

# Sociology and Social Welfare Division Newsletter

Society for the Study of Social Problems

## Message from the Division Chair

Dear Members:

Hi this is Dave Wagner, the new chair for the Sociology and Social Welfare Division of the SSSP. I am writing to just introduce myself, and also to facilitate either newsletter contributions or other forms of dialogue among members.

Many of you do know me already. I worked as a social worker and organizer prior to coming to academia, and am overtrained- holding degrees in social work, labor studies, and sociology. I have taught mostly Social Work (some Sociology) since starting teaching in the 1980s, and am currently a Professor and MSW Coordinator in the School of Social Work at the University of Southern Maine in Portland. I have written widely in the areas of poverty and inequality, social welfare history, and cultural criticism including the books, Checkerboard Square: Culture and Resistance in a Homeless Community, The New Temperance: America's Obsession with Sin and Vice, What's Love got to do with it?: A Critical Look at

American Charity, The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institution, and Ordinary People: In and Out of Poverty in the Gilded Age. I am currently completing a book on the intertwined lives of Anne Sullivan ("the miracle worker") who was a poorhouse inmate and Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, the abolitionist and charity reformer who aided her out of the poorhouse.

In talking with Deirdre Oakley and looking at the last few newsletters, I frankly did not see too much content other than announcements. It would be great to my mind to see some actual debate or discussion about social welfare, as this is absent at least from most of the field of social work, but I suspect sociology as well. I am writing to see what people feel the division can do to support some sort of more thoughtful discussion of the issues in the broad field of sociology and social welfare. For example, why has this field of sociology and social welfare, once a "natural" combination, fallen on such hard times in the last decades (I know when

I interviewed for jobs years ago, the sociology departments disdained social work, and vice versa). As another example, in the 1960s and 1970s, very fruitful and interesting areas of critical analysis were opened in the discussion of social welfare, but now several decades later, they seem abandoned to rather generalized statements of wishing more or less social welfare.

These are only examples of things that the 288 members of the division can discuss. I would mostly like all of your views on whether this could take place in the newsletters or perhaps on-line discussions?

At a minimum, reviews of new books, notes on conferences that are coming, and other announcements should certainly be sent for either the newsletter or email dissemination.

All the best for now,

Dave Wagner, University of Southern Maine

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# 59th Annual SSSP Meeting in San Francisco!

Steven E. Barkan, SSSP President, has developed the theme for the next meeting – “Race, Ethnicity, and the Continuing Problem of the Color Line.” According to his statement on the SSSP website, “The 2009 annual meeting in San Francisco will be an occasion both to celebrate the racial and ethnic diversity of our society and to reflect soberly on the color line that remains and the work that still needs to be done.” This year, the conference will take place August 7-9, 2009 at the Stanford Court Hotel in San Francisco, CA. Information on this upcoming annual meeting can be found on the SSSP website.

## Sociology and Social Welfare Sessions – Call for Papers

### **Race and the Welfare State: Comparative Perspectives**

We seek papers that examine the effects of race, ethnicity, and immigration upon either particular social policies, categories of policies, or upon the very shape of state social provision within or across nations. Race and ethnicity are understood contextually and are dynamic and complex concepts to define. We are especially interested in papers that examine the meaning of race and ethnicity and the effects of increasing immigration on the breadth or generosity of established social democratic or other advanced welfare states. Examinations that include the effects of race and ethnic divisions upon the emergence or elaboration of the welfare state in less developed nations (especially in the former Soviet bloc nations, Southeast Asia and Africa) are encouraged. Although we are especially interested in papers that offer cross-national comparisons, we are happy to consider single-nation studies with the proviso that if a paper is to examine race in the context of the U.S., we ask that it have a comparative dimension.

*Chairs: Stephen Pimpare, Yeshiva University and Jerry Streets, Yale University*

*Contact/Abstracts to: Stephen Pimpare, pimpare@yu.edu*

### **The Declining Significance of Race Revisited**

This session is intended to explore the role of race in the United States in light of William Jules Wilson’s classic, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*, published more than twenty-five years ago. Papers are being sought that consider Wilson’s thesis - that class has superseded race as the most important explanatory factor in situating blacks in the United States - and demonstrate ways in which and to what extent Black Americans are mainstreamed in American social and cultural institutions, as well as integrated into the American economy. To what extent, for example, has the proportion of Black families entering the ranks of the middle-class Americans over the past quarter century changed? Has the average or median level of middle class income of Black families remained on par with those of other race/ethnic groups? To what extent have Blacks improved politically? Have Blacks achieved proportionate representation in the U.S. Congress, in state legislatures, and the like? Has the U.S. reached a point where affirmative action programs are no longer necessary to ensure equal opportunity in the academic and labor markets? In light of Wilson’s claim about class, how does one account for the racial wealth divide and increasing inequality? When viewed through intersectional perspectives, how does incorporating gender change the dynamics among Black Americans? In what ways might race be more important or significant now than it was twenty-five years ago?

*Organizers and Chairs: Richard K. Caputo, Ph.D. and Luisa S. Deprez, Ph.D.*

*Abstracts sent to: Richard Caputo, caputo@yu.edu*

## Call for Papers (continued)...

### **Welfare Reform: How Race Still Matters**

One of the most significant policy challenges before us is the plight of fragile families in poverty, the bulk of whom are disproportionately families of color headed by single mothers. In 1996 under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), recipients were required to seek employment and go to work to become self-sufficient. Many met this mandate and entered the labor market, moving mostly into low-wage jobs earning wages that were sometimes only slightly more than TANF benefits while losing access to valuable, life-sustaining services.

