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All Things to All People or Nothing for Some: Justice, Diversity, and Democracy in Sociological Societies

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All Things to All People or Nothing for Some: Justice, Diversity, and Democracy in Sociological Societies

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This presidential address first explores the increasingly popular position known as racial realism, which argues that the problem of racism has largely been solved, and places blame for any tenacious remnants of racism on a small group of intransigent white extremists and on people of color themselves. The racial realist perspective is not difficult for sociologists to dispute, using the extant research on institutional racism and its effects on people of color. However, the address then examines how white privilege is ingrained not only in the society at large, but also in the discipline of sociology itself and, more particularly, in sociological professional societies, including the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), both historically and contemporaneously. The address concludes with suggestions for improving the culture and practices of SSSP with regard to issues of privilege, race, and ethnicity. Keywords: white privilege, sociology societies, racial realism.

In 1940, sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois wrote that racial discrimination is the product not only of maliciousness, but also of “unconscious acts and irrational reactions unpierced by reason” (Du Bois [1940]1984:6). Du Bois, who 20 years earlier had published what may be considered the first critical analysis of whiteness (see Du Bois [1920]1996), recognized that conscious bigotry and willful acts of discrimination are not necessary to preserve racial inequality. Apart from the racial prejudices and overtly discriminatory behaviors of individuals, racism is the product of a historic legacy of institutionally embedded disparities based on skin color. Amazingly, despite the abundance of empirical evidence accumulated over more than six decades in support of Du Bois’s observation, institutionalized racism continues today to be the focus of dispute. Indeed, according to one social commentator, Shelby Steele (2006), research fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, the notion that systemic racism remains a barrier to racial equality is simply a “lie” (p. 180). In his 2006 treatise, White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era, Steele proclaims black people in the United States “now live in freedom and are surrounded by opportunity” (p. 63). Not surprisingly, President George W. Bush awarded Steele the National Humanities Medal in 2004, citing Steele’s “learned examinations of race relations and cultural issues” (quoted in Steele 2006, bookjacket).
On what evidence do Steele and other “racial realists”\(^1\) who share his view base their assessment of race relations in contemporary U.S. society? Michael Brown and his colleagues (2003), in a careful and thorough analysis of this perspective, identify its major themes and the “data” offered to support them. First, Steele and others argue that the abolition of Jim Crow and the passage of legislation, such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, produced a gradual, but dramatic decline in racial discrimination in the United States and a concomitant burgeoning of racial equality. One need only consider the growth of the black middle class and the fact that today we find people of color in the highest levels of corporate and governmental leadership including, of course, the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Office of the Attorney General. Sure, there is still a small pocket of old-fashioned white racists in the United States, but they are a tiny minority of the population, and the vast majority deems them “immoral” at best—so public opinion surveys tell us (Brown et al. 2003).\(^2\)

But if, as the racial realists claim, “racism is a thing of the past” (Brown et al. 2003:6), then how may we account for the persistent racial inequalities we continue to see in income, employment, housing, health care, education, and just about every other fundamental component of social life? According to Steele and other like-minded writers, the answer lies in the failure of black people to take full responsibility for uplifting themselves. Per Steele (2006): “Without oppression—and it must be acknowledged that blacks are no longer oppressed in America—the group itself becomes automatically responsible for its inferiority and non-competitiveness” (p. 67). White liberals and black “militants” encourage this shirking of responsibility in people of color by “constantly portray[ing] problems of minority underdevelopment as problems of injustice” (p. 64). Misguided public assistance programs just make matters worse by reinforcing the belief that reversing “underachievement” is not a matter of personal, individual responsibility for people of color, but rather the responsibility of (white-led) government agencies, businesses, and other social institutions. This amounts to nothing less than a violation of “natural law,” according to Steele (2006): “human beings, individually or collectively, cannot transform or uplift themselves without taking full responsibility for doing so. This is a law of nature. Once full responsibility is accepted, others can assist as long as it is understood that they cannot be responsible” (p. 62, original emphasis).

With an interesting twist of logic, Steele and other racial realists maintain that white people benefit from the belief that contemporary racial inequalities are the product of social injustice. How? According to Steele (2006) and others, relieving people of color of personal responsibility for their fate bestows moral authority on white people and American institutions. We currently live, they claim, in an era of black freedom and “white guilt.”

