

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS – Fall 2020, Issue One

DIVISION CHAIR: Ethan J. Evans, term 2019-2021. Assistant Professor, Social Work, California State University, Sacramento. Email: ethanjevans@csus.edu.

DIVISION Co-CHAIR: Arturo Baiocchi, term 2019-2021. Assistant Professor, Social Work, California State University, Sacramento. Email: arturo.baiocchi@csus.edu.

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NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

Hello Sociology & Social Welfare Division Members,

We just got word that the 2021 SSSP annual meeting will be held virtually. While very early, given the planning needed to adjust it seems like the prudent decision. The University where I teach was a front runner in going mostly online through the Fall semester. Unless there is a major shift soon, I anticipate mostly online instruction through Fall 2021. Please enjoy the warm thoughts I share with you now as you read on - wherever you are.

My mantra has been: Safe, Simple, Essential.

Chair & Vice Chair Elections Call for Nominations/Volunteers, Due December 11, 2020.

Please to submit nominations for leaders of our division. YOU can also SELF-NOMINATE or consider a "shout out" to your graduate students who can also run for these positions. Please email nominations to ethan.evans@csus.edu.

SSSP Membership Renewal please renew your membership. While we are in trying times, we want our divisions strong and healthy. Your society and division membership monies help fund all the cool division sponsored projects!

Renew here:

<https://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/255/fuseaction/ssspmember.portal/userid/-1>

DIVISION MISSION

Vision: The Sociology and Social Welfare Division supports a vision of a just society.

Mission: Our division promotes theory informed, applied scholarship about social institutions and processes in order to foster understanding, but also to speed remediation of structural racism, and all forms of exclusion through policy and social programs.

2021 ANNUAL MEETING

In light of the American Sociological Association's (ASA) cancellation of their in-person annual meeting in Chicago and given our concern for our members' health and safety, the Board of Directors has decided to cancel the SSSP's in-person 2021 Annual Meeting and move to an all-virtual meeting. This move is facilitated by the fact that we were planning for a hybrid meeting, with both in-person and virtual sessions, but this pivot still requires substantial work that has already started. As the planning for the virtual meeting proceeds, we will be in touch periodically with updates and details.

DIVISION BOOK REVIEW PROJECT: Call for book recommendations

The Sociology and Social Welfare (S&SW) division releases newsletters two to three times annually with a section dedicated to review a book published by an author who is an active member of our division (or review of a book held in high regard by one or more active members of the division).

This newsletter features a review of "*Down, Out, and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*" by Forrest Stuart (University of Chicago Press, 2016). Review by Michael O. Johnston, Ph.D., johnstonmo@wmpenn.edu.

BOOK REVIEW: "Down, Out, and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row " by Forrest Stuart (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

In *Down, Out, and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*, Forrest Stuart shares his five years of ethnographic fieldwork of Los Angeles, California's Skid Row (also known as "The Nickel"). Stuart states that this area includes a 50-block-radius on the eastern flank of the city's rapidly redeveloping downtown and is only blocks from the city's iconic city hall. Its features include a revitalized central business district and the hippest new coffee shops. He shares that there are 13,000 residents who are living in extreme poverty – mostly black, undereducated, working-age men who often have additional difficulties associated with physical disabilities, mental illness, and addiction. The emergence of this community can be traced back to national phenomena – deindustrialization and welfare cutbacks.

People seem to migrate to the Los Angeles' Skid Row in search of emergency relief and low-cost housing from across the United States. In this book, the author examined how welfare policy shapes the attitudes and identity of police who patrol Los Angeles' Skid Row and the people who reside there. Stuart Forrest released a second book this year, "Ballad of the Bullet Gangs, Drill Music, and the Power of Online Infamy" (Princeton University Press, 2020), and although the study was conducted in a different city it can be thought of as an extension to this research.

Stuart draws connections between the history of welfare policy and its influence on strategies of policing, as they both impact the lives of people who reside in the Nickel. The author began his fieldwork for this study in 2007 with an intent to focus on the residents, but soon realized the influence that police had on the stories of residents. The author realized that to neglect the stories and experiences of the police officers who regularly patrolled the area would have left a void in the research. Therefore Stuart expanded his fieldwork in 2008 and followed alongside police officers who were assigned to Skid Row. He then spent his time rotating every

few months between the residents of Skid Row and the police who patrol it. The author also used material from his relationship with the Los Angeles Community Action Network and deeply studied the police records from the Los Angeles Police Department. The well roundedness of Stuart's mixed method approach enhanced the range of insight provide, which allows readers to feel as if they are also in the field getting the "seat of their pants dirty" right along with Forrest Stuart.

