

THE NORTH CENTRAL SOCIOLOGIST

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Spring/Summer 2020 Newsletter

The 2020 NCSA Presidential Address



Perhaps the selection of **Constant Crisis in the Modern World** as the theme for the 2020 NCSA Conference was too tempting for the universe to ignore, or perhaps our venerable NCSA president, Dr. Robert Carrothers, knew something we were not privy to when he selected the topic. Perhaps life would have become even more chaotic and uncertain had he gone with the initial, single word, dare I say even more provocative theme (Dafuq) that the vice president strongly supported. Either way, the 2020 conference will go down in history as just one small casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the experience of which fundamentally altered our lives as teachers, researchers, and colleagues, and challenged our roles as caregivers, children., friends, and community members.

Had the Presidential Address occurred in person in March, in all of its glory and splendor, it may have played similarly to the video address available through the NCSA virtual conference YouTube channel, or it may have been categorically different, as the impact of a global pandemic on the thought processes of sociologists cannot be underestimated. But, the selection of luck as the topic for his address not only illuminates how we think about the fortune and misery that befalls us, as a nation and as individuals, but also reveals key social dimensions to the experience of luck itself.

Ignoring the unmistakably dubious claim that he is unqualified to be among the ranks of NCSA presidents etched into the gavel, the discussion of the importance of luck to life circumstances, expectations, and outcomes more broadly is abundantly clear given the vast inequities that characterize our nation. Emphasizing the clear sociological relevance of the concept of luck, the presidential address focused on how and why luck emerges, or fails to materialize. As Dr. Carrothers traced his arrival to sociology as a discipline to a unique set of experiences, we were treated to a life history of sorts,

demonstrating the very connections Mills implores us to make. Moments of luck and misfortune along with "chance" encounters led him down a path that may not have been otherwise visible, but eventually contributed to his sociological awakening.

Is it all just "dumb luck" or is it something much larger? The presidential address highlighted how luck itself is not equally distributed. Sociologically, luck can be linked to privilege, along with intersectionality. The more recognition of these privileges you have, the more understanding you possess of how these advantages operate. Quite simply, social status confers more luck. The likelihood of fortuitous encounters with people who can open doors and clear obstacles increases according to the social power and authority of the "birds" with whom we flock.

Our social groups, outside of conferring our position in the social hierarchy, also influence the norms to which we adhere, the information we consume, and the echo chamber in which we reside. Accordingly, the authority to which we bend can influence group norms and dynamics, so much so that it creates distinct social worlds. This is no more readily apparent than in the 2016 election.

Although we would like to believe that a legal – rational system of authority guides our nation, with adherence to rules and conventional norms, it is Weber's notion of the charismatic authority that currently reigns. When it comes to the presidency and the power conferred as a result of holding office, the people are wooed into believing that rule violations will be addressed by the bureaucratic structures, and that normative behavior will ensue. However, this has not been the case. Rather, it appears as if "**our luck has run out.**"



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*Pictured:
Dr. Rashawn Ray,
University of
Maryland,
College Park*

2020 Useem Plenary Address

Forming a Racially-Inclusive Sociological Imagination: Becoming A Racial Equity Learner, Advocate, and Broker

Dr. Rashawn Ray’s virtual Useem Plenary Address began with the story of the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, and the homicide of Army 2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins III by a University of Maryland – College Park student only months before the demonstration. As he recounted the substantial increase in hate groups and hate crimes over the past several years, Dr. Ray traced the origins of many of these groups to changing social currents that began with the election of Barack Obama, the first black identified president. Overwhelmingly, he noted, the discrimination, domestic terrorism, and bias-motivated crimes are predicated on race, with racial motivations accounting for approximately sixty percent of reported incidents. Indeed, roughly seventy percent of the homicides in these incidents are committed by right wing extremists.

Clearly, bias, hate, and discrimination is not limited to extreme acts, nor is it the sole province of hate groups. Rather, the ideology, and the bias, extends to seemingly mundane interactions occurring daily within public spaces. Although we often associate racial profiling with police misconduct, ordinary citizens engage in this process, some unwittingly, and others intentionally, within the public sphere. It happens at beaches, coffee shops, parks, swimming pools, sidewalks, and neighborhoods more generally. Simply put, blackness is criminalized.

Offering substantial evidence of the criminalization of black youth (particularly black boys) in public education, disparities in mortality rates for black mothers and their infants, “justifiable” homicides involving black lives in police-citizen encounters, he demonstrates how a racial empathy gap and implicit bias operate within American culture. Even among COVID-19 figures, racial inequities abound, as blacks are overrepresented, another indicator of divisions that persist.

