

F A L L 2 0 1 5 V O L U M E 1 5 , I S S U E 1

PEWS NEWS

Political Economy of the World-System

American Sociological Association

A FEW WORDS FROM OUR CHAIR Paul Almeida

Dear PEWSers,

My vision as Chair involves highlighting new areas of insight from a global political economy perspective such as innovative approaches to explaining the rise of mounting environmental crises and worldwide austerity, as well as race, class, and gender stratification dynamics in the world system (among many other examples). I believe it is the global political economy framework that distinguishes PEWS and provides a wide umbrella allowing scholars to work from multiple perspectives and methods to address compelling questions on the patterns and consequences of globalization (past and present). Working together, I am confident we will continue sustaining and diversifying a vibrant section.

Paul Almeida, UC Merced
Chair of PEWS Section of the ASA

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Abolitionism and Restorative Justice in Chicago

Brendan McQuade, DePaul University

In Chicago's 2015 mayoral election, the incumbent Rahm Immanuel and the challenger Jesus 'Chuy' Garcia both promised to hire more police. At first glance, this pro-police position appears sound. In the past decade, there have been between 400 and 500 homicides per year in Chicago. This consistent level of violence has earned Chicago national infamy, exemplified in the distasteful and controversial moniker "Chiraq." The sensational focus on violent crime obscures a more complicated picture, however. With approximately 450 police officers per 100,000 residents, Chicago is also the most policed city in the United States. This oversized police force is aggressive. Chicago stops and frisks youth at four times the rate of the NYPD's more controversial program. Policing is clearly not the answer to Chicago's problems. As many sociologists and criminologists have long argued, the roots of violent crime lie in social causes: poverty and segregation. What is more, the disruptive effects of aggressive policing and mass incarceration further exacerbate these problems, criminalizing and marginalizing already disadvantaged communities.

At the 2015 meeting of the American Sociological Association, the Political Economy of the World System Section co-sponsored a panel that highlighted the alternative solutions being put forward by grassroots activists. The event featured speakers: David Kelly, a Catholic priest of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood; Page May, a Chicago-based organizer with We Charge Genocide; Byron Hobbs, the executive director of Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation (SOUL), an inclusive, multi-generational social justice organization comprised of religious congregations, affordable housing groups, block clubs, students, and neighborhood groups across the South Side and South Suburbs; and Frank Chapman, the field organizer and Educational Director of the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (CAARPR).

Together, the speakers provided vivid examples of the struggle of communities across Chicago to establish community control of police, roll back mass incarceration, build alternative institutions to restore justice to their communities, and, in the long term, abolish police and prisons. These activists provide a transformative vision, one that is increasingly important in a political moment where both parties talk about rolling back mass incarceration but still struggle to think of security beyond policing. While their work is specific to the struggles around the carceral state, they also exemplify an important shift and the character of antisystemic movements. These movements do not practice the old two-step strategy of the Old Left: seize the state and remake society. Instead, they provide expression to the new-two step strategy recently enunciated by Grace Lee Boggs: personal and community transformation that leads to political and institutional transformation.

Dave Kelly and Page May explained how their work heals the damage of the carceral state and develops leadership. In Chicago, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood work to combat the deleterious effects of a criminal justice predicated on punishing. The organization works out the Back of the Yards/ New City neighborhood of Chicago, a community that struggles with issues of poverty, gangs, and racial divisions. Their peace circles provide a safe place for residents to work through the trauma that infuses their community. The work is built around the five principles of restorative justice: (1) repairing harm; (2) the radical hospitality required to welcome hurt people; (3) accompaniment; (4) engagement with families, stakeholders, and systems; (5) collaboration.

Where Kelly's work seeks to provide services in challenging neighborhoods, Page May does more explicitly radical leadership development work. May is one of the co-founders of We Charge Genocide, a grassroots, inter-generational effort to center the voices and experiences of the young people most targeted by police violence in Chicago. The organization formed last summer in response to the death of Dominique Franklin Jr, known to his friends as Damo, who passed away after a police

Restorative Justice Continued

officer shocked him with a taser. Damo's friends were devastated by the loss and demoralized by feeling that Damo's life taken and there would be no consequence.

The nascent group decided to create a new project: a reiteration of an effort of a group of Black activists who in 1951 took a petition to the United Nations. The petition, called "We Charge Genocide," cited over 150 police killings of Black people in the United States. This new group decided to compile a similar report about police violence against youth of color in Chicago and to send a delegation to Switzerland to present the report to the UN Committee Against Torture. The reformed adopted the name We Charge Genocide to recalled parallel tactics from a moment in time in which conversations about anti-Black violence were being brought to a world stage, specifically in relation to anti-colonial movements in Africa, and there was a more broad-based political basis for global and diasporic Black solidarity. May was the lead author of the report one of the 8 youth delegates who traveled to the United Nations. While the organization formed as an immediate response to the traumatic death of Damo, its work has continued. We Charge Genocide has organized around campaigns to win reparations for victims of police torture, pass a local ordinance to record police stops, and bring justice for Rekia Boyd, who was killed by an off duty police officer in 2012. As a related project, May is also one of the co-founders of Assata's Daughters, an intergenerational organizing collective for Black women in Chicago.

Bryon Hobbs spoke about SOUL, a more traditional advocacy organization. Unlike many advocates, however, SOUL is a grassroots organization rooted in the communities of Chicago's South Side. Hobbs spoke about the SOUL's efforts to fight the carceral state. In January SOUL launched Decarcerate Chi, campaign to end the mass incarceration and criminalization of black and brown people in Chicago and Illinois. The Cook County Jail is the largest pretrial detention center in the country. It holds people for unnecessarily pending trial. SOUL is currently engaged in a campaign of direct action in support of a decriminalization bill that would divert non-violent drug offenders from the prison system. They are also running a related campaign to end bail for people who do not pose a threat or flight risk. With a new bipartisan consensus emerging on criminal justice reform, Hobbs explained that it's time to "go big or go home" and work to transform the carceral state.

Like Hobbs, Frank Champan and CAARPR seek to reform the carceral state. Champan was wrongfully convicted of murder and armed robbery in 1961 and sentenced to life and fifty years in the Missouri State Prison. His case was taken up by the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (NAARPR) and after 14 years imprisonment he was released in 1976. In 1983 he was elected Executive Director of NAARPR. He has been a part of leading the struggle in Chicago for the past three years to stop police crimes, especially murder, torture, beatings and racial profiling. His current work centers around an effort to legislation that would create an elected Civilian Police Accountability Council with powers to appoint the police commissioner, rewrite the police rule book, investigate police shootings, and otherwise oversee the police department. When Champan spoke, CAARPR was in the final push for mobilize for a demonstration in support on the legislation.

In short, these four panelist spoke of the important and innovative activism happening in the United States around issues of state violence. While many want to reduce the Black Lives Matter to a project of cultural affirmation and protest movement with no alternative vision, Kelly, May, Hobbs and Chapman show that these upsurge in protest is part of longer trajectory of political action rooted in community struggles for justice, decency, and autonomy. Most importantly, these organizations show a new revolutionary two step strategy. Their work to heal the damage of the carceral state, build alternative institutions, and develop leaders is connected to and informs a project of abolitionist reform.