to thrive, under the editorship of Dr. Annulla Linders and Dr. Earl Wright II. I am pleased to report that Annulla and Earl have agreed to serve another three-year term as editors of the journal once their current term is completed, pending approval of the Board in August. They will be joined by a third editor, Dr. Derrick R. Brooms, a faculty member in Sociology and Africana Studies at the University of Cincinnati. Our sincerest and warmest welcome to Derrick. Let me take this opportunity as well to report (and applaud) an impact factor of 2.345 for *Social Problems*, placing the journal 29th among 150 journals in Sociology. *Social Problems* is ranked 97 out of 1243 journals in *CiteScore*. Finally, all of our thanks to reviewers of articles submitted to the journal and to the Chair of the Editorial and Publications Committee, Dr. Shirley Jackson, and the other members of the committee.

On a less uplifting note, when we advertised for applications to edit *Social Problems*, only one person expressed interest in the position. We did not do much better the previous two times as

well. We are not alone in this respect. Institutions do not reward this kind of activity as much as they once did and it has had a tangible, deleterious impact on the interest being expressed to edit the journal (and journals generally). Despite this low interest, we were very fortunate to have found excellent editors. That may not be the case in the future, so we urge you to begin thinking about serving as a future editor of *Social Problems*. If you are not interested or cannot do it, please help us search for talented individuals who may be.

Human Rights and Social Justice Webpage

This past year we created a webpage dedicated to and with resources for work on human rights and social justice. We will continue to update it and encourage members to consider doing this kind of work and including this material in courses that they teach – or perhaps to create courses on human rights at their institutions. We are a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) Science and Human Rights Coalition as well. Dr. John Dale and I represent the Society, and both of us sit on important committees of the Coalition. John, for example, was elected to the Coalition's Steering Committee.

COVID-19, Membership Decline, and Deficit

One of the unfortunate effects of the pandemic and the cancellation of the annual meeting has been a precipitous decline in membership. At one time we were approaching 2000 members and presently we are much closer to 1100. We need former members to renew and an effort by existing members to recruit new members. Hopefully, getting a better handle on COVID-19 and the Chicago Annual Meeting in 2021 will help us to restore all, or most, of this lost membership, but in the interim, we need members and former members to lend a hand. One of the consequences of this decline, is a substantial deficit. We have healthy reserves that will allow us to weather the storm in the short run, but in the long term we have to find a way to increase our membership, minimally, to pre-COVID-19 levels.

This summer, Michele and I met (virtually) with the Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee (POSPC) to discuss, principally, the decline in membership. The discussion was an excellent and lively one, which included questions about the kind of organization we are and want to be. Some good ideas came out of the discussion, which we will take to the Board for further discussion and hopefully implementation. Someone once said that you should never let a crisis go to waste. Crises can be used in many ways, including by ill-intentioned individuals to consolidate power and target their "enemies." That's not what I have in mind. What I have in mind, is what we have been doing for the past few months, and that is taking stock of who we are, where we are, and where we want to be, a year and five or ten years from now -- and how to get there. As a member of the POSPC put it (paraphrased), "an organization for what?"

Letters and Statements

This past year the Society continued its practice of releasing or signing on to statements on an assortment of social justice issues. The most recent was an "End Racism Statement" in the wake of George Floyd's execution, in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement and other protests against the unjust treatment of communities of color by police and in opposition to the actual

and threatened militarized response by the current administration. We also signed on to a letter drafted by the ASA calling for additional relief funds to higher education in the CARES Act. In addition to signing this letter, we sent our own letter to the White House and Congressional leaders to add DACA students to the list of recipients of these funds. In February, we sent a letter to the President of the United States, expressing concerns about the administration's decision to add the countries of Nigeria, Myanmar, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan, and Tanzania to the restricted travel list. While acknowledging the administration's responsibility to ensure the country's security, the letter, approved by the Board, expressed the belief that this approach is short-sighted and will, in the long run, make us more isolated and, consequently, less secure. Finally, we sent a letter to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), supporting comments by the AAUP concerning the employee status of university and college student employees under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).

Concluding Remarks

No doubt I have omitted something I should not have omitted. If I find that to be the case later, I will amend the report. For now, let me end by thanking the Board and membership for allowing me to serve as the organization's Executive Officer. As I indicated earlier in the report, it truly is an honor.