The anticipated self-sufficiency of these families has not been realized. Instead, PRWORA flooded the low-wage labor market with poor women, many of them women of color heading families. Despite the high poverty rate of working African American (13%) and Hispanic (10.6%) women in comparison to working white women (5%), not enough attention has been directed at this facet - the racial dimensions - of welfare reform. We also have evidence of continued racial discrimination in regulatory protocols and state sanctions that inexplicably target communities of color.

This session seeks to address how welfare policy research can, and must, attend to race, elucidating how a new version of welfare research—one that places race and welfare in historical context; reveals its complexity in its intersection with gender, place, age; makes explicit links between racial inequality and welfare policy and the labor market; and exposes the role of race as a social construction - is needed. In doing so, such research will contribute to an understanding of how the policies of welfare reform continue to reproduce racial disadvantage and inequality within American society.

We encourage papers that focus on racial disparities under welfare reform, especially ones that reveal the complexity of race as it intersects with variables such as gender, age, geographic location; the construction of race in both in welfare policy and the labor market, particularly the low-wage labor market; the intersection of welfare policy with other social supports; discriminatory state practices, etc.

*Chairs: Mary Gatta, Rutgers University and Luisa S. Deprez, University of Southern Maine*

*Contact/Abstracts to: [deprez@usm.maine.edu](mailto:deprez@usm.maine.edu)*

## Student Paper Competition

The Sociology and Social Welfare Division announces its 2009 paper competition. The goal is to encourage scholastic endeavors that enhance our understanding of issues related to sociology and social welfare. Relevant papers might focus on social activism, social justice, empowerment, policy or any social welfare-related issues. Qualitative or quantitative empirical analyses or theoretical papers welcome. To be eligible for submission, papers must be (1) written between January 2007 and April 2008 and not published or submitted for scholarly review; (2) authored by one or more students and not co-authored by faculty or a colleague who is not a student; (3) 25 pages or fewer, including references and tables; (4) accompanied by a letter from a faculty member at the student's university nominating the paper for the competition. To be considered for the award, the author must make a commitment to present a paper at a SSWD session during the 2009 SSSP meeting. Send two copies of the paper along with the letter of support to either Richard Caputo, Wurzeiller School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, Wilf Campus, 2495 Amsterdam Avenue, Belfar Hall, Room 907, New York, NY 10033, [caputo@yu.edu](mailto:caputo@yu.edu); or Sondra Fogel, School of Social Work, University of South Florida, 4202 E.Fowler Avenue, Tampa, FL 33620, [sfogel@cas.usf.edu](mailto:sfogel@cas.usf.edu). The SSWD competition winner receives a cash prize of \$150 plus 2009 SSSP conference registration and a banquet ticket.

## Brief Book Reviews

Reviews by David Wagner

Two books that are well worth reading are Stephen Pimpare's *People's History of Poverty in America* (The New Press, 2008) and Frank Stricker's *Why America Lost the War on Poverty— And How to Win It* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Pimpare (Yeshiva University, Political Science and Social Work) has done a great job at an effort needed for a long time: to piece together the many available historical works on poverty with many recent and contemporary accounts of poverty. *The People's History* approach is deeply needed in this subject so often dominated by elite reports and numbers and figures. Pimpare's assembly of mostly first person accounts remind us that as a broad statement, little about being poor in America is new. He arranges his book in a novel way, focusing on survival in all its elements from sleep, eating, work, love, as well as the needs for respect, and escape and resistance. I suspect this will be a needed text in any account of Poverty in the USA. One potential criticism from a historian's perspective may be the very fact that the book eschews chronology, and perhaps at times does not bring out the very different contexts poverty exists in. Still it is great start to a needed project.

Frank Stricker (History, California State University at Dominguez Hills) provides us with a rare look back at the "war on poverty" and other contested poverty related issues of the 1960s. It may be the very controversies of the 1960s have led to an underwriting about this important period, in some ways both the right and left has not deeply explored this period. Stricker very well provides the context of the 1950s and early 1960s that led to the often naïve, but enthusiastic approach of social science to poverty, policies that to begin with were limited by decisions to avoid any redistributive efforts. Stricker does a good job at presenting some parts of the 1960s controversies such as the Moynihan Report and the battle over the Family Assistance Plan of Nixon that are well balanced and reflective. I think the book is less effective once it moves out of the 1960s nor does it necessarily work well in terms of the last part of the title ("How to Win it"). However, this thoughtful account of the "war on poverty" and the 1960s battles over poverty is well worth reading.

## Membership Renewal!

The end of the calendar year is approaching, so I wanted to give members a reminder to renew memberships for 2009. More information regarding membership rates can be found at the website below:

<http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/253>

# Newsletter Submissions

I wanted to use this space to call for future submissions to the Sociology and Social Welfare Division newsletter. Particularly, I wanted to ask for submissions for our the division's next newsletter.

Submissions have a wide range, from new publications to pertinent division information, awards, job openings, etc. You may send any material directly to me. My contact information is below.

Thank you in advance for your submissions and I look forward to serving this division. For more information about my research and scholarship, I direct you to my website:

<http://personal.bgsu.edu/~antwanj>.



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## **Division Chair Contact Information**

David Wagner  
School of Social Work  
University of Southern Maine  
Portland, ME 04104

207.780.4764  
[wagner@usm.maine.edu](mailto:wagner@usm.maine.edu)

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## **Newsletter Editor Contact Information**

Antwan Jones  
Department of Sociology  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, OH 43403

419.372.2294  
[antwanj@bgsu.edu](mailto:antwanj@bgsu.edu)