Ironically, however, the data the racial realists cite to support their argument that racism is essentially dead actually show a tremendous lack of white guilt about persistent racial inequalities. For example, in one recent U.S. national survey, while 75 percent of African American respondents said that African Americans have fewer opportunities available to them than white people do, 58 percent of white respondents felt that African Americans now have about the same opportunities available to them as white people do. In the same survey, 61 percent of Latino respondents said that Latinos have fewer opportunities available to them than white people do, while 54 percent of white respondents said that Latinos have about the same opportunities that white people have (cited in Brown et al. 2003; see also Bonilla-Silva 2003). Another recent poll, taken by *Time* magazine in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, showed that only 29 percent of white respondents but 73 percent of African American respondents felt that race and class played a part in the government’s poor response to the disaster and its victims (cited in Kendall 2006). As Brown and his colleagues (2003) observe:

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\(^1\) The term “racial realist” is attributed to Alan Wolfe (see Brown et al 2003:5). Examples of other racial realist writings include D’Souza 1995 and Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997.

\(^2\) Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) analysis of colorblind racism shows these ideas to be widely held among the general white population.
an increasing number of white Americans think that the problems of many blacks cannot be attributed to discrimination—if anything, they believe discrimination today works in the opposite direction. It tilts the playing field against whites who are not the beneficiaries of special programs (p. 224; see also Bonilla-Silva 2003).

In short, the view of the racial realists has become the view of a majority of white people in the United States, who are essentially living what Frances Kendall (2006) so aptly calls the color-blind fantasy: the belief that skin color no longer matters, that racism is no longer an issue—or at least “it’s not my issue because I hold no racial prejudices and I do not discriminate on the basis of race.” The prevailing sentiment among most white people appears to be not guilt, but self-righteousness. They’ve been let off the hook; the “real” blame for any tenacious remnants of racial inequality rests squarely on the shoulders of people of color. This is what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) calls “racism without racists” (p. 4). The U.S. Supreme Court has reinforced this view by ruling that to sustain a claim of racial discrimination, the plaintiff must prove the defendants’ behavior stemmed from intentional biases (i.e., a specific state of mind, not just a factor contributing to their actions), which is “the equivalent of the concept of racism as personal prejudice” and a very high standard to meet (Brown et al. 2003:38). As Patricia Williams (1987) has argued: “As in rape cases, victims of racism must prove that they did not distort the circumstances, misunderstand the intent, or even enjoy it” (p. 128).

For members of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), a critique of the racial realist perspective is easy to muster. No doubt I could randomly call on members to voice an objection—an objection that would be made cogently and with empirical data to back it up. Many of the papers presented at the 2006 SSSP conference lay bare the lie of the color-blind society, not only in the United States, but also in Canada, by documenting the entrenched historical legacy of racism in our countries. This is not to say that no progress has been made in narrowing some of the gaps between white people and people of color over the past 40 years. Certainly, many of the papers presented at our conferences and in books and articles by members also highlight such progress. But the true racial reality is that racism continues to be one of the most serious social problems facing us today. Systemic racism was built into the foundation of U.S. society, which practiced apartheid until 1969 (Feagin 2006). And the fact remains that white people, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, continue to benefit from racial stratification that bestows numerous privileges on us, while simultaneously denying these privileges to people of color.

White privilege is an institutional, rather than personal set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who hold the power positions in our institutions. One primary privilege is having greater access to power and resources than people of color do; in other words, purely on the basis of skin color doors are open to [white people] that are not open to [people of color] (Kendall 2006:63).

So pervasive is white privilege, and so embedded in social life, that it has an everyday, taken-for-granted character that, ironically, renders it invisible, at least to people who are white. In Kendall’s (2006) words, white people:

are able, almost always, to forget that everything that happens in our lives occurs in the context of the supremacy of whiteness. We are admitted to college, hired for jobs, given or denied loans, cared for by the medical profession . . . always in the context of white dominance. Part of the reason that doors open for us is our unearned racial privilege. But we act as if, and often believe that, we have earned everything we get (p. 75, original emphasis).