This book is divided into two sections. The author provides the perspective of police and the history of Los Angeles' Skid Row in the first section of this book. In the second section, the author focuses on the wisdom acquired by the residents in this community where police are always on patrol (also referred to as "cop wisdom"; see *Elijah Anderson, 1999*). The author concludes the book with an in-depth look at therapeutic policing and the future of policing in Los Angeles, California and across the United States of America.

A strength of this book is the author's ability to provide a detailed history of Los Angeles' Skid Row over multiple eras. The first era began in the 1850s and lasted until the 1930s; the second from 1930s to the 1990s; and the third from the 1990s to present. The purpose of this appears to be to distinguish the transformations that have occurred in policy and practice of policing and of welfare provision over the course of decades. Stuart does an exceptional job bringing his fieldwork to life by providing thick description of the stories that participants in the study shared with him (see Geertz, 1973). The author doesn't just follow his participants around, he establishes a relationship with participants and is able to make that explicit in his writing.

During the first 70 years of policing in Los Angeles' Skid Row the residents of this neighborhood were portrayed as willfully defiant, morally deficient, and as having a lack of restraint. Society was tasked with re-socializing citizens of Skid Row immediately and the police played a central role in making certain they did not become too comfortable in this community. The second era was focused on containing and quarantining residents to a small 50-block radius through government intervention (also known as the "1976 Containment Plan") and changing language that is used to describe the people who reside in this neighborhood (i.e., shifting from a deviance model with words like "vagrant" and "transient" to a medical model using words like "homeless" and "addict"). It was a time when residents were left mostly there to liver and the police were not expected to respond to offenses like loitering, public drunkenness, and begging. The 1990s onward marked a transition back to the first era when Los Angeles' Skid Row was deemed a problem in need of a solution. Social welfare shifted from programs that were funded by the government into private organizations that used police to help them in enforcing their goals. This is something that Michele Wakin (2020) also found in her ethnographic study of homeless populations who camped out in what she called "hobo jungle" in one of California's wealthiest cities. Stuart found that there were three shelters that dominated Los Angeles' Skid Row (referred to as "mega-shelters"). They seemed to focus on resident resocialization. The strategic goal was intended to eliminate anything that would promote long-term residence and to rid Los Angeles of anything that resembled the Skid Row neighborhood.

This book provides readers with an in-depth examination of the consequences that punitive policing has had on the lives of residents of Los Angeles' Skid Row. The author demonstrates his passion and desire to enlighten audiences about the lived experiences of homeless populations. I applaud Stuart for his willingness to dig deeper into the Skid Row neighborhood and his keen ability to bring the stories from the pages of this book to life in the mind of its readers. He also provided a thorough examination of his observations by applying

theory across multiple disciplines (political science, race studies, community and urban development, sociology) to make sense of what he found from his fieldwork. His findings are so raw that it may, at times, make readers feel uncomfortable. I recommend this book for anyone who is interested in learning more about the impact that policy can have on the attitudes and behaviors enacted on some of society's most marginal groups.

References

- Anderson, Elijah. (1999). *Code of the street: decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. First edition. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company
- Geertz, Clifford. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books
- Wakin, Michele (2020). *Hobo Jungle: A Homeless Community in Paradise*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner

BOOK REVIEW SUBMISSION

The S&SW newsletter is seeking suggestions for titles to review in 2021. Please email your recommendations to book review Chair, Michael O. Johnston, PhD., assistant professor, Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences, William Penn University. johnstonmo@wmpenn.edu. We are also seeking a member to serve as co-chair for a book review team. If interested, please email Michael.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS INVITED

We encourage members to submit news such as publications, new appointments, and other professional accomplishments for inclusion in a future newsletter. Suggestions and inquiries about less conventional content are also welcome— consider editorials, book reviews, teaching notes, department/program profiles, calls for contributions to journals and edited books, obituaries... Please direct inquiries or submissions to the current Division Chair, Ethan J. Evans at ethan.evans@csus.edu.

PUBLICATIONS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recognition of members' contributions will be posted in the next newsletter. Please email ethan.evans@csus.edu to submit announcements.

Conference Papers:

Bill Cabin. "*In the Realm of Haunting Ghosts: Denying the Existence of Substance Abuse In Medicare Home Health*". Research Spotlight at the **Society of Behavioral Medicine** 2021 Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions, virtually on April 12- April 16, 2021.

Ethan Evans. "*Impact of COVID-19 Shift to Online Education on Social Work Student Educational Experience and Goals*". **Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR)**, virtually on January 19-22, 2021.

Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare. I highly recommend that you submit your work to this journal for potential publication (See www.scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw).