

TO: The Board of Directors of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)  
FROM: Felicia Arriaga, Chair  
2023 Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Fellowship Committee  
RE: 2022-2023 SSSP Racial/Ethnic Minority Graduate Fellowship Committee Report  
DATE: July 6, 2023

### Committee Members

The committee members included: Felicia Arriaga (chair), Shaonta' Allen, Christopher Contreras, Kenneth A. Cruz, Gabriela León-Pérez, Candice C. Robinson, Rita Shah

### Applicant Pool

The SSSP Administrative Office received 22 complete applications by the final due date and we waited on a letter of recommendation for the 23<sup>rd</sup> application. There were 10 less applicants this year than last year.

The SSSP Administrative Office summarized the gender and sex categories for the committee:

Female|Woman: 5

Female|Cisgender (i.e., not transgender): 2

Male: 1

Female: 7

Woman: 1

Non-binary/ third gender/ genderqueer: 1

Woman|Cisgender (i.e., not transgender): 1

Female|Woman|Cisgender (i.e., not transgender): 3

Male|Man|Cisgender (i.e., not transgender): 1

Female|Non-binary/ third gender/ genderqueer: 1

The SSSP Administrative Office summarized the racial and ethnicity categories for the committee:

Hispanic or Latinx: 9

Black or African American: 7

American Indian or Alaska Native|Black or African American: 1

Muslim South Asian: 1

Asian or Asian-American|Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: 1

Asian or Asian-American: 2

American Indian or Alaska Native: 1

Black or African American|Hispanic or Latinx: 1

Role of Administrative Office: Michele Koontz and Rachel Cogburn helped immensely in this process. They met with the committee chair via zoom on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023 to discuss logistics,

timeline, and next steps for the committee members. The committee greatly appreciated their support in this endeavor and found SlideRoom easy to use.

### Selection Process

The Chair emailed all committee members the evaluation criteria, a timeline for the selection process, and links to the fellowship announcement and application on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The chair asked the committee members to return evaluations by April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The deadline was extended by a week to ensure that committee members were able to complete all evaluations. Committee members were then asked to attend 1 of 2 meetings to discuss the final selections and to provide feedback on the process. These meetings took place on April 23<sup>rd</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup>. Our first selection was unanimous, and the committee ranked Venus Green as our top candidate. After some deliberation, the committee selected Jalia Joseph as the 2<sup>nd</sup> recipient for the fellowship.

**Venus Green** from the University of Massachusetts Amherst went above and beyond to discuss her commitment to SSSP and to scholar-activism. While she clearly articulated the financial hurdles she's dealt with or is dealing with, her plan for receiving the award also made her stand out. She wrote, *As a SSSP Minority Dissertation Fellow, I plan to secure a career as a tenure-track faculty in sociology, in order to continue to develop interdisciplinary research agendas that explore the dynamics of Black women's labor conditions, their philosophies of community building, and the innovations of critical Black feminist thought. As I make the transition from advanced doctoral student to junior tenure-track faculty, I will translate my dissertation research into manuscripts and a book monograph to speak to audiences in the sociology of race, labor studies, political sociology, African American studies, women and gender studies, and broader public and local communities. As a SSSP Minority Dissertation fellow, I will complete my dissertation, which I am currently in the data collection and analysis stage of and will complete the writing stage by Spring 2024. Following the rich tradition of SSSP's dedication to social transformation and empowerment through education, equity, and justice, I look forward to joining the supportive community of passionate and cutting-edge current and past SSSP scholars to guide me in strengthening my community-based and social justice-oriented approach to my research agendas. With this support, I am confident that my research on Black domestic workers' employment conditions and their advocacy for justice will lend key insights to educators, policymakers, and academics on how to challenge racialized and gendered discrimination experienced by domestic workers and other essential workers. As a first-generation Black and Indigenous scholar, I believe that with the support of the SSSP Dissertation Fellowship, I can overcome historical obstacles of gendered and racial educational exclusion in becoming the first person in my family to complete the Ph.D., ensure the completion and timely write-up of my dissertation during the 2023-2024 academic year, transition into an early career scholar in 2024, and complete the submissions of manuscripts for publication.*

She also had high praise for SSSP's impact on the development of her scholar-activism, *As a first-generation graduate student and as a woman of color who has had to overcome many institutional boundaries to education, my involvement with SSSP has been an invaluable resource through which numerous structural barriers have been leveled and I have been able to access the resources needed for my career development as well as for the support of my*