The analyses of racism and white privilege that are presented at our conferences and in our books and articles have focused largely on the systemic institutional discrimination that people of color experience: discrimination in employment, health care, education, housing, the legal system, and so on. But it is also important—urgent, in fact—that we scrutinize the unacknowledged,
less obvious, more subtle manifestations of racial disadvantage that are nevertheless fundamental components of our everyday lives, including our professional lives as sociologists. Consequently, I would like to take this opportunity to initiate what I hope will be a continuing interrogation of white privilege in our field, sociology, and more particularly, in our professional organizations, including SSSP. I am not attempting to provide a comprehensive assessment of the discipline or of any specific organization. My goal is far more modest: the practice of old-fashioned consciousness-raising by offering some examples from the past and the present of the ways that white privilege has colored our discipline and our professional organizations. I am asking that we turn our scrutiny inward and make the invisible visible, so that we may begin to strategize ways to make our own sociological community of scholar-activists more democratic, more diverse, and more just. As Joe Feagin said to me in a recent conversation, if sociology—arguably the most liberal social science—cannot get its act together in this regard, then there is little hope for the other academic disciplines, let alone for society at large.

White Privilege in Sociology and SSSP, Historically and Contemporaneously

Cheryl Harris (1995) has written that white privilege is “the unconstrained right to exclude” (p. 288), and sociology has an exclusionary history. Every introductory sociology student is taught that North American sociology began at the University of Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century, thanks to the efforts of men such as Lester Ward, William Graham Sumner, Albion Small, and Franklin H. Giddings. They learn—we teach them—about the rural and Protestant ministerial backgrounds of these men and about their concern with the problems of urbanization and industrialization. Sociology, it is taught, has its roots in the desire for liberal reform. What is left unsaid is that the men we honor as sociology’s “founding fathers” were white; it need not be said, since without the adjective “African American” modifying the noun “sociologist,” the assumption is automatically made that they were white, an example of the taken-for-grantedness of whiteness.

Joe Feagin and Hernan Vera (2001) note that many of these early sociologists were “unabashedly racist in their views of people of color” (p. 61). For example, Henry Hughes, who predated the Chicago School and who published the first monograph in the United States that used Comte’s language and principles, justified slavery (which he called “warranteeism”) on sociological grounds, and claimed that the institutions and codes of the southern plantation stood as a model for “the properly guided societal system” (Vidich and Lyman 1985:10). Similarly, Franklin Giddings, who dominated the sociology program at Columbia University during the first three decades of the twentieth century, advocated a system of social engineering that included severe restrictions on immigration, and control of the poor, the “inferior races,” and the “degenerate” by those “capable of self-mastery and self-direction”—that is, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Vidich and Lyman 1985:118). But even those who were not explicitly racist saw no value in incorporating the perspectives of members of marginalized groups, including immigrants and African Americans, into their teaching, research, or public activity (Feagin and Vera 2001).

It is now the case that in a nod to “diversity,” most textbooks at least mention Du Bois, as well as Ida B. Wells-Barnett and sometimes Anna Julia Cooper, citing them as early African American sociologists, but not granting them the mantel of disciplinary “founder” despite the fact—or perhaps because of it—that they were “the first U.S. social scientists to analyze data on social institutions of both black Americans and women in terms of such critical concepts as social ‘domination,’ ‘subordination,’ and ‘repression’” (Feagin and Vera 2001:72). And although the “reform spirit” of sociology is a strong theme throughout the history of our discipline, the social activism of Du Bois, Wells-Barnett, and Cooper, often undertaken at great personal risk to themselves, on behalf of oppressed people of color, is still frequently overlooked in...
by the (white) standards of his day as well as those of today, Du Bois was an eminently qualified sociologist: a Harvard Ph.D., who had a post-doc in Germany where he studied with Max Weber; he conducted pioneering field research in Philadelphia and Atlanta, and had numerous publications (Deegan 1988). Yet, he was never offered a regular full-time academic appointment at any white-dominated university, and his perceived “militancy,” according to Feagin and Vera (2001), made it difficult for him to get funding for his research and led him to be ignored or ostracized by sociologists in the prestigious (i.e., white) university departments. In short, like colleagues today who foreground race in their teaching, research, service, and public discussions, Du Bois was labeled a “troublemaker.” To paraphrase Kendall (2006), white privilege allows white sociologists not to see race in themselves and to be angry at, to ignore, or to silence those who do (p. 67).