Dr. Ray reminded the audience that engaging with the public and promoting social change that is evidence-based is clearly the work of sociologists. Recent divisions within the

social sciences have questioned whether social justice is rightly the domain of the discipline. But who is better situated than sociologists, armed with data, targeted interventions, and research-based training strategies, to promote avenues for improving racial equity?

The question is, what do we do about it?

For the discipline, Dr. Ray advocated for the implementation of a racial equity framework. A racially inclusive sociological imagination is the first step. Highlighting the work of C. Wright Mills, and W.E.B. Dubois, this inclusive approach highlights what is not seen, looking not at what race is, but rather what it does in social interaction and via social institutions.

A racial equity framework implies the adoption of three identities, by behaving as a racial equity learner, a racial equity advocate, and a racial equity broker. Being a *racial equity learner* implies that one has become educated about the historical legacy of and trends in racism. Similarly, acting as a *racial equity advocate* requires individuals to not only hold themselves accountable for their implicit and explicit racial bias, but those around them as well. Finally, *racial equity brokers* advance policies and practices that promote social justice and rooted in research, while specifically advocating for accountability, evaluation, and transparency in social policy and practice.

While the three roles outlined in his presentation appear to be straightforward, particularly for academics in the field of sociology, Dr. Ray noted that for many faculty stepping out of the ivory tower is uncomfortable. From a sociological standpoint, our work is fundamentally necessary to the crafting of social policy, and yet historically sociologists are nowhere to be found. Going forward, we should train our students not for careers solely in academia, but for applied work, that occurs out in the “real world,” and is integral to advancing an agenda of social progress, equity, and social justice.

WHEN
“BLACKNESS
BECOMES
WEAPONIZED...”



VISIT DR. RASHAWN
RAY’S WEBSITE
AND TWITTER



Didn’t get a chance to see NCSA keynote speakers, addresses, or special programs? There’s still time! You can register for the NCSA 2020 Virtual Conference and view through July 31st. Click [here](#) to register!

2020 Schnabel Teaching Address

Missed Opportunities: Developing Undergraduate Students' Sociological Research Skills Throughout the Curriculum

The annual John F. Schnabel Teaching Address, delivered virtually by Dr. Stephanie Medley-Rath of Indiana University-Kokomo, concentrated on how to foster sociological research skills among undergraduate students. Research methods courses provide students with some of the central tools required within the discipline of sociology. However, students also need to apply these skills in myriad ways, outside of the standard research methods course. In order to assess the types of skills they need then, we have to figure out where our students actually go. Research skills within human service fields or nonprofit organizations may be more difficult to cultivate in our students, or they may encounter challenges that are specific to another field they intend to enter. While some students pursue graduate education following their undergraduate career, many of them will move directly into the workforce. Yet, irrespective of where our majors go following graduation, they should be able to both consume and produce sociological research.

The development of research skills, by practicing using these tools, applying them to a research project, and presenting it at an academic conference provides students with a wealth of experience in the research and dissemination process. But, it also requires funding student attendance at conferences, providing them with ongoing support in writing academic articles, and addressing barriers to undergraduate research like student readiness, time, and the completion of prerequisites. Students will undoubtedly struggle to put together a research project. Given that most academics still struggle with the time, energy, and resources associated with research, our expectation that students will understand the process and seamlessly complete independent research as undergraduates without significant assistance is misplaced.

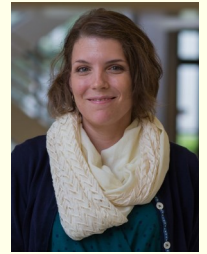
The complete project ideal and the approach to research methods adopted in standard sociology programs is problematic for students. Clearly, the time required from conceptualization to paper completion is immense if confined to one course. Further, the trifecta approach of introducing research methods in introduction to sociology, teaching research methods in a methods and statistics pairing of classes, and then applying those methods in a senior seminar attempts

to offer multiple venues for exposure, the formula generally fails to go beyond a superficial understanding. Much of the knowledge acquired in research methods is abstract, and students find it unfamiliar. Student trepidation about statistics, and a similar sense of dread surrounding research methods as well serve to undermine their success.

Ironically, a paucity of research exists on research methods pedagogy, and that which does exist relies on weaker data, such as student perceptions. This gap in the research led Dr. Medley-Rath to conduct her research on the impact of intensive research in elective courses across the curriculum. However, it appears as if the more you know, the more you know that you don't know, a callback to the issue with surface level explanations that characterize research methods throughout the discipline.

