

**Institute for Research on the
African Diaspora in the Americas
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July 15, 2020

To: Society for the Study of Social Problems Board of Directors
From: Tsedale M. Melaku, Co-Chair
SSSP 2020 Annual Meeting Program Committee

Re: SSSP Program Committee Report 2020

Theme: Bringing The Hope Back In: Sociological Imagination and Dreaming
Transformation

Dear Board of Directors,

I am privileged to write to you about my experiences serving as the Program Co-Chair. I was honored to be invited to serve in this position alongside Dr. Barbara Katz Rothman at the request of President Heather Dalmage. This year's program theme could not have been more fitting, and appropriate for the tumultuous time in which we find ourselves. With the coronavirus pandemic engulfing this world while amplifying systemic inequities ravaging Black and Latinx communities in the U.S., and the continued brutalization of Black people resulting from the persistent and insidious racism that exists; what we need is hope, resistance, resilience to recognize privilege, foresight to do the work and acknowledge our own complicity. President Dalmage's theme for this year was always timely, but SSSP members are now called to action, in recognizing her words:

“We cannot stop resisting, certainly not now. But resistance alone will not create a new world with new possibilities. Resistance will lessen the suffering, for some, but without visions for new worlds, transformation is unlikely. Mobilizing our sociological imaginations, we can think again about the work of SSSP and how our collective work has created the SSSP that currently exists. Let's explore how this current moment, ripe – so, so ripe, demands that we dream transformation.”

We need to dream transformation and make it a reality—now. Time is of the essence.

Given that the 2020 conference as originally planned with rich panels, critical dialogues, and paper sessions, were cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this report will focus on discussing the process of planning the program, and logistical information. It is of the utmost importance for me to highlight the fact that the process of planning a conference could not take shape in any way without the incredible support, knowledge, patience and kindness of Michele Koontz, our Administrative Officer & Meeting Manager. As this was my first time participating in conference organizing, Michele's leadership and extensive knowledge was critical to not only facilitating a smooth transition, but thoroughly explaining, developing, collaborating and implementing strategic plans to bring multiple moving systems together seamlessly. SSSP is incredibly lucky to have



Michele working tirelessly to bring the most professionally organized and well-thought out conference to fruition.

I am grateful for the support of Héctor L. Delgado, Executive Officer, Kelsey Whitaker, the Assistant to the Administrative Officer, Rachel S. Cogburn, Information Technology Specialist, and Zaina Shams, Graduate Research Associate & Webmaster. Thank you to last year's Program Committee Chair, E. Brooke Kelly (University of North Carolina at Pembroke) for sharing her experiences with us at the meeting in New York City. I would like to acknowledge the hard-work of the local arrangements committee chaired by Valerie Francisco-Menchavez (San Francisco State University), including Orly Clerge (University of California, Davis), and Theresa Ysabel Rocha Beardall (Virginia Tech). In addition, thank you to all of the division chairs for sponsoring various thematic sessions, developing and organizing specific division sessions and working to create an impactful program that centered President Dalmage's program theme.

A very special thank you to our Program Committee: Angie Beeman (Baruch College, CUNY) and Doug O. Meyer (University of Virginia) for their work this year, especially organizing the highly demanded session, *Networking Event: Interdisciplinary Collaboration for Publication*.

In accepting the role as Program Co-Chair, one of my primary goals was to work towards making Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) intrinsic to the organization and the program, rather than having them engage on the periphery. With this goal in mind, I had an incredible opportunity to interface and engage with many scholars doing amazing and impactful research. This also gave me a chance to highlight panel sessions that specifically target social issues that have always been important, but often decentered, and are so prevalent in this moment of racial awakening. It was also my goal to integrate graduate students by centering their work and inviting them to participate with a leading scholar in their area of research. My hope is that future program chairs will take up the mission of centering and valuing the work of individuals who are marginalized within this progressive organization, creating real space to engage in critical discourse that also focuses on areas we need to improve.

The submission information for the 2020 program was pulled from the online management session system. As of the submission deadline, January 31, 2020, there were a total of 722 online submissions. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 SSSP Annual Meeting in San Francisco was cancelled on April 28, 2020. As of this date, there were a total of 713 papers submitted using the online submission process and 15 papers added by session organizers for a total of 728 conference papers. There were 154 sessions on the program. 32 sessions were cancelled. In total, there were 2 plenary sessions, 48 thematic sessions, and 10 special sessions. There was a total of 62 sessions that were co-sponsored. The 1/2-day virtual annual meeting is scheduled on Friday, August 7 from 12:00pm-5:00pm (EDT). The program is offered as a complimentary benefit to current SSSP members. Currently, there are 1,094 current SSSP members.