White liberals, it has been observed, are sometimes the most defensive when it is suggested that they have work to do around race. One reason is that white liberals believe themselves to be open to, even welcoming of, diversity and to be on “the side of” marginalized people rather than the privileged. Nevertheless, as I have already pointed out, white people who oppose racial discrimination and disadvantage may sometimes act in ways that reinforce white privilege, or fail to act in ways that undermine it or confront it head-on, thereby reproducing and reinforcing racial inequalities. Feagin and Vera (2001) recount an incident that took place at the 1923 meeting of the American Sociological Society (now the ASA) in Washington, DC. E. Franklin Frazier, who would later become the first African American president of ASA, was told by a white elevator operator at the meeting hotel that blacks could only ride on the freight elevator. Frazier was actually pushed out of the guest elevator by two white men, who told him to go back to Africa where he belonged, but he refused to back down and the police were called to try to force him to use the freight elevator. Subsequently, the police harassed Frazier in the hotel lobby. Frazier appealed to Ernest Burgess, who was the sociological society’s secretary. Burgess conferred with the hotel manager, but he continued to refuse Frazier access to the guest elevator. Robert Park, who had witnessed at least some of the discriminatory treatment of Frazier, offered to ride the freight elevator with him. But there is no evidence that Burgess or Park engaged in any kind of direct challenge to the hotel management, the police, or the white men who threw Frazier off the guest elevator, nor did the American Sociological Society protest Frazier’s treatment; in fact, the organization met at the same hotel in 1924.

A racial realist would consider this incident and quickly point out that it occurred more than 80 years ago, pre-civil rights movement, during a different era of race relations in the United States than what exists today. And some SSSP members might also be tempted to add—not without a degree of smugness—that the incident as well as the lack of response to it by sociologists in attendance took place at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, now ASA. Both observations are, of course, true, but the incident and the setting should not be so cavalierly dismissed. Some of us were present at the 2005 SSSP awards banquet, when the minority scholarship was presented to a Latino student in a manner that was insensitive to issues of race and privilege and was disrespectful to and humiliating for the student. The award recipient later wrote that during the presentation, he looked around the room and saw various emotions in the eyes of attendees—frustration, anger, compassion—but the fact remains that no one intervened or in any way condemned the behavior at the time that it occurred. I was there; I felt uncomfortable and angry, but I did nothing. Subsequently, a resolution from the past president and the 2004-05 board of directors was passed, which included an apology for this failure to act (see SSSP 2005).

The professional socialization and networking functions of professional organizations such as SSSP may either solidify or erode white privilege. Marlese Durr (2005) offers an example of the former when she speaks of the unwritten rules or behavioral expectations of the profession that effectively silence well-meaning people within organizations, pressuring them to conform to “traditions” so as not to be labeled “unreliable” or to be seen as outsiders.
or pariahs. Surely, we do not wish to socialize our students and colleagues to believe that proper professional demeanor demands silence when another colleague speaks or behaves in a racist manner. ¹ Not surprisingly, there was a great deal of discussion via e-mail exchanges and at the 2005 board meeting as well as several committee meetings about what transpired at the award ceremony. One sentiment expressed by some white members was that a public apology should be given and then “we” should “just move on.” There was a sense that enough had been said about this embarrassing incident: “we’re” sorry, now can we all be friends again? This approach to the problem is an exercise in white privilege; it is white people using their self-perceived sense of power to define the problem “solved,” making a decision that affects the entire SSSP community, but without the community’s consultation. ²

An alternative response was to include in a resolution not only an apology for failing to intervene and a condemnation of the behavior that occurred, but also a statement of reaffirmation of the Society’s “commitment to recognizing excellence and supporting minority scholars and to analyzing and improving our organization with regard to issues of privilege and race/ethnicity.” This was the resolution that was taken to the membership for a vote at the 2005 business meeting and was passed (SSSP 2005:44). Nevertheless, the question remains: What are we doing—what can we do—to improve the culture of our organization with regard to the issues of privilege, race, and ethnicity? Let me suggest several answers, although I do not portend this to be an exhaustive response by any means.

### Addressing Race Privilege in SSSP: Some Suggested Starting Points

The SSSP was founded in 1952 by Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Bryant Lee with a mission of social justice and community activism. According to John Galliher and James Galliher (1995): “The Lees were concerned that sociology increasingly was abandoning its historic concern with human welfare in favor of the management and control of citizens by government and other elites” (p. 99). One of the primary goals of SSSP was to “take a stand on social issues” (p. 100), and that stand was to be from the point of view of the oppressed. Thus, I suggest that an important step toward improving not only the culture of our organization, but also the practice of our organization with regard to issues emanating from privilege, race, and ethnicity is to return to our roots: that we take seriously once again the mission of SSSP’s founders. One way to do this is to be not a race-neutral or color-blind organization, but rather a race-conscious organization.

