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A history of the mid-south sociological association

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ABSTRACT

Prior to his death in 2018, Marc Matre, Archivist and the longest serving Secretary-Treasurer of the Mid-South Sociological Association (MSSA), submitted a paper to the journal on the history of the MSSA. Reviewers wanted revisions that Marc was unable to complete because of his infirmity, and his last professional wish was that the journal and members of the association finish the work he had started. The following is that revision. It is the combined work of many who contributed to the project as noted in the acknowledgments. Biographical information about Marc follows the list of the principal founders of the association.

The Mid-South Sociological Association (MSSA) was founded in 1975 during a professional meeting in Monroe, Louisiana, that was organized for the dual purpose of establishing a new regional sociological association and convening the first annual conference of the group.¹ The host institution for the meetings was Northeast Louisiana University (NLU), now known as the University of Louisiana at Monroe, and attendees stayed in dormitory rooms. Minutes and other material from the MSSA Archives indicate that the conference meetings were largely held in the NLU Union Ballroom on bleacher-like chairs, and in dorm rooms, beginning on the afternoon of November 6, 1975 (with the meetings continuing another day, November 7) ([Appendix 1](#)). Presiding over the first organizational meeting in the evening of November 6 was Russell H. Meier, a sociologist at NLU in the Department of Sociology and Social Services (shortly thereafter renamed the Department of Criminal Justice, Social Work and Sociology, chaired by G. Dale Welch).²

While numbers in the Archives vary, at least 36 people were at the organizational meeting on the first day of the conference. At the meeting, Meier presented a temporary working constitution (later to become the Bylaws when the association was incorporated in 2017) that was voted on with the addition of several friendly amendments. Those at the meeting included NLU colleagues of Meier: Frank Forwood, Harry J. Hale, Lawrence A. Kratz, and Marsha McGee, who had been assisted mainly by colleagues at Arkansas State University (viz., J. Larry Williams and James H. Harrison), and interested others from colleges and universities in Alabama, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas.³

The inaugural organizational meeting included the first elections of the new association. Julian Roebuck of Mississippi State University was elected the first President, with Donald E. Allen of Oklahoma State University President-Elect (2nd President, 1976–77). Larry Williams of Arkansas State University was made Vice-President, and Russell Meier took the Vice-President-Elect position. Six committees were established: Nominations, Program, Membership, the Profession, Women, and Minorities. Chairs of the committees were elected by the membership and became members of the governing body of the MSSA, designated as the Executive Council (now Board of Directors). Other positions were elected including a Secretary-Treasurer, with Jerry Waxman of

the University of South Alabama taking the initial role until late in 1977.⁴ After that, Emory G. Davis from Texas Tech University, the only African American of the group, took the position until 1981. The Chair of the Nominations Committee was taken by Davis, Chair of the Program Committee by Donald E. Allen of Oklahoma State University, the Membership Committee went to Donald D. Sieger of the University of Arkansas, the Committee on the Profession was taken by H. Paul Chalfant of Texas Tech University, the Committee on Women by Marsha McGee of NLU, and Chair of the Committee on Minorities was filled by Gloria Javillonar (now Palileo) of the University of South Alabama. The members at the meeting also defined the MSSA region geographically to include the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. The first Executive Council meeting was held over lunch the following day, November 7, and included Julian Roebuck, Donald Allen, Larry Williams, Russell Meier, Jerry Waxman, Emory Davis, Donald Sieger, Paul Chalfant, and Gloria V. Javillonar ([Appendix 2](#)). At this meeting, it was agreed that the site for the 1976 conference would be the Ramada Inn in Monroe, Louisiana, and that the American Sociological Association would be contacted regarding the establishment of the new regional association.

Officially, 66 people attended the first conference of the MSSA—20 from Louisiana; 11 each from Oklahoma and Texas; 8 from Alabama; 6 from Mississippi; 4 from Arkansas; 2 from Tennessee; and 1 each from the District of Columbia, Georgia, Kentucky, and Missouri, among whom 8 (12.1%) were women ([Appendixes 3 and 4](#)). While there was no theme for the first conference, the two plenary speakers were Stuart Clark, the Louisiana Regional Director for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and J. Robert Grimes, the Louisiana Regional Administrator of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. In all, there were 10 sessions with 34 paper presentations. On November 6, the paper sessions of the new association began at 1:00 p.m. with the first session of the new association devoted to medical sociology, chaired by Marsha McGee and Roland Ficken of the University of Alabama–Birmingham. Two other sessions were presented that afternoon—one on the sociology of education, the other on deviance. The following day, morning and afternoon sessions included papers on crime and delinquency, sociology of religion, social psychology, political sociology, the sociology of the family, criminology, and a “potpourri” session that included papers that did not fit into the other sessions.⁵ On the morning of November 7, Phil Carey, Director of the Minority Program of the American Sociological Association, addressed the group.

At least two of the conference papers were subsequently published. One of these was “An Investigation of Death Attitudes and Death Anxiety in College Students” by William Chiappetta, H. Hugh Floyd Jr., and Dennis R. McSeveney (President, 1997–98) of the University of New Orleans (Chiappetta, Hugh Floyd, and McSeveney 1976).⁶ The other published paper was by Smith (1976) of the University of Mississippi, “Portrayal of the Elderly in Prescription Drug Advertising.” Many other session papers are not available today, but 18 of them were collected and published as the Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association (1975) and are available in the MSSA Archives. The papers were assembled from mimeograph stencils by Brent S. Roper of Texas Tech University, who presided over the political sociology session on November 7.

Why a new regional association?

Two general reasons why the founders were interested in establishing a new regional sociological association were to promote greater professionalization of mid-South area sociologists, including a scholarly outlet for publication, and the perception that existing regional associations were less responsive to female and minority academics. Some founders and early members felt that, because of their college and university affiliations in the deep South (especially at small colleges and universities), they were being shut out from participation and leadership roles in regional

and national organizations and the journals these associations sponsored. Some women felt discriminated against with regard to participation in the annual meetings of the existing regional organizations, and others thought the Southern Sociological Society (SSS) was less diverse than it should be with respect to both women and minorities.⁷ What the founders wanted was a more representative organization whose structure would be designed to foster inclusiveness, and high standards of scholarship and excellence in teaching.