*scholarship. Through SSSP, I learned the importance of the co-creation of knowledge through collaboration, respect, and maintaining the integrity of social justice-oriented sociology which has produced organic intellectuals both within and outside of the academy. My involvement with SSSP has allowed me to develop a toolkit that prioritizes the democratization of knowledge production while also building a supportive community of dedicated people engaged in social activism. It was through the spaces of dialogue organized through SSSP and through participating in numerous roundtables and attending sessions ranging from the topics of reproductive justice to abolitionist sociological methods that I strengthened my intellectual vision and sharpened my theoretical skills in terms of learning how to develop a more rigorous and grounded sociological inquiry towards a horizon of emancipatory Black feminist and Indigenous sociology.*

It was clear that SSSP has influenced her work and her letter writers had wonderful things to say about her. While the committee saw her as one of the candidates most involved in her community, Venus has also contributed immensely to her and her classmates education, co-creating the Decolonial Studies Graduate Certificate.

**Jalia Joseph** unfortunately has experienced some hurdles in completing their graduate education but their commitment to studying and supporting Black activism is clear from their community work and dissertation research titled “a more liberated future: Black MaGes Experiences with Political and Protest Engagement.” *Receiving the fellowship would help me finish the final year of my program. Unfortunately, I had to extend my timeline by a year due to unforeseen medical issues which required surgeries. However, because of changes in my department and within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, there is no guarantee I will secure an additional year of funding or a tuition waiver, which allows me to pay tuition at the in-state rate. In addition, no funding from my department will force me to pay tuition and fees alone and require me to pay for insurance out of pocket. Receiving the fellowship would help alleviate the stress of both of these problems without requiring me to take on a full-time job which could hinder my ability to write my dissertation promptly.*

Jalia is also committed to ensuring more scholar-activists find a home in sociology. have also taken my experiences as an organizer directly in other academic spaces. *I served on the Graduate Student Committee for the Association of Black Sociologists (ABS), the graduate representative for the Section of Racial and Ethnic Minorities (SREM) in the American Sociological Association, and an inaugural member of the #SOCAF collective. In all these roles, my goal has been to better create spaces for graduate students, mental health, and the constraining financial difficulties we face. Working with ABS, I have helped create professionalization seminars for graduate students focusing on the importance of community activism and public scholarship. For SREM, I helped to create a fund for students of color to offset the price of the annual meeting. As a part of the #SOCAF collective, I helped prioritize the importance of mental health and celebrate ourselves and our wins outside academic institutions.*

### Suggestions for the future

The committee has a few suggestions for the future.

- Letters of recommendation: The committee unfortunately received some letters of recommendation that were not glowing reflections of the candidates, and the committee suggests a reminder to the students to select their recommenders carefully and perhaps include a reminder to the recommenders. The committee also received a few letters of recommendation from community-based organizations and the committee is interested in exploring that as a requirement for the future. There was also a suggestion to move to 1 or 2 letters of recommendation instead of 3.
- Definitions and categories: The committee recommends that scholar activism and community involvement be weighted more heavily in decisions. If this shift is made, communicating this to the candidates would be necessary. In general, the committee valued candidates who had both areas represented over candidates who were solely undertaking DEI work on their campus. We also recommend including gender as an aspect of disadvantaged social background given the rolling back of many protections at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Personal statement: There is still some variety for what is included in the personal statements. It seems a little more guidance might be needed based on the rubric used to score. According to the rubric, we are to assess the quality and commitment to study, but more guidance for the candidates would make it easier for us to do this (What is the quality and strength of the student's personal statement? Does it articulate a scholarly commitment to the study of inequality, injustice, or oppression?). Some personal statements read like research/grant applications instead of discussing their commitment to scholar-activism.
- Process: The committee suggests that future committees meet to review 2-3 of the same applications and discuss their scoring before scoring all applications. This would help in clarifying the scholar-activism definitions/scoring and the financial need aspect since those were the two areas where there were clear discrepancies in scoring.
- This is the first year, we had the 10 single-spaced page limitation for the dissertation proposal, and it seemed sufficient but sometimes made it challenging to assess the feasibility of their project.
- Lastly, we are interested in whether future committees will allow for undocumented students to apply.