Investigating the role that textbooks play in reinforcing central ideas surrounding research design and methodology, her research indicated that course texts frequently isolated topics, distilled ideas down to create misleading overviews, and failed to provide enough opportunities for assessing competing theories and methods. Textbooks for introduction to sociology, social problems, and key upper division electives, missed a crucial opportunity to include methods into the curriculum.

To remedy this, the Schnabel Award recipient advocated for three strategic shifts at the instructor, department, and textbook level. For instructors, upper division courses and electives should incorporate opportunities for students to perform research. At the department level, actively bringing students into faculty research projects and grants socializes students into the research process. Departments can also begin with the skills they want to emphasize and work backward to incorporate these into the curriculum. Finally, textbooks need to offer students detailed information on how studies are conducted, rather than simply including a summary of their findings, as well as emphasize more qualitative studies.



Pictured: Professor Stephanie Medley-Rath



VISIT DR. STEPHANIE MEDLEY-RATH'S WEBSITE AND TWITTER



"IF YOU TEACH SOCIOLOGY, YOU ARE A RESEARCH METHODS TEACHER."

Incoming NCSA President Announces 2021 Conference Theme



WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS AT THE 2021 NCSA ANNUAL MEETING IN GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN.

Incoming NCSA president, Dr. Rachel Stein of West Virginia University, who consequently may be the first North Central Sociological Association president in our recent history to miss out on the ceremonial passing of the gavel as part of her movement into office, has announced the theme for the 2021 annual meeting of the NCSA. In accordance with the tradition of alternating positive and negative themes and maintaining the balance of the universe, next year's conference will focus on the more optimistic and upbeat character of the discipline, examining the processes involved in, as well as the impact of **doing sociology that matters**.

Sociology provides a window of understanding into our social world. How we comprehend the world around us not only impacts us as researchers and teachers, but also influences our students, research participants, and sometimes even the general public if we happen to be engaged in public sociology.

However, doing sociology that matters does

not necessarily mean that we are always out to change the world in the immediacy but rather, that we are using sociology in a manner that is meaningful to us and to those around us. Doing research with the community, providing immersive learning opportunities for students, conducting research that is beneficial for teaching, and engaging in applied work constitute prime examples of doing sociology that matters.

Yet, it is not always easy to identify what "matters" in the work we do. Figuring out what matters is thus also about the journey, not simply the magnitude or immediate impact of the findings. As sociologists, we should pursue this path daily through our research, our teaching, and our mentoring.

So, how does sociology matter to you? Please join us in Grand Rapids to share your journey and be part of the discussion of how sociology matters.

An enormous thank you to our sponsors for supporting the development of a virtual conference. Although the virtual conference did not include all of the magnificent papers and panels that were originally scheduled for the in-person conference, we are nonetheless thankful for their support. Similarly, we are grateful to the individual speakers and panelists who recorded select sessions for current NCSA members to enjoy virtually.



A Preview of the 2021 Useem Plenary Speaker

The 2021 Useem Plenary Address at NCSA will feature Dr. John Eason from the University of Wisconsin– Madison. A former church-based community organizer focusing on housing and criminal justice issues, Dr. Eason also served as a political organizer for then Illinois State Senator Barack Obama. Currently, he serves as the Director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Justice Lab. His groundbreaking research examines the complex interrelationships between community, health, race, punishment, and rural/urban processes. His book, *Big House on the Prairie: Rise of the Rural Ghetto and Prison Proliferation*, addresses the extension of concentrated disadvantage from urban to rural communities, offering a novel approach to understanding rural and urban poverty, their connection to the prison industrial complex, and the neighborhoods engendered by forms of ghettoization.



2020 NCSA Award Recipients



Scholarly Achievement: Book

Mohammed A. Bamyeh

University of Pittsburgh

Bamyeh, Mohammed A. (2019). *Lifeworlds of Islam: The Pragmatics of a Religion*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY.



Scholarly Achievement: Article

Jamie L. Small

University of Dayton

Small, Jamie L. (2019). Constructing Sexual Harm: Prosecutorial Narratives of Children, Abuse, and the Disruption of Heterosexuality. *Gender & Society* 33(4), 560-582.