Some also viewed existing regional and national organizations as representing a kind of elitism that extended to or was based on the sociological approach or theory they promoted. This somewhat more radical purpose was offered by Julian Roebuck in his 1976 presidential address (published in 1978), in which he detailed three objectives for the establishment of the MSSA: (1) the need for a forum for the increasing number of sociologists in the mid-South, and in particular one that was different from, “more broadly based associations, and their journals [that] have catered to entrenched elites”; (2) the need to focus on more “innovative” and “creative” sociology, specifically theoretical sociology, interactionists’ perspectives, and conflict theory, in an effort to go beyond structural-functionalism and survey research, “The southern region has tended to overlook the contributions and horizons of the early Chicago School and the Neo-Chicagoans”; and (3) a focus on service to member sociologists, that is, “how best to prepare sociology majors for nonacademic employment.”

The antipathy to quantitative research and the focus on particular varieties of theory supported by some of the founders seem dated nowadays when publication, tenure, and promotion in the discipline today are driven by the understanding that good and bad work can be found in most approaches, rather than which approach or perspective is taken. As the almost 50 years of experience since the founding of the MSSA has shown, academic and especially scientific disciplines tend to be self-correcting over time. The reason appears to be that rationality and the truth are fundamental ingredients in the process. Clearly, the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago today is both quantitative and qualitative, and interactionists and conflict approaches are now pervasive in the discipline. Among other things, quantitative work is necessary when large samples are used, and large samples are needed because many variables cannot be explained adequately with small ones. Qualitative work is necessary when the complexity of what sociologists study cannot be properly operationalized, a very common problem in social science research.

The charge of elitism and regional prejudice may well have been appropriate at the time, and actions based on those ideas may have been perceived as unfair and hurtful to some. However, as a historical matter the values of those at elite institutions have often helped to develop and encourage best academic practices, notions that were sometimes absent and are still not robust in some institutions in the South and elsewhere. Too often in some universities today, academic authority takes a back seat to administrative efficiency, and decision-making can be limited or devoid of academic input. We must also wonder if the charge of elitism was less about values and beliefs and more about geography and history. It is likely that at the time of the founding of the MSSA, members of the “elite” institutions in the South felt that some non-southern universities were elitist, and that some of those in turn felt some eastern universities were elitist. In 1900, it was said that the only elite universities were in Europe.

Discord within the discipline tends to be unproductive. Ours has always been a small discipline compared to the other social sciences. Our fight, and the legitimacy of the discipline, is ultimately based on Emile Durkheim’s hope for sociology, that its theories will be seen to be of value once other concepts and approaches have been taken into account. This is a notion that sociology competes with other disciplines and approaches, not that it is separate from science or academic scholarship. At a time when research is highly interdisciplinary, and other social sciences increasingly focus on outcome variables that used to be unique to sociology, internecine attacks can only be damaging. Gender and minority diversity are also something that nearly all

sociologists today strongly support, but members of the MSSA can be proud of the fact that the first generation—let us call it the 1975 generation—was so proactive on these issues.

Perhaps another reason for the founding of the MSSA was the cost of participating in regional associations. Many founders of the MSSA were also members of the SSS or the Southwestern Social Science Association (SSSA). The SSSA, multidisciplinary in nature, with its journal *Social Science Quarterly*, appealed to some but not all sociologists.⁸ More important, the SSS and SSSA, being large organizations, typically met in larger metropolitan settings more distant from MSSA's originally designated mid-South region. Few schools in the South had budgets to support professional participation in such places. Many in the South found the cost-benefits ratio discouraging. While this fact did not translate into abandonment of the SSS or SSSA, many of the founders were seeking an alternative to facilitate more professional participation. Generally, those who could handle the cost remained members of the SSS and SSSA. With MSSA's strong focus on younger scholars and students, it began as a somewhat different organization. Today, the Board of Directors of the association grapples with the matter of whether it should move beyond the usual locations for meetings in an effort to grow the membership. The strong financial situation that MSSA currently enjoys may suggest that steps to go beyond the traditional region may be worth the effort.

People

With the exception of Marc Matre, coauthor of the current article, the people whose role in the MSSA is described below are those who were most active in the founding of the MSSA. Some of them became less active than some nonfounders as time went on, but we think it is important to note for historical reasons those who were involved at the very beginning. Newer members may not be aware or may never have known of them, and even some older members may not recall the important role these individuals played.

Russell H. Meier

Russ Meier was an Associate Professor of Sociology at NLU at the time of MSSA's founding in 1975, with a PhD in sociology from Southern Illinois University in 1974, and previous teaching experience at McMurry College in Abilene, Texas, and Arkansas State University. He was the principal founder of the MSSA who developed and promoted the idea for establishing a new regional sociological association. Meier presided over the first meeting of the MSSA, was the first editor (Executive Editor) of *Sociological Forum*, the MSSA's journal, was elected the first Vice-President-Elect and second Vice-President of the association, and presented a paper at the first annual meeting, "Sources of Institutional Support for New Interdisciplinary Scientific Fields," which was included in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association*. Among other works, he published a paper on academic achievement in *Sociological Forum* (Alexander and Meier 1979). By 1979, Meier had left NLU for McMurry College and remained there as a permanent employee until 1987.⁹

Harry J. Hale Jr

Harry Hale was a Professor of Sociology at NLU, with a PhD from the University of Tennessee in 1963. He aided in the planning for the first meeting of the MSSA and the first annual conference. Along with Frank Forwood, Hale presented a paper at the first meeting, which was included in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association*, "Expected and Preferred Fertility among Louisiana College Students." In 1978, Hale was elected President of the Southwest Association for the Scientific Study of Religion. Among other things,

he is known for two book reviews in the field of sociology of religion—Hale and Wilson (1979) and Hale and Nordquist (1980)—and a paper with McGee and Hale (1980) in the journal, *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*.

