

- **The 2012 Meeting**
- **Thoughts on Community Organizing**
- **Moving Towards Non-profit Status**
- **AMSA Online**

INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:

A-MSA 2012	1
Moving Towards Non-profit Status	3
Thoughts on Community Organizing	4
A-MSA Journal	7
2010 Student Competition	9

Soc Scribbles

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1, SPRING 2011
EDITED BY TOM KERSEN

The 2012 Meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association

The 2012 Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association will highlight what much of sociological discourse focuses on already: disparities. Since our association's roots are tied to the Mississippi Delta, the theme for the annual meeting will link that physical anchor with many of the inequalities or disparities that are pertinent in contemporary society, particularly in Mississippi and Alabama. The theme of the meetings is Disparities in

the DELTA: Demographics, Economics, Literacy, Transportation and Agriculture. As such keynote



A-MSA President
Lynne Cossman

speakers and organizations sessions, as well as the Presidential Address, will focus on this topical area. Other sessions will be scheduled as

well.

The meetings will be held at the Hunter Henry Center, February 16th and 17th 2012 at Mississippi State University in Starkville Mississippi. The Hunter Henry Center (<http://www.hunterhenrycenter.msstate.edu/>) is home of the Mississippi State University Foundation and has excellent meeting facilities. We intend to have the banquet in the Hunter Henry facility as well. There are many hotels in

Continued on page 2

Starkville, but the Comfort Inn and Suites (http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g44030-d225701-Reviews-Comfort_Suites-Starkville_Mississippi.html) includes a continental breakfast and is across the street from the Hunter Henry Center.

Starkville is a college town in northeastern Mississippi with a resident population of nearly 24,000 and a student body of another 20,000. In February, we can expect beautiful weather (highs near 60 and lows in the 40s) and there are many activities, restaurants and bars to keep you busy when we are not in session. If there is enough interest, I can arrange for a pre-meeting group campus tour – we have the second largest campus in the nation including extension offices in every county and North Farm and South Farm.

Please encourage colleagues and students to submit ideas and send questions to 2012.AMSA@gmail.com. (Note the dot between 2012 and AMSA). All suggestions will be explored.

The Executive Committee will hold its mid-year meeting in Starkville this September and we will have more updates at that point in time.

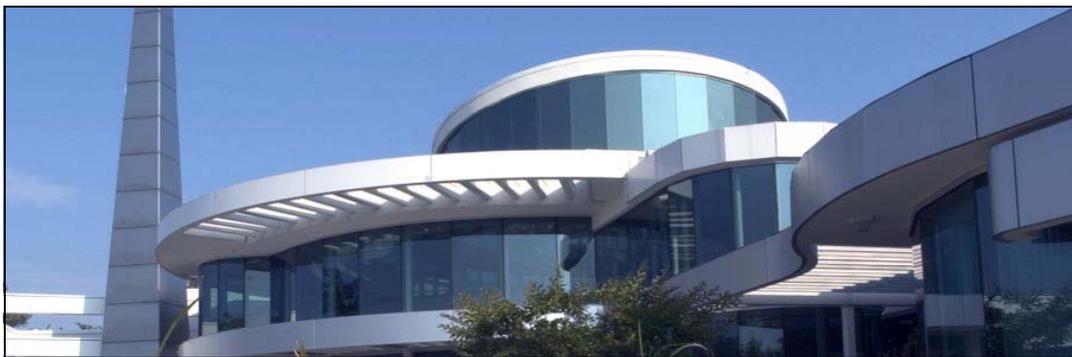


Photo: MSU ' s Hunter Henry Center

Moving toward Non-Profit Status

Throughout the past three years, AMSA and its executive committee have been diligent in moving the organization toward non-profit status. This effort enables AMSA to better fulfill its purpose and objectives as stated in the current constitution:

“The Association shall facilitate and encourage cooperative relations among persons in Alabama and Mississippi engaged and interested in the scientific study of society. The Association shall endeavor to improve teaching, research, and sociological practice and to assist in the furtherance of sociology in the schools, colleges, and universities of the two-state area.”

Additionally, as presented in the past, financial obligations in serving the mission and objectives of AMSA have been hindered by not being a non-profit organization.

In order to proceed into non-profit status, AMSA first had to incorporate itself in both Alabama and Mississippi. This was done in 2010 and involved the signatures of the current officers on AMSA's executive committee. Dr. John Green, serving as AMSA's past president, headed up the next step toward 501c3 non-profit status by obtaining the pro-bono legal services of the Mississippi School of Law and Harvard Law School Transactional Clinic. As part of the services, the clinic helped in recommending what necessary statements should be added to AMSA's Constitution and By-laws, such that our organization meets with all of the Federal Non-profit status requirements.

Finally, a home location for AMSA records and mailings was required, and is almost complete. The Department of Sociology, at Mississippi State University was chosen as AMSA's first home location. Dr. R. Gregory Dunaway, Department Chair and Dr. Jeralynn S. Cossman, 2011-12 President of AMSA, are securing final approval.