Toward this end, in 2006, SSSP began asking members to provide their racial/ethnic identification on their membership forms. Of the 1,661 members of SSSP in 2006, 502 gave a racial/ethnic identification and of these, 79 percent identified as white, 8 percent identified as black or African American, 5.2 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino, 4.2 percent identified as Asian, .8 percent identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 2.8 percent identified as another race/ethnicity of their choosing. ³ According to statistics compiled by the American Sociological Association (ASA), in 2003—the most recent year for which data are available—71.5 percent of doctoral recipients in sociology identified as white, 9.7 percent identified as black, 5.1 percent identified as Hispanic, 8.2 percent identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, and 5.5 percent identified as another race/ethnicity (ASA 2006). Moreover, ASA’s statistics show

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³ I am indebted to Kim Cook for making this point and for raising the question of whether we, as sociologists in SSSP, can be members of an exclusive organization while simultaneously embracing inclusion.

⁴ In discussing this incident with colleagues following my address, I was offered other similar examples, such as the recent controversy over the editorship of the American Sociological Review (ASR) that resulted in the failure to appoint the first person of color as editor, Walter Allen, who had also proposed to appoint as his associate editors people of color and women. Social Problems has never been edited by a person of color, a point I will return to shortly.

⁵ These figures, incidentally, are quite similar to those for ASA’s membership (Craig Schaar, Membership Manager, ASA, personal communication, August 3, 2006).
that between 1990 and 2002, the percentage of graduate students who identified as white declined by 1.3 percent, while the percentage of graduate students who identified as people of color increased substantially: a 63.3 percent increase for black graduate students, a 64 percent increase for American Indian and Alaskan Native graduate students, a 79.2 percent increase for Asian graduate students, and a 117.1 percent increase for Hispanic graduate students. Although the overall number of graduate students of color remains small relative to white graduate students, the significant increases in the proportions of graduate students of color paints an important picture of the future of our discipline and, I hope, our organization.

The SSSP leadership and membership must begin immediately to develop strategies for making SSSP a more welcoming professional home for sociologists of color, one in which white sociologists acknowledge their whiteness and the privileges that have historically accompanied it, but do not use it to dominate, dismiss, or disparage colleagues of color. Although the overall number of graduate students of color remains small relative to white graduate students, the significant increases in the proportions of graduate students of color paints an important picture of the future of our discipline and, I hope, our organization.

I urge that we take an inventory of our membership's perceptions of their access to power, resources, and influence within SSSP and their assessment of the factors that impact this access, including race and ethnicity, and that we use these data to inform the development of programs and policies to ensure that the distribution of power, resources, and influence is equitable.

I also urge that in our nominations process for officers and other elected positions as well as in committee appointments that race be explicitly used as one of several “plus” factors, as Brown and his colleagues (2003) call them, to assure that all racial and ethnic groups achieve a “critical mass” on the board, on committees, and in the divisions. In its more than 50-year history, SSSP has had only three presidents who are people of color. In 2006, as in many years past, all of the Society’s officers were white. The Society’s journal, *Social Problems*, has never been edited by a person of color. The editorship of the journal may be considered an even more powerful position than the presidency within the Society, given the size and breadth of the audience reached and the disciplinary gatekeeping functions it serves. People of color must be nominated for, actively recruited to, and strongly encouraged to serve in these leadership positions within the Society in order to truly diversify our discipline and our organization.

Most of SSSP’s committees have at least one or two members who are people of color, although some of these individuals serve on more than one committee. But why did the 2006 Graduate Minority Scholarship Committee have three members who are people of color, while the 2006 Committee on Standards and Freedom of Research, Publication, and Teaching had none? It may be that the appointment of people of color to the Graduate Minority Scholarship Committee is the result of a conscious awareness on the part of the SSSP leadership that minority representation is necessary and expected on this committee. I do not think that

6. Interestingly, findings from recent psychological research show that although many whites believe that avoiding the issue of race during social interaction—that is, adopting a stance of supposed colorblindness—makes them appear unbiased, they may instead be perceived as distant and unfriendly by people of color (Norton et al. 2006).