Frank P. Forwood

Frank Forwood was an Assistant Professor of Sociology at NLU with a ThD from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1958. He was involved in planning for the first MSSA meeting and conference, and he presented a paper at the first conference with Hale (above).

Lawrence A. Kratz

Lawrence Kratz was a Professor of Economics with a PhD from the University of Mississippi in 1966. He was similarly involved in planning for the first MSSA meeting. Kratz presented a paper at the first conference, “Resource Allocation by Computerized Matchmaking, A Social-Economic Problem.”

Marsha McGee

Beginning in 1975, Marsha McGee was an Assistant Professor of Sociology at NLU with a PhD from the University of Kentucky in 1975. Like the previous four individuals, she was instrumental in planning the first MSSA meeting and conference. She was the first person to be elected Chair of the Committee on Women and chaired the first session of the first MSSA conference on medical sociology. McGee was also Associate Editor of *Sociological Forum* (1975–79), then the Executive Editor of the journal for a short time after, becoming the Editor (with James K. Skipper, Jr.) of volume 1 of *Sociological Spectrum* in 1980. McGee was the second female Vice-President of the MSSA (1980–81) and became President (1984–85), the first woman to hold the position. McGee has numerous publications in such journals as *Social Science Quarterly*; *Gerontologist*; *Rural Sociology*; *Illness, Crisis & Loss*; *Journal of Sex Research*; *Journal of Death and Dying*; *Journal of American Culture*; and *Sociological Spectrum*. McGee retired from NLU in 2006.

J. Larry Williams

Larry Williams was one of two faculty members, along with James H. Harrison, at Arkansas State University who in 1974 and 1975 assisted with the founding of the MSSA. Williams was elected the first Vice-President of the association and presided over the first sociology of deviance session on November 6, 1975.

James H. Harrison

Harrison did not attend the first organizational meeting or conference, but he attended other conferences, for example, as Chair of the third criminology session at the 1977 conference and as Chair of the juvenile delinquency session in 1984, during which he also presented a paper, “Juvenile Delinquency: Control Theory Revisited.”

Julian B. Roebuck

At the inaugural meeting of the MSSA, Julian Roebuck of Mississippi State University was elected President of the new association. Roebuck had a long and productive career as a published

scholar primarily in the area of qualitative criminology. A computer search in 2019 found dozens of publications including four books, many journal articles and book reviews. Among his books are *The Rendezvous: A Case Study of an After-Hours Club* (1976), and *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in American Higher Education* (1993). His articles were published in a variety of journals such as *Criminology*; *British Journal of Criminology*; *Criminology and Delinquency*; *Social Problems*; *Race, Gender & Class*; *Deviant Behavior*; *Urban Life*; *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*; and *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*.

Donald E. Allen

Donald E. Allen of Oklahoma State University was elected President-Elect at the first meeting of the MSSA, was first Chair of the Program Committee, and served as the second President of the association, 1976 to 1977 (Appendix 5). Allen also served as an Associate Editor on the first journal of the association, *Sociological Forum*. More than a dozen publications for Allen were found in journals such as *American Journal of Sociology*; *Social Forces*; *Journal of Marriage and the Family*; *Canadian Review of Sociology*; *Sociometry*; *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science*; *Journal of Negro Education*; and *Journal of Sex Research*. Sociology was Allen's second career. He was in the military in 1941 and served on General Douglas MacArthur's staff in Tokyo as an intelligence officer, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1960. Viewed by many as a great friend to the MSSA over the years, Allen retired from Oklahoma State University in 1982.

Jerry Waxman

At the first meeting of the MSSA, Jerry Waxman was elected Secretary-Treasurer, a position he held from 1975 to 1977. With Terrence Mizell and John Reed, Waxman presented the paper, "Watergate Hierarchy and Images of Punishment" in the political sociology session at the first MSSA conference, and the paper is in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association*. Considered an influential member of the Executive Council, Waxman left the discipline in 1978 when he failed to receive tenure. He obtained a JD in 1981 and became a practicing lawyer in the state of Florida.

Emory G. Davis

As noted, Emory Davis of Texas Tech University was the first African American to hold a seat on the MSSA Executive Council as Chair of the Committee on Nominations and the second person to be elected to the post of Secretary-Treasurer, 1977 to 1980 (Appendix 6). Among other things, he presented a paper at the first annual meeting, "Employed Women and Motivation for Success," in the social psychology session on November 7, and the paper is included in *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association*.

Donald D. Sieger

Donald Sieger of the University of Arkansas was elected the first Chair of the Membership Committee and presided over the sociology of religion session at the first annual meeting. He presented a paper in the complex organization session at the 1985 conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, "Contributions of Collective Behavior Therapy to Organizational Boundary Analysis."

H. Paul Chalfant

Elected as the first Chair of the Committee on the Profession, Paul Chalfant of Texas Tech University presented a paper in the session on deviance on November 6, 1975, “Normative Expectations and the Classification of Deviance: Alcohol Use and Perceptions of Alcoholics,” which is available in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association*. Well known for his work in sociology of religion and medical sociology, Chalfant went on to author many publications, including four books, varied journal articles, and book reviews. His books include *The Sociology of Medicine and Illness* (Kurtz and Chalfant 1984) and *Religion in Contemporary Society* (1987). His work was published in journals such as *Review of Religious Research*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, *Social Science & Medicine*, *Sociology of Religion*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, and *Social Compass*. Another of the first generation with a second career, Chalfant was an ordained Presbyterian minister prior to pursuing a PhD in sociology.

Gloria V. Javillonar (Palileo)

Gloria Javillonar Palileo of the University of South Alabama was the first Chair of the Committee on Minorities, and she presented a paper in the sociology of religion session in 1975, “Religious Preference and Social Mobility Among Working-Class White Males,” which can be found in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association*. In 1973, she published a paper in the *British Journal of Sociology*, “Sociological and Social Psychological Aspects of Indian Entrepreneurship,” and is known for other articles in the *International Review of Modern Sociology* and *Sociological Spectrum* (Gray, Palileo and Johnson 1993). Palileo is retired from the University of South Alabama.