Thoughts on Community Organizing—Thomas Kersen

**“Empowering
people is
What
democracy is
all about”**

“Organizing is about turning self-interest into collective concern” (Rubin and Rubin 2008:15)

Progressive social change, according to Rubin and Rubin (2008) involves economic and social justice, civil liberties, and concern for the environment. Is also about speaking truth to power and ameliorating or even eliminating obstacles to the goals mentioned above. This is also point behind liberation sociology. It “is not just research the social world but to change it in the direction of expanded human rights, participatory democracy, and social justice.” Feagin & Vera 2008:1.

Who is involved with social change? Individuals, of course, but Rubin and Rubin mention social action and economic and social development organizations. Also, there is network, support and national advocacy coalitions. All together, these entities possess the “capacity to cause change.”

How do social organizations and even more broadly social movement work? There are two broad approaches used by social organizations: social mobilization and social production. Direct action, that in-your-face method is social mobilization. Economic and social development methods fall into the social production model. Either way, the key to social organization and community development is identifying the problem and figuring out solutions.

Why do individuals and communities need change?

Many of the personal issues that people experience are pervasive and do not just affect individuals. Feagin and Vera (2008:vii, 191) write “As Mills put it, this theorizing involves a sociological imagination that allows people ‘to grasp what is going on in the world, and understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society.’”

Another reason is that the

game is stacked against those who don’t have power. In other words, those who have the gold make the rules. There is also the issue of disempowerment that can be internalized too. When confronted with a large problem, people may think “...but what can I do? I am but one person.” This way of thinking makes it harder for progressive change to occur. People fall into the dominant way of thinking—Gramsci’s intellectual hegemony. This is where the fight is—over who gets to call the shots.

Oftentimes, we are wired as Americans to think of our personal circumstances as a reflection of our individual choices and actions. This outlook creates a “blind spot” when it comes to structural problems such as poverty, all the “isms,” etc. The point is, many Americans are loathe to involve themselves. The reference to Paulo Freire on page 14 of Rubin and Rubin is important: “the personal is the political.”

The Academic Hierarchy

THE DEAN:

Leaps tall buildings in a single bound, Is more powerful than a locomotive, Is faster than a speeding bullet, Walks on water, Gives policy to God.

THE DEPARTMENT HEAD:

Leaps short buildings with a single bound, Is more powerful than a switch engine, Is just as fast as a speeding bullet. Walks on water if the sea is calm, Talks with God

PROFESSOR:

Leaps short buildings with a running start and favorable winds, Is almost as powerful as a switch engine, Is almost as fast as a speeding bullet, Walks on water in an indoor swimming pool, Talks with God if a special request is approved.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Barely clears a prefabricated hut, Loses tug of war with a locomotive, Can fire a speeding bullet,

Swims well, Is occasionally addressed by God.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Makes high marks on the walls when trying to leap tall buildings, Is run over by a locomotive, Can sometimes handle a gun without injuring himself/herself Dog paddles, Talks to animals.

GRADUATE STUDENT:

Runs into buildings, Recognizes locomotives two times out of three, Is not issued ammunition, Can stay afloat in a life jacket, Talks to walls.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT:

Falls over doorstep when trying to enter buildings, Says "Look at the choo-choo," Wets himself with a water pistol, Plays in mud puddles, Mumbles to himself

THE DEAN'S SECRETARY:

Lifts buildings and walks under them, Kicks locomotives off the tracks, Catches speeding bullets in teeth and eats them, Freezes water with a single glance, Is God

—Anonymous Source

Changing of the Guard

The 2011 annual meeting concluded with the business meeting. As part of the meeting, outgoing A-MSA President Geoffrey McIntyre (Troy State-Montgomery) handed over the symbolic gavel to incoming President Lynn

Cossman (Mississippi State University).



(from the left) Incoming A-MSA President Lynn Cossman and outgoing President Geoffrey McIntyre exchange the gavel at the business meeting

A-MSA On-Line Sociological Review

The **AMSA On-Line Sociological Review** is a new electronic journal for publishing research, essays, and commentaries in the discipline of sociology. The journal is located at <http://www.olemiss.edu/pubs/amsa/index.htm> . The **AMSA On-Line Sociological Review** was created as an outlet for both faculty and student writing. It offers students--both graduate and undergraduate--and faculty members an opportunity to publish some of their best work. By creating this journal, the members of the **Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association** seek to encourage collaboration between students and their faculty mentors and to foster the professional activity of publishing, early in the careers of sociologists-in-training. Papers submitted to this journal will be reviewed by knowledgeable sociologists willing to offer suggestions and commentary to beginning as well as established students of sociology.

The purpose of the **AMSA On-Line Sociological Review** is to promote scholarship and publication by sociologists--students and faculty members. The journal is open to articles from sociologists in all stages of their careers. By creating this journal, the **AMSA** seeks to foster collaborative relations between faculty members and students, undergraduate as well as graduate students that will result in co-authored manuscripts.

By editorial policy, the **AMSA On-Line Sociological Review** will provide an outlet for good papers authored or co-authored by students. While open to submissions from the **United States** and elsewhere, the editors of this journal will give some priority to papers focused on the **Mid-South** and the **Southeastern United States**. Prior to publication, all papers will undergo the usual peer-review process.