7. Former SSSP President Kathleen Ferraro suggests that the Society undertake an examination of the editorial and review process as well as the content of articles published in *Social Problems*. She cites a recent article by Martin and Yeung (2003) in which the authors analyzed a sample of articles published in the *ASR* between 1937 and 1999 to determine how mainstream sociology has used race as an explanatory variable. Martin and Yeung report a greater likelihood for sociologists publishing in the discipline’s “flagship journal” to take race into account in their research, but they note that this increased attention typically takes the form of using race as a control variable due in part to the ease with which control variables can be added to regression models:

That is, mainstream sociologists seem to assume that most sociological phenomena come to us in racialized form, and that it is our task to take this into account and present a final version that reflects how various causal processes would appear were there no racial differences. This is not necessarily a poor operating model, although of course difficulties arise in how one interprets a model of American society that “controls for” race... (Martin and Yeung 2003:538–39).

I am grateful to Kathleen for her suggestion regarding *Social Problems* and for bringing this article to my attention.
the non-appointment of people of color to other committees such as the Committee on Standards and Freedom of Research, Publication, and Teaching has been intentional. However, I do think it is one of the results of white privilege in this organization: the privilege to overlook, to exclude. If the committee is not already “marked” as a committee having something explicit to do with race, then it may not occur to white organization leaders that the inclusion of people of color on the committee is necessary.

By committing ourselves to being a race-conscious organization, SSSP can ensure that election slates are racially and ethnically diverse and that all committees, every year, include people of color in equal numbers. This has two important consequences. First, it represents an overt stance by SSSP in support of racial equality. And second, the presence of people of color in SSSP’s leadership, on its committees, and among its active membership is critical to counteract the dominant perspectives of white academics and broaden fundamental ideas and points of view within the organization and those that we carry with us into our departments, institutions, classrooms, and communities at large.

None of these proposals is original or particularly innovative. I offer them as a modest beginning, a starting point for improving the culture of SSSP with regard to issues of privilege, race, and ethnicity, as we have resolved to do. Given that white privilege has been engrained in North American social life for at least 300 years, I recognize that there are no quick fixes, either for SSSP or our communities at large. Moreover, I am not, as Shelby Steele would likely accuse, trying to instill liberal guilt in the white membership of SSSP. Guilt is not a strong motivator; it tends to depress rather than energize. I am asking simply that white members of SSSP be cognizant of whiteness and its privileges, that we stop thinking and speaking of race as something only people who are not white have (Kendall 2006). I am not arguing that only white sociologists or white members of SSSP have work to do with regard to race. However, like Kendall (2006), because I am white, “I don’t feel comfortable [or competent] proposing the nature of the work Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, or Asian Americans should be doing about race” (p. 105). I am asking that we in SSSP explicitly recognize that race is one of the filters through which we think, speak, act, and interact. I am not denying the tremendous diversity within racial and ethnic groups, and I am well aware that we must consider how race intersects with gender, social class, sexual orientation, age, and abilities. But I have chosen to foreground race not only because of recent racist incidents in the Society, but because I believe that it is critical now for the political Left to reclaim the discourse on racial stratification and to take concerted, collective action to counter the culture of racial fear and anti-immigrant hostility being fed to the public by the current U.S. administration and its conservative allies. I believe that to do this effectively, we must first be sure our own house is in order.

SSSP was established as a populist organization (Galliher and Galliher 1995). Of course, we should not try to be all things to all people, but nor can we be all things to some at the expense or exclusion of others. SSSP should be the conscience of our profession. In 1990, Stephen Pfohl, who the following year would become president of SSSP, also considered the need to re-form the organization. Wrote Pfohl, “The society in which we live and study and teach and write is in crisis.” With a prescient sense of urgency, he wrote about the need for SSSP to provide “an opportunity to be both disturbingly challenged and supportively encouraged to think critically and to act creatively; an opportunity, not simply to diagnose, but to learn better how to strategically counter the terrorist powers that dominate the material and imaginary landscape of contemporary North America” (pp. 332–33).

The “terrorist powers” to which Pfohl referred were not the dark-skinned Middle Easterners that the Bush administration and its allies have so successfully villainized, a further testament to the continuing power of racism in our supposedly colorblind society. Let us begin now, without delay, to build a counter-system analysis and strategic program that makes race a cornerstone not to oppression, but to liberation. We have resolved to do as much; now we must act to make good on this promise.
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