Alvin L. Bertrand

Alvin Bertrand did not attend the first conference but according to Roebuck was present at the first organizational meeting later in the day and became an important role model and strongly supported the association once on board. Among the most accomplished of the first generation of MSSA leaders, Bertrand was the author of numerous books and dozens of journal articles. He contributed to the MSSA conferences in the early days, was an Associate Editor of *Sociological Forum*, the author of the first paper in *Sociological Forum* (Bertrand 1978), and the third President of the association, 1977 to 1978. Known largely for his work in rural sociology, Bertrand published in such journals as the *Journal of Farm Economics*, *Home Economics Research Journal*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Current Anthropology*, and had several articles each in *Social Forces*, *Rural Sociology*, and *Sociological Spectrum*. His books include *Rural Sociology* (1958), *History of the Southern Sociological Society* (Brooks and Bertrand 1962), *Rural Land Tenure in the United States* (Bertrand and Corty 1967), *Basic Sociology* (1967), and *Social Organization* (1972).

Sarah Brabant

Sarah Brabant attended the first annual conference of the MSSA in Monroe and was an effective, outsized “behind the scenes” influence in the formation and early development of the association. She was the first female Vice-President of the MSSA, and the only person to hold that position for two years (1977–79). Brabant obtained her PhD in sociology in 1973 from the University of Tennessee and spent her academic career at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (formerly University of Southwestern Louisiana). She published many articles in journals such as

Sociological Perspectives, Sex Roles, Death Studies, Omega-Journal of Death & Dying, Journal of Applied Sociology, Review of Religious Research, Sociological Spectrum, and the book *Mending the Torn Fabric* (1996). Brabant helped found the Grief Center in Lafayette, Louisiana, in 1997 and retired from teaching in 2001.

Marc Matre

The principal author of this paper, Marc Matre was a professor at the University of South Alabama, with a PhD from Ohio State University in 1969. His first MSSA conference was in 1983, at which time he chaired the session on southern ethnic communities and presented the paper “The Position of Jewish Community Members in a Southern Metropolitan Area.” The next year he presented two papers and was a regular contributor to many annual conferences until late in his life. He published in journals such as *Review of Religious Research, Journal of Studies of Alcohol, Social Science Quarterly, Sociological Focus*, and *Sociological Spectrum*. His last conference was in 2017, where he was in a roundtable on “Connecting Public Discourse, Social Issues and Analysis in the Classroom” and presented a paper in the sociology of religion session. In 1986 to 1994, and again in 1996 to 1999, he held the position of Secretary-Treasurer of the MSSA, the longest serving Secretary-Treasurer in the history of the association. Marc was the Archivist of the association from 2015 until his death in 2018.

Going forward

Shortly after the association was created and its Constitution accepted, it was agreed that the Executive Council would make changes necessary to produce more formal yet practical permanent documents for governance of the association. Among other things, it was suggested the Constitution should be free of sexist terminology. These actions reflect enduring concerns of the majority of members of the organization. Of paramount concern from the beginning was that the organization should be open and welcoming to all, especially women and members of various minority groups. Ultimately, these and similar concerns led to the establishment of a code of ethics in 2001, specifically the Code of Ethics and Policies and Procedures of the Committee on Professional Ethics, written principally by Jackie Eller and Lyn Huff-Corzine, and approved the following year.

Because the association was new, individuals in the lead had to move quickly to maintain momentum. President Roebuck, President-Elect Allen, Secretary-Treasurer Waxman, and several other members of the Executive Council were mainly responsible for orchestrating subsequent annual meetings. Thus, as is commonly seen in academic settings, organizations launched to be open and welcoming to everyone are often initially fostered by a few enthusiastic persons. Indeed, some methods, procedures, and transactions early on were said to have been accomplished “out of the back pockets” of individuals. These are not allusions to corrupt practices but to the fact that people took needed initiative and related risks that might accrue to them personally should the organization founder. Many of these risks and sacrifices for the association were financial. Some have suggested that were it not for the financial support of Jerome Salomone, President (1980–81) and Editor of *Sociological Spectrum* with H. David Allen (1981–84), the association might not have survived.¹⁰

Basic rules for appointing members of standing committees were established. This included a requirement that committees be composed of persons selected from the states that were part of the mid-South region as defined by the association. Committee chairs were authorized to appoint members of their committees but instructed to make these committees geographically representative. This requirement became problematic as the “mid-South region” as defined by the

association expanded in later years, but subsequent practices have been in keeping with the spirit of the original organizational meeting.

Once an MSSA Constitution was adopted and refined, rules for continuity and division of labor were established and communicated. Lines of authority were established that made it possible to make important decisions during business meetings and keep a record of decisions as minutes of the meetings that were prepared and circulated. Clear responsibilities were given to committee chairs and appointed officers. Planning and decision-making became timelier and more consistent. Executive Council membership increased as elected and appointed positions were added. More responsibilities were delegated, although delegation sometimes created problems. Because total membership was relatively small, the pool of persons from which to recruit potential officers was limited. New officers were likely to be early in their careers, pressed by heavy professional and family demands, and often relatively inexperienced with professional organizations. Inevitably, breakdowns occasionally occurred, with one or more officers having accepted responsibilities they did not entirely understand or could not manage. Executive Council meetings sometimes bogged down in post mortems. Effort was given to determining how to improve processes to prevent past mistakes. Unless fault was found for error or nonfeasance, discussions were likely to settle on one or both of two explanations: that duties of offices had never been properly specified to the incoming officers, or that outgoing officers were not transmitting important information to incoming officers. Although many processes were memorialized in the Constitution, it was determined that it was not a "user-friendly" document for transmitting institutional knowledge to new officers or members. The Constitution was rewritten to eliminate a lot of procedural detail, and that information was incorporated into a new document entitled the Operations and Procedures Manual or OPM.¹¹ This manual became a repository of specific tasks, deadlines, and good practices. New officers were routinely given copies. It was subject to revision each year with the intent to continually improve processes in the new and growing association. Officers were encouraged to suggest changes after consulting with others. However, some officers were less committed, and compilation of agreed-upon revisions was sometimes piecemeal and not timely. Indeed, a few officers perceived it as more of a constraint than a help. Nevertheless, many additions and changes have been approved by the Executive Council over the years, and processes are continually being refined based on experience.