There were several sessions from the previous conferences that were continued including: "Networking Event: Interdisciplinary Collaboration for Publishing," organized by Angie Beeman and Doug O. Meyer, and "The Academic Job Market" organized by Héctor L. Delgado. Another important session that should be continued is the "New Directions in Theory and Research among Advanced Undergraduates," organized by Chris Wellin (Illinois State University). This special session really ensures that undergraduate students gain access to doing advanced sociology and engaging with scholars. Also, there was a fantastic invited panel requested by graduate students via

feedback they provided in 2019, which we committed to organize, “Doing the Work: Avoiding Replicating Systems of Oppression in Academia.” It is my hope that these sessions will be revisited in future conferences.

Other notable panels, workshops, paper sessions, and critical dialogues organized and sponsored by the Program Committee, include *Invited Panels*: “Diversity in Organizations: Going from Well-Meaning to Actual Doing;” “#NextGenBlackSoc: Exploring the Research of Emerging Black Sociologists;” “Intersectional Analysis: Identities of Race, Class and Sexuality in Varying Spaces;” *Thematic*: “Pedagogies of Liberation: Hope, Imagination and Transformation;” “The Key to Mentoring;” *Author Meets Critics: You Don’t Look Like a Lawyer*” *Black Women and Systemic Gendered Racism* (Tsedale M. Melaku, The Graduate Center, CUNY); *Flatlining, Race, Work, and Health Care in the New Economy* (Adia Harvey Wingfield; Washington University in St. Louis) *Paper Sessions*: “Coalition vs. Competition: Building a Model of Collaborative Scholarship;” “Breaking the Silence: Marginalized Groups in Organizations;” “Discourse on Difference: The 50th Anniversary and Continued Relevance of Ethnic Studies;” *Repository Paper Sessions*: “Intersectional Analysis: Identities of Race, Class and Sexuality in Varying Spaces II;” “Crime, Delinquency and Substance Abuse;” *Social Action, Change and Conflict in Community Research;”* “Exploring Political Problems and Theory Construction;” “Politics, Gender, and Racial and Ethnic Minorities;” “Critical Dialogue: Poverty, Class, Social Action and Change.”

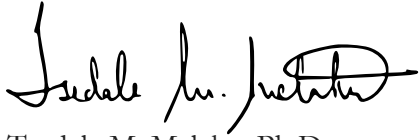
To all the invited panelists and discussants, thank you for your willingness to share your expertise, research, and help bridge the gap between faculty, students and practitioners in our field: Wendy Leo Moore (Texas A&M University), Johnny Eric Williams (Trinity College), Victor Rios (University of California, Santa Barbara), Erica Chito Childs (Hunter College, CUNY), Amaka C. Okechukwu (George Mason University), Victor Ray (The University of Iowa), Margaret M. Chin (Hunter College, CUNY), Ted Thornhill (Florida Gulf Coast University), Adia Harvey Wingfield (Washington University in St. Louis), Patricia A. Banks (Mount Holyoke College), Lisa D. Covington (University of Iowa), Edwin Grimsley (The Graduate Center, CUNY), Candice C. Robinson (University of Pittsburgh), Anthony James Williams (University of California, Los Angeles), Karen Okigbo (The Graduate Center, CUNY), Eileen O’Brien (Saint Leo University), Carlos M. Camacho (The Graduate Center, CUNY), Joseph A. Guzman (The Ohio State University), Xuemeng Li (The Graduate Center, CUNY), Estela B. Diaz (Columbia University), CiAuna Heard (Temple University), Carla Shedd (The Graduate Center, CUNY), Sarah Jane Brubaker (Virginia Commonwealth University), Aldon Morris (Northwestern University), Enobong Hannah Branch (Rutgers University), Angie Beeman (Baruch College, CUNY), and Yung-Yi Diana Pan (Brooklyn College, CUNY).

This year has been a wonderful learning journey and I am grateful to President Heather Dalmage for trusting me with the very critical task of bringing her vision to life during this year’s conference. Although our planned conference would have certainly been great enjoying the San Francisco summer breeze, gaining nourishment from learning about and sharing research, breaking bread, making connections, and fortifying friendships, I truly believe the call to action that has come from these troubling times is even greater. President Dalmage’s message of hope and the *Pandemic Panel* featuring exceptional scholars and activists doing the hard work of shedding light on the insidious systemic inequities in our society will absolutely drive our vision of transformation.

The one suggestion I have for the Board of Directors, future Presidents, Program Committee Chairs, Division Chairs, Members and everyone affiliated with SSSP, is to find ways to make racial

equity intrinsic to the organization. That is when we will truly fulfill SSSP's important mission of bringing about social change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tsedale M. Melaku". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'T' and a prominent flourish at the end.

Tsedale M. Melaku, Ph.D.