John F. Schnabel Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award

Gregory Kordsmeier

Indiana University Southeast



Aida Tomeh Distinguished Service Award

Melinda Messineo

Ball State University



J. Milton Yinger Lifetime Award

Kathryn Feltey

University of Akron



Butler A. Jones Minority Scholarship

Shaonta' E. Allen

University of Cincinnati

2020 NCSA Student Award Recipients

Seidler Graduate Student Awards



1st Place

Muna Adem and Denise Ambriz, Indiana University- Bloomington

"What Makes a Citizen? Symbolic Boundaries of Legal and Cultural Membership in the United States"

Advisor: Brian Powell



2nd Place

Shaonta' E. Allen, University of Cincinnati

***"Conceptualizing Scholar-Activism:
Lessons from Ida B. Wells-Barnet"***

Advisor: Earl Wright



3rd Place

Hanning Wang, University of Pittsburgh

***"Returning to Demonstrations: A Multi-level Analysis of Abeyant Protestors
Across 84 Demonstrations in Eight European Counties"***

Advisor: Melanie Hughe

Undergraduate Student Paper Awards



1st Place

Nicole Aggarwal, Saint Mary's College

"The Media Virus of Explicit Racism: A Content Analysis of Internet Memes"

Advisor: Susan Alexander



2nd Place

Sarah Hautzinger, Saint Mary's College

***"In the Business of Justice: An Ethnography of the Bureaucratization of a Small-Town
Courtroom"***

Advisor: Susan Alexander



3rd Place

Anastasia Hite, Saint Mary's College

"Subverting the Stereotypes: A Content Analysis of Black-Oriented Film Synopses, 1940-2019 "

Advisor: Susan Alexander

If you have ideas for the 2021 NCSA Conference, please contact us.

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Tamika Odum

Vice President Elect/

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For information on the NCSA, membership inquiries, sociology in the news, and conference events, like us on [Facebook](#) and visit the [NCSA website](#). Please contact the public relations coordinator if you are interested in writing a guest blog for the [NCSA website](#). Follow us on Twitter!

Sociological Focus

Consider submitting your manuscript to *Sociological Focus*, the official publication of the North Central Sociological Association (NCSA). Published continuously since 1968, the quarterly journal is international in scope, covering a full range of topics of current interest to sociology and related social science disciplines. *Sociological Focus* is peer reviewed and committed to publishing high quality research on substantive issues of importance to the study of society. The journal's mission is broad in scope, encompassing empirical works (both quantitative and qualitative in nature), as well as manuscripts presenting up to date literature review of any field of sociology. Look for upcoming issues focused on a specific theme, and dedicated to timely topics. Current author and submissions guidelines available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/usfo20#.VE-62fldWTM>

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Alpha Kappa Delta

Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD) is the International Sociology Honor Society. AKD was founded in 1920 at the University of Southern California by Dr. Emory S. Bogardus and became affiliated with the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS) in 1967. AKD is also affiliated with the American Sociological Association (ASA). The purpose of Alpha Kappa Delta is to seek to acknowledge and promote excellence in the scholarship in the study of sociology, the research of social problems, and such other social and intellectual activities as will lead to improvement in the human condition.

Membership is open to all interested undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members from active chapters who meet the minimum standards for consideration. Currently, there are more than 120,000 members in Alpha Kappa Delta and over 660 chapters. The NCSA is proud to partner with AKD to offer students, faculty, and sociologists in the public and private sector high quality, hands-on pre conference programming.

If you don't have a chapter at your university, please visit <http://alphakappadelta.org/> to see how you can set one up.



Alpha
Kappa
Delta

2020-2021 NCSA Officers

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Vice President Elect.....	Tamika Odum, University of Cincinnati
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Council Member at Large.....	Ashley Hutson, Kent State University

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Membership Chair.....	Robert Peralta, University of Akron
Equality & Inclusion.....	Temple Smith, Hope College
Finance Chair.....	Rachel Campbell, Grand Valley State University
Sociological Focus, Editor.....	Rachel Stein, West Virginia University
NCSA Undergraduate Presentations.....	Mellisa Holtzman, Ball State University
Aida Tomeh Award.....	Kathleen Piker-King, University of Mount Union
J. Milton Yinger Award.....	Lynn Ritchey, University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash
Teaching Section/Schnabel Award.....	Tamika Odum, University of Cincinnati
Scholarly Achievement Award.....	Joshua Woods, West Virginia University
Student Paper Awards.....	Pam Koch, Hope College
Butler A. Jones Award.....	Temple Smith, Hope College
Applied and Public Sociology.....	Chadwick Menning, Ball State University
Profession, Freedom & Responsibility.....	Veronica Medina, Indiana University Southeast
Community College.....	Amaha Sellassie, Sinclair Community College
Publication Policy.....	Kent Schwirian, Ohio State University
Conference Coordinator.....	Joyce Lucke, Paragon Meeting and Events
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