Sociological Forum to Sociological Spectrum

A major reason for establishing a new regional association was to also create a new scholarly journal. As early as January 1976, Russell Meier, the main founder of the association, was in talks with the administration of NLU to allow the MSSA to use the printing services of the university to publish a journal, a plan that was approved within that month. In a letter to the Executive Council in February of 1976, Meier formally proposed the establishment of a new MSSA journal, that it should be called the *Mid-South Sociological Journal*, that he be appointed the Acting Executive Editor, and members of an Editorial Board be created. In November 1976 an Editorial Board for the new journal was established with Meier as Executive Editor, and the decision to go forward with the new journal was made. Finally, in the fall of 1978 the association began publishing the new journal, now called *Sociological Forum*. The title was suggested by Sarah Brabant of the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now University of Louisiana-Lafayette). Meier was the Executive Editor, and the Associate Editors (Editorial Board members) were Alvin Bertrand; Julian Roebuck; Donald Allen; Paul Chalfant; Joseph M. Garza, Georgia State University; John P. Reed, University of South Alabama; Samuel E. Wallace, University of Tennessee; James Harrison;

J. Michael Brooks, University of Kentucky; and Marsha McGee.¹² Meier's Foreword for the first issue included the following:

Sociological Forum . . . adheres to the highest standards in the selection of scholarly and sociologically relevant articles and reports for publication. Diversity in perspectives and content is sought with the submission of articles and research reports from professional sociologists, whatever their academic or agency affiliation. . . . *Forum* is not only an outlet for the research and ideas of the members of the MSSA, but for all sociologists. It invites the submission of manuscripts from professionals everywhere, and welcomes a readership from all persons who share an interest in and concern about human relationships.

In May 1979, Russell Meier resigned from *Sociological Forum* and by August of that year Marsha McGee of NLU had taken over as Editor. *Sociological Forum* and another journal, *Sociological Symposium* (originated at Western Kentucky State University by Clifton Bryant, President for 1981–82) merged to combine into *Sociological Spectrum* in 1981 because of financial problems.¹³ *Spectrum* was originally coedited by Marsha McGee and James K. Skipper, Jr. of Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI) and State University. Skipper left *Spectrum* the following year when he became editor of *Sociological Inquiry*, the official journal of Alpha Kappa Delta, the International Sociology Honor Society founded by Emory S. Bogardus of the University of Southern California in 1915. At the beginning, *Spectrum* was owned and published by Hemisphere Publishing Corp., but in 1988 the company was sold to Taylor & Francis. Not to be confused with *Forum*, the newsletter of the MSSA (established in 1991), the title *Sociological Forum* reappeared in 1986 and is now the official journal of the Eastern Sociological Association. Currently, editors of both *Sociological Spectrum* and the newsletter *Forum* serve on the governing Board of Directors of the MSSA.

The stated reason for MSSA establishing the journal *Sociological Forum* and the subsequent *Sociological Spectrum* was that, similar to the founding of the association itself, many were concerned that mid-South scholars, and especially those at smaller colleges and universities, were having difficulty presenting and publishing their work. Some also felt that gender and race discrimination, what today we would generally call institutionalized status relations, were issues that national and other regional associations and their associated journals were handling in an insufficient or dilatory manner. The inaugural issue of *Sociological Forum* included articles on the theme of "Human vs. Natural Resources," concerns related to the 1974 United Nations World Population Conference (Bertrand 1978; Ford 1978; Bryant 1978); the Medicaid program (Kronenfeld 1978); deviant behavior (Norland 1978); labeling theory (Orh 1978); a short history on the founding of regional sociological associations (Hetrick, Pease, and Mathers 1978, in which it was noted that all but the MSSA were established in the 1930s); and a short report on the founding of the MSSA (Roebuck 1978), which was his presidential address at the second annual meeting in 1976 as noted above. The contributors came from diverse institutions: Hood College, Louisiana State University, Mississippi State University, The College of Charleston, University of Alabama-Birmingham, University of Kentucky, University of Maryland, University of Tennessee, VPI and State University, and Western Illinois University. The first volume of *Sociological Forum* also included a section titled "Mid-South News," authored by Sarah Brabant, which included member news and foreshadowed *Forum*, the MSSA's newsletter.

Sociological Forum published an additional three issues, Spring of 1979 (Vol. 2, 1), Fall of 1979 (Vol. 2, 2), and Fall of 1980 (Vol. 3). Spring 1979 was mainly focused on the theme of the "Medicalization of Deviance" and included a rare (in *Sociological Forum*) article by female authors, Patsy Spurrier and Jay Reeves (President in 1991–92), "The Economics of the Working Wife: A Sex-Roles Interpretation."¹⁴ The issue also included separate articles by Donald Allen and Paul Chalfant, and an interesting article on the southern culture of violence theory, in which Doemer (1979) used survey data and failed to find support for the thesis. The second issue, Fall of 1979, in part involved the theme of "The Context of Academic Achievement," which included the article by William Alexander and Russell Meier, noted previously, and an article by Alvin

Bertrand. A spring issue was not published, but Fall 1980 included nine articles and a theme on "Theoretical Perspective: Articulations and Syntheses," in which Wolfgang Frese and Julian Roebuck authored an article titled "Symbolic Interactionism and Social Ecology: Toward an Articulation." Other articles included the independent work of Clifton D. Bryant, Paul Chalfant, and William Kenkel (President, 1988–89).