In order to survive, this fledgling journal requires people to submit work of high quality. The quality of the articles in Part I of the inaugural issue will encourage sociologists to submit papers to the **AMSA On-Line Sociological Review** by suggesting that **AMSA's** e-journal is a worthy showcase.

Empowerment is “both a means through which organizing is accomplished and a core goal of organizing and comes about by orchestrating battles to enable ordinary people to obtain power as—the ‘have-nots’ battle the haves” (Alinsky 1969) in Rubin and Rubin 2008:13). Basically, empowerment is letting people take charge of their lives.

Empowering people is what democracy is all about. Democracy is not some wishy-washy ephemeral idea. Democracy demands that citizens are informed and action-oriented. Democracy demands that we have a sense of empathy and a care about future generations—what psychologist Erik Erickson called generativity. To strive towards democracy requires that we use our sociological imagination to see how things actually work in society, who is really behind the curtain pulling the levers, and who benefits from the social arrangement. For instance, who really benefits if health care reform legislation is struck down? The Tea Partiers? Pharma/Health-for-Profit?

Regarding democracy, Feagin and Vera (2008:143) quote Alinsky: “Democracy is a way of life and not a formula to be ‘preserved’ like jelly. It is a process—a vibrant, living sweep of hope and progress which constantly strives for the fulfillment of its objective in life—the search for truth, justice and the dignity of man.” Like any other process, democracy does not just happen.

Just as we may be geared towards progressive social change, community organizers should be aware that the opposition is doing the same. I find it ironic that the extreme right to include the Tea Partiers despise Saul Alinsky, yet closely follow the strategies he laid in *Rules for Radicals*.

Consider the term astro-turf which means corporate/well-heeled sponsorship of social change versus grass-roots which means activism at the individual and local level. Much of the opposition to health care legislation seemed to be from local people but what the mainstream media continually failed to do was show how corporate lobbyist and pharmaceutical/health-care for profit folks had financed and took care of the logistics at these events. We need to continually ask ourselves, who benefits?

SOURCES

Alinsky, Saul. 1971. *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage Books.

Brint, Steven. 2001. “Gemeinschaft Revisited: A Critique and Reconstruction of the Community Concept.” *Sociological Theory* 19:1.

Bulmer, Martin. 1985. “The Rejuvenation of Community Studies? Neighbors, Networks and Policy.” *Sociological Review* 33:430-448.

Delanty, Gerard. 2003. *Community*. 1st ed. Routledge.

Feagin, Joe R., and Hernan Vera. 2008. *Liberation Sociology: Second Edition*. 2nd ed. Paradigm Publishers.

Freire, Paulo. 1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 20th ed. New York: Continuum.

Rubin, Herbert J., and Irene S. Rubin. 2008. *Community Organizing and Development*. 4th ed. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.

Warren, Mark. 1992. “Democratic Theory and Self-Transformation.” *American Political Science Review* 86:8.



2011 President Geoff McIntyre receiving award from 2010 President John Green in Montgomery at the annual AMSA meeting

2011 Student Paper Competition Participants!

Alma Calix, Hinds Community College, and Tom Kersen, Jackson State University, served as Chairpersons for the Student Paper Competition Committee. The student paper competition was comprised of a collection of several interesting papers by students from Auburn University-Montgomery, Millsaps College, the University of Mississippi, Samford University, and Troy University.

All submissions were sociologically relevant and interesting; yet, a few rose to the level of notability. The winners were as follows:

Graduate

Katie Rolley, University of Mississippi, "Unintended Consequences of Benevolence" **1st Place**

Tiffiney Gray, University of Mississippi, "Perceptions of African American Women Attractiveness" **2nd Place**

Gloria B. Williams, Troy University, "Working It Out: Alternatives to Layoffs" **3rd Place**

Undergraduate

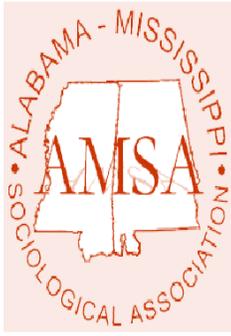
Zach Davis, Millsaps College, "Stimulating the Divide" **1st Place**

Madison A. Hinton, Auburn University-Montgomery, "Symbolic Interaction Theory and Choosing Children's Names" **2nd Place**

Pamela Jackson, Millsaps College, "Welfare: A Good or Not-So-Good Policy?" **3rd Place**

Undergraduate Certificates of Participation were presented to all other graduate and undergraduate participants.





Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association

<http://www.a-msa.org/>

Established in 1969, the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association (A-MSA) is a community of professionals and students dedicated to building a better world through the use of sociology and other social sciences. Our goal is to facilitate the development of knowledge in an environment that celebrates the diversity of life and recognizes the necessity of incorporating multiple forms of knowledge in the development of answers to social problems. The A-MSA website, annual conference and online journal bring people together for active learning.



At last count, we have 93 Facebook members!

Address any comments, corrections, and news to Tom Kersen, editor of *Soc Scribbles* at thomas.m.kersen@jsums.edu.