

July 7, 2021

To: Society for the Study of Social Problems Board of Directors

From: Saher Selod, Co-Chair SSSP 2021 Annual Meeting Program Committee

Re: SSSP Program Committee Report 2021

Theme: Revolutionary Sociology: Truth, Healing, Reparations and Restructuring

Dear Board of Directors,

This report details some of some of the experiences serving as Program Co-Chair for the 2021 Annual Meeting for SSSP. My Program Co-Chair, Woody Doane, invited me to serve in this role. The President of SSSP, Corey Dolgon, selected the theme, *Revolutionary Sociology: Truth, Healing, Reparations and Restructuring*. The theme reflects the urgency for academia to address the rising inequalities the world continues to face considering climate change, racism, sexism, authoritarianism, and now COVID-19. The Program Committee was selected by Corey, which included Kasey Henricks, Andrea Miller, Michelle Christian, Raul Perez and Saida Grundy. Woody and I are indebted to them for the hard work they put into this conference. We met with the committee regularly and their input on how to make this conference successful as well as their willingness to serve as organizers and presiders on sessions was invaluable.

Due to the uncertainty of the pandemic, the Board of Directors voted to move the program to a virtual platform rather than hold the conference in person in Chicago. This decision was made on November 23, 2020, which allowed enough time for the program committee to organize the conference in a way that would suit the online format. The IT Specialist for SSSP, Rachel Cogburn, and Michele Koontz met with several vendors and selected Pathable to host the virtual event. Pathable will centralize the online conference in a way that will allow participants to move freely between sessions, meetings, and events. It also allows for free meeting space so that participants can congregate with colleagues and friends to meet and socialize. This platform will provide the conference with a virtual space for the SSSP community to both socialize and collaborate.

The Board voted to extend the deadline for paper submissions from January 15<sup>th</sup> to January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. This flexibility in the deadline helped to insure a successful conference with a high participation rate. Flexibility on behalf of the Board and Program Committee were vital to ensuring that the conference would move forward with a high participation rate in the online format. As of the January 31<sup>st</sup> submission deadline, 459 papers were submitted. By July 11<sup>th</sup>, 419 papers were submitted using the online submission process and 50 papers were added by session organizers for a total of 469 conference papers. At the time of this report, there were 761 registrants. A total of 19 program participants were

removed from the program for failure to register despite numerous reminders from Michele Koontz and the Program Committee Co-Chairs. Currently, there are 124 sessions on the program. There are 3 plenary sessions, 31 thematic sessions, 5 special sessions and 53 co-sponsored sessions. The Board approved a reduced registration fee to help offset the cost for participants due to the lack of research and travel funding available at institutions around the country because of the pandemic. The early bird registration rate for members was \$95 and \$40 for students/underemployed/emeritus members pre-registration of \$110 for members (\$175 in previous years) and \$50 for student/underemployed/emeritus members (\$60 in previous years); and same-day registration of \$125 for members (\$200 in previous years) and \$50 for students/underemployed/emeritus members (\$70 in previous years).

While there are many challenges that the pandemic created for organizing a conference virtually, there were also some surprising opportunities. The online format afforded the ability to include more international and global scholarship and activism at the conference. Because they did not have to pay for travel to the United States or worry about visas, we were able to include a more diverse range of scholarship that is global in nature. The Transnational Initiatives Committee, led by Alan Spector and Eberhard Raithelhuber, organized several sessions that focused on global issues including feminist leadership in the Global South, COVID-19, and the rise of authoritarian regimes. Another benefit of hosting the conference online is that the Divisions and the Board of Directors were also able to hold meetings via zoom prior to the conference. We believe this will make the conference more enjoyable for those who hold office, like Division Chairs and members of the Board, who often find themselves in multiple meetings during the conference.

There were a few changes that we made to the conference this year. The Program Committee decided to host a *An Evening of Book Panels* in lieu of having the Author Meets Critics sessions. The Program Committee voted that this would be more inclusive as we could include multiple books instead of just a few. The themes for the panels are Criminal Justice and Race, Immigration and Borders, Austerity and Alternatives and Ethnography. Each of the panels consists of 3-4 authors and a panelist where they will discuss some of the main points of their book. There were also several pre-recorded interviews with authors and activists for our members to watch at their leisure. For example, Corey Dolgon invited Ida B. Wells great granddaughter, Michelle Duster, to participate in two talks with moderators about her two books. We feel high profile speakers like her were able to participate because it was virtual. We are also hosting a *Movie Night* on Wednesday, August 4<sup>th</sup>. SSSP participants will be able to view one of three movies that will be followed with a Q&A by the directors of each film. We hope these events will enrich the program and make up for the lack of in person activities a conference in Chicago would have afforded.

One of the major challenges we faced organizing the conference during a pandemic was the limitation of one SSSP policy put into place in previous years. Reading through past Program Committee reports, I noticed a recommendation to limit the number of times someone could participate in the program. While it makes sense that there should be a limitation on how many times one can present their research at a conference, the policy that was put into place created some barriers for session organizers. The policy that presenters, which included paper authors, critics, panelists, and discussants, could only be listed on the program once was difficult to work around without asking for exemptions to this policy, which we

were granted a few times. Many session organizers had a difficult time identifying a discussant for their session that was not already listed on the program as an author or panelist. Due to the limited travel and research funds available because most institutions reduced faculty's research and travel budgets, asking participants to pay a registration fee for a conference only to serve as a discussant or presider was a difficult request to make given that many institutions require evidence of presenting one's research to cover the cost of a conference. We anticipate that declining research and travel funds will limit participation in future conferences over the next few years. Our recommendation to the Board is to consider revising this policy to allow for presiders/discussants to serve an unlimited number of times in addition to serving as an author once, rather than requiring participants to only serve once in any of these roles. We understand the need to limit presenting one's research, but the role of discussant and presider should not be included in this restriction. This would ease the burden on session organizers to scramble to find a discussant/presider. While it is ideal to have a presider and discussant in every session, it is not realistic to want this for all the sessions. We also recommend that after a set date, say six weeks before the conference, SSSP does not enforce the requirement for having a discussant plus panelists for each session. While it would be ideal to have a discussant, sessions should still be able to run without a discussant and we feel this not only creates undue stress for the Administrative Office at SSSP, the Program Co-Chairs, but it is also very difficult for session organizers to find discussants at that late time before the conference.

The Program Committee owes a huge debt of gratitude to Rachel Cogburn for her work on moving this conference to the virtual format. This shift required a lot of time and innovative thinking on the behalf of the SSSP Administrative staff. We appreciate the hard work of Kelsey Whitaker as well. It goes without saying that Michele Koontz is the backbone of SSSP. Without her, we would have been lost. She made organizing a conference under a very difficult circumstance not only possible but made it easy on the Program Co-Chairs. We are indebted to her. Finally, Corey Dolgon's dedication to putting together a stellar conference should be noted. He went above and beyond for this conference by individually emailing members of SSSP to helping organize the book panels and the movie night. Woody and I were honored to serve as Program Co-Chairs with Corey as President.

Sincerely,



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