The inaugural volume of *Sociology Spectrum* appeared in 1981 under the editorship of Marsha McGee and James Skipper (Appendix 7). The Associate Editors included the same Associate Editors of *Sociological Forum* and the following: Richard Brumgart, Syracuse University; Judith Cates, Charles Dudley, and James Michaels of VPI and State University; Orville Cunningham, Louisiana State University; Bernard Farber, Arizona State University; Roland Pellegin, Pennsylvania State University; Herman Turk, University of Nebraska; Doris Wilkinson, Howard University; and Louis A. Zurcher, University of Texas. The first issue included an eclectic group of topics: blue-collar workers, the life experiences of older women, gender and crime perceptions, prison guards, Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and the sociology of prostitution. The affiliations of the contributors were similarly diverse: Pennsylvania State University, D'Youville College, SUNY-Fredonia, Texas Christian University, Western Carolina University, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Church of St. Barnabas-on-the-Desert, and LeMoyné-Owen College in Memphis, Tennessee.

Issue 3 of the first volume included the first Special Issue in *Sociological Spectrum* on the topic of stratification, edited by Ellsworth R. Fuhrman and Mark L. Wardell of VPI and State University. The final issue of the first volume included three articles of particular interest to MSSA members. Still useful today, Margavio and Salomone (1981) wrote on Italian immigrants to Louisiana: "The comparatively rapid entrance of Sicilian peasants into the lower ranks of the middle class is explained by the size of the immigrant population, by their distinctive cultural values and social experiences in southern Italy and Sicily, by the custom of gambling, and by the friendly compatibility of the host culture in southern Louisiana." Of interest, David Allen, Dennis McSeveney, and William Bankston (1981) wrote on southern culture and homicide rates by disaggregating them by race and found "clear differences in the effects of cultural and structural factors. . . . One of the more interesting findings is the inverse relationship between black homicide rate and percent nonwhite." Finally, Wallace (1981), the fifth President in 1979 to 1980, wrote about the distinctive concept of the South, one that he explained was well established by 1800. However, he found that explanations for the concept varied among southerners with some rejecting race as important to the concept of the South, and preferring instead to focus on "culture," whereas many others thought it was "slavery that made the South distinctive."¹⁵

Two special issues of *Sociological Spectrum* were of great interest to members of the association at the time, "Blacks in the South" (1984) and "Southern Women" (1986). "Blacks in the South" was guest edited by Thomas J. Durant Jr. (President, 1996–97) and included six articles on a variety of topics, including social desegregation, race and class consciousness, agriculture, the urban black family, black coal miners, and property maintenance. The latter was authored by Bill Reese of Texas Christian University and Marc Matre (1984): "While little is known of the effect of racial residential integration on property maintenance . . . the findings show that integrated and upwardly mobile blacks had the motivation, the financial capability, and the expertise to excel in their contributions to the neighborhood's upkeep and appearance."

"Southern Women" was edited by Matheny Dillman of Agnes Scott College and included articles on research and publications on southern women, antebellum proslavery rhetoric, cultural heritage, the role model of the lady, gender role ideology, and southern women writers. In the article on women writers, Darden (1986) of the University of Arkansas, and President of the MSSA (1990–91), took on the writings of Jill McCorkle, Lisa Alter, Ellen Gilchrist, and Lee Smith:

"The southern woman has always been strong in a way rather different from the strength of other women. Her strength is not from the pioneer women of Willa Cather or Edith Wharton. It is the gritty strength of

the farm women who made it from scratching through the dirt during the Civil War to that of the depression, that lasted longer here than in the rest of the country.”

Sociological Spectrum has increasingly become more national and even international as it came to be viewed as a more prestigious journal in which to publish. In a *Spectrum* article, Eller (2006) surveyed the first 25 years of the journal (1975–2000) and found that 88% of the 549 published papers did not originate at a MSSA conference. Twelve percent of them consisted of presidential addresses, keynote presentations, or were based on other conference presentations. She also found that 90% of the published papers came from colleges and universities in the South, although almost 50% of more recent articles—prior to 2000—were from beyond the MSSA member states.¹⁶ Continuing this trend, since the year 2010, 229 articles have been published by *Sociological Spectrum* with 478 authors, of whom 258 or 54.2% were affiliated with southern colleges or universities. Of the non-southern authors, 37 (7.8%) were international. This trend toward broader geographical representation is similar to the current profile of other regional journals. The broader reach has also been evident with the reviewers that the journal uses. In the past, reviewers tended to be members of the association, while today the majority of reviewers are national and international. The journal now strives to obtain reviewers who are the leading scholars in the subject areas under review. Arguably, the quality of *Sociological Spectrum* has also increased as the acceptance rate for papers is currently about 20%, a far cry from the rate when the journal began.¹⁷ To keep the acceptance rate low and hence keep the quality of papers high, the journal now publishes 24 or fewer papers each year (four per issue). Finally, since 2000 the majority of submissions to the journal are not from the South (in part, the result of large numbers of submissions coming from international authors), which is a pattern seen for many journals in the United States.

In 2002, the Institute for Scientific Information began to include *Sociological Spectrum* in its Journal Citation Report, which measures the “impact factor” of academic journals, that is, the number of journal citations divided by the number of articles. *Spectrum*’s first impact factor for papers published in 2001 to 2002 was 0.325 (Eller 2006). The most recent impact factor for the journal was 0.625 for 2018, an increase of almost 93%. As a comparison, the *New England Journal of Medicine* currently has an impact factor of 72.3, *Science* is at 37.2, *American Journal of Sociology* at 4.3, *Social Forces* at 2.1, *Social Compass* at 0.625, and *Sociological Inquiry* at 0.608.

To 1980

From dormitory rooms in 1975 to the Ramada Inn, the MSSA met for the third time in Monroe, Louisiana, in early November 1977, but now fielded 265 attendees (up from 160 the year before), including 63 from Louisiana and 51 from Texas—the biggest state totals—of whom at least 73 of the attendees (27.5%) were women. The association was reaching out regionally as well, with attendees coming from as far as Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The Program Chair for the year was the well-known Alvin Bertrand from Louisiana State University, probably one reason why his university had the largest contingent. There were 59 sessions in 1977, including workshops, panel discussions, caucus meetings (women and minorities), and 175 paper presentations, ranging from the usual topics such as social psychology, criminology, demography, and social theory to the less familiar: simulation games, visual sociology, a panel discussion of the television series *Roots*, and a potpourri session that including a paper on science fiction.

Russell Meier, attending as Vice-President, chaired the undergraduate student session, the first-time undergraduates presented papers, and he presented a paper on education. Harry Hale chaired the first social psychology session (with Frank Forwood as the discussant) and presented a paper on social factors in obesity. Lawrence Kratz presented a paper in the sociology of religion session on the Hutterites. Marsha McGee chaired the Women’s Caucus, presented a paper in the

session on the sociology of “Health, Services, Physicians, and Physiology,” and chaired the popular culture session. Larry Williams chaired the first social theory session, and James Harrison chaired one of the criminology sessions. Julian Roebuck, the inaugural president of the MSSA, chaired one of the social deviance sessions. Donald Allen, the President from 1976 to 1977, gave an address on “A Hundred Practical Tasks for Sociology,” which unfortunately does not survive; presented a paper on drinking behavior in one of the deviance sessions; and was a discussant in the social change session. Others present at the 1977 conference included future MSSA presidents: Alvin Bertrand (Pres.-Elect), Paul Chalfant, Samuel Wallace, Jerome Salomone, Gene Acuff, Marsha McGee, Dennis Peck, Willie Pearson, William Kenkel, Eddie Palmer, Joy Reeves, Thomas Durant, Dennis McSeveney, and Peter Heller, perhaps the youngest future president who attended that year. The keynote speaker of the conference was Joseph S. Himes of the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, the noted African American sociologist known for his books *Racial Conflict in American Society* and *Racial and Ethnic Relations*.

In part, the creation of the MSSA can be seen as a response to pressures affecting higher education in the 1970s. Social changes in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s profoundly altered American higher education (Geiger 2019; Thelin 2019). Colleges and universities expanded, first to accommodate returning veterans and then baby boomers. Ever larger cohorts of students were being admitted. Programs and faculties were expanded. The move from an industrial to a postindustrial economy encouraged expansion of curricula, including the creation of additional graduate programs in sociology. During the middle stage of this expansion, many graduate students were employed to help teach the growing influx of students. For the first time, even first-year graduate students were used as teaching assistants and some advanced graduate students were given their own courses to teach. These conditions contributed to both optimism and a false sense of security. Quite a few graduate students yielded to the temptation to take faculty positions before completing their doctorates, leading to later difficulty for some. Even experienced teachers were struggling to cope with heavy teaching loads.

Soon college and university administrators were anticipating lower student enrollments as successive cohorts of baby boomers completed their degrees. Competition for enrollments increased. More attention was given to recruiting nontraditional students and improving student retention. Faculty evaluation was made more systematic and greater emphasis placed on nonteaching activities. When economies faltered, budgets tightened. Vulnerable faculty members were let go as positions were eliminated. Tenured faculty anticipating retirement sometimes stayed on because their departments might not replace them. New hires were systematically made aware of expectations/requirements for teaching, research, service, and publication. True to long-standing academic values, tangible evidence of performance counted most, even if intangibles still mattered. Faculty were motivated to find ways to demonstrate their competence. Activity in professional associations provided a way to become recognized, present their research to their peers, seek advantageous professional bonds with colleagues, and keep up with trends in the profession.

These pressures extended into the realms of graduate and undergraduate education, eventually reaching the point where a graduate’s success in the job market depended not only on classroom grades and faculty recommendations but also on evidence of accomplishments even before graduation, rather than merely the promise of future accomplishments. In response, departments and professional associations sought ways to facilitate student participation in professional associations such as the MSSA, where students could compete to present papers, participate on panels, and meet influential professors who could be potential role models or mentors. This intensified pressures on programs with fewer resources to find a way to expose their students to professional associations and the benefits they offered. One adaptation was to carpool to transport both faculty and students to meetings. Some schools made vans available, allowing them to get larger contingents on the road. In this way, even undergraduate students could be shown the significance and advantages of participation in professional associations.

All of the ramifications of these developments could not be anticipated when the MSSA was launched, but the sociologists who gathered for that first organizational meeting were looking for ways to survive and prosper in a challenging and more demanding academic environment. Having a regional association with meetings closer to home looked promising because it could increase opportunities for professional participation. In subsequent years, members of the MSSA would take many initiatives to promote participation by both faculty and student members.¹⁸

Most of the standing committees created by the association at the time of its founding proved to reflect matters that have been of enduring importance to the association and its members through the years. The Nominations Committee, Membership Committee, and the Committee on the Profession were focused on good governance, sustaining the organization, and fostering professionalism. The Committee on Minorities, the Committee on Women, and the Committee on Small and Community Colleges were focused on inclusiveness and equality.

These committees provided a forum for colleagues with similar interests to collaborate, discuss issues, and problem solve on matters specific to their concerns. Over time, actions of the Council, annual meeting programs, and administrative policies were progressively more influenced by committee initiatives. True to its founding goals and kept honest by its committees, the association strove to find ways and means to increase its support for participation of women and minorities in the association and the profession. By means of their caucuses and through wider contacts, the committees have encouraged persons to organize sessions, submit papers, attend meetings, and seek to be nominated as officers of the association. These effects have been cumulative, as evidenced by the increasing visibility of women and minorities in particular, as well as by the greater impact of committee concerns on the business of the association.

Also, the committees continue to evolve. New committees can be added and the scope of existing committees can change. A Committee on Small Colleges was added in 1985 and chaired by Mary and Philip Kuhn of Hinds Junior College in Mississippi (and after Philip's death, by Mary Kuhn until 1992), after it was realized that the membership included a number of persons whose professional lives were centered in institutions fitting this designation. Later, with the support of Dennis McSeveny, the President at the time, the focus expanded and the committee was renamed the Committee on Small and Community Colleges. In 2015, the purview of the Committee on Women was broadened and it was renamed the Committee on Women, Gender, and Sexualities. The following year, the Committee on Minorities was renamed the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minorities.

Association records have also been used to monitor participation on the part of historically marginalized groups. It became standard practice for the chair of the Program Committee to include in the meetings events of special interest to minorities, women, and persons from small and community colleges. Open sessions and caucuses have become regular features of meeting programs. These events provide venues where committee chairs can encourage communication, elicit suggestions, and strengthen bonds between interested parties. In keeping with the association's spirit of openness, all persons have been welcome to attend, the only requisite being interest.

The Executive Council has always been receptive to discussing initiatives to increase participation of minorities and women. With respect to minorities, issues have often turned on using association resources to support participation. For example, measures were taken to reduce the cost of attending meetings. A new registration category was established, enabling faculty members to sponsor groups of students. Some faculty members even arranged bus transportation and housing arrangements for their groups. Consequently, the association became part of a larger effort to include more students, sometimes assisted by the educational institutions and/or personal faculty funds. Over the years, the attendance of many students, including those from historically black colleges and universities, was assisted in this way.

Willie Pearson, the first African American President of the MSSA, wrote the following in his 1985 session conference presentation, “MSSA Reflections: A Minority Perspective”:

Lest one feels that things have always worked so smoothly I would like to dispel that notion quickly. In its first four or five years of operation, the association had only one minority—Emory Davis—on its Executive Council. I, along with Bob Bullard, Joyce Smith, Mary Benjamin, Beverly Hendrix Wright, and a few others began a drive for greater minority representation in the association. The leadership of the association did listen and supported most of the group’s demands—especially with respect to the nominating system. For example, although blacks represented the largest segment of the minority membership, blacks did not hold the office of Chair of the Minority Caucus (now Chair, Minority Committee) until Mary Benjamin was elected as its third Chair.¹⁹

Because historic inequalities related to sex, gender, and sexuality operated somewhat differently from minority-related inequalities in American society, women’s issues more often turned on matters of status and inclusion. All MSSA officers were expected to work in favor of achieving acceptable levels of participation on the part of members of historically underrepresented social categories. In particular, nomination committees have tried to offer balanced slates of candidates.²⁰

Efforts of the Committee on the Profession have focused on activities during annual meetings. This has mainly taken the form of providing employment services. Sometimes the Committee has organized sessions on the profession, especially ones featuring discussions of interest to graduate and undergraduate students. From time to time, the committee has been concerned with professionalism exhibited by meeting participants. Session chairs have been asked to report certain facts about sessions. Data, such as numbers of “no-shows” at the conference generally, presenters, presentations, attendees, and discussions, have been reviewed to see if minimal expectations for professionalism have been met. Secretary-Treasurers have also used such data to see if session participants have been registering and have paid membership dues. This was an important concern during the first few years of the association’s existence, because total memberships were small and budgets were tight. On occasion, the Committee on the Profession has also given attention to breaches of professional ethics. When allegations about abusive conduct have arisen, issues have been resolved by informal means, referred to committees, and/or reported to outside authorities. On very rare occasions, officers have resigned under pressure or have been removed.

The association has supported professional advancement of its members. One early effort was intended to facilitate publication. Annual meeting participants were encouraged to submit polished versions of papers presented at the sessions to the Secretary-Treasurer. The idea, as noted previously, was to publish collections each year of articles called “Proceedings of the Mid-South Sociological Association.” As it turned out, only some presenters chose to submit. Some authors neglected to follow guidelines. Still others did not observe deadlines. Notwithstanding much effort, the initiative never turned out an attractive product of good quality before it was time to prepare for the next annual meeting. In the end, the idea generally proved unworkable with few exceptions as presented here.

1980s

As noted above, the late 1970s and early 1980s were a time of considerable change and financial worry for the new association, with the failure of *Sociological Forum* and the emergence of *Sociological Spectrum* in 1981. It was also a time for the association to move the annual meetings away from Monroe, Louisiana, and Jackson, Mississippi. In 1979, the association’s conference was in Memphis, Tennessee, and the new decade added two new states—Alabama and Arkansas—for our conference destinations. The young decade also saw the reemergence of the “Proceedings” for the 1981 conference in Shreveport, Louisiana, but this time there was a less ambitious approach and abstracts were included instead of entire papers. Among the most interesting perhaps were

abstracts from the session on “The Paramedic: An Intensive Examination of an Emerging Medical Specialty,” chaired by William McWhorter of VPI and State University, in which Denny Hill of Georgia Southern College, Eddie Palmer of Texas Tech University, and James Mannon of DePauw University discussed the development and standardization of “pre-hospital portable emergency room treatment,” or paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs). These had become a major advance in medical services at the time. Palmer (1983, 1989), who became President of the MSSA from 1989 to 1990, and Editor of the journal *Deviant Behavior*, contributed “‘Trauma Junkies’ and Street Work: Occupational Role Performances of Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians,” an article in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, and revisited in “Paramedic Performance” in *Sociological Spectrum*.

If medical services were not your thing, a more relaxing time might have been had in the session titled “Religiosity, Peer Behavior and the Use of Marijuana: An Empirical Investigation” by Robert D. McWilliams and Donald J. Shoemaker of VPI and State University. The authors reported that the study “provides support for the assertion that the frequency of church attendance is inversely associated with indulgence in victimless forms of deviance among young persons, specifically with the use of marijuana.” This is not to suggest that sociologists work overly hard, as might be evident in the presentation “The Structure and Function of the Public Drinking Places in the French Quarter of New Orleans” by Gerald O. Windham of Mississippi State University and David Salloum of Washington, DC, in which the authors explain, “This study delineates a constructed typology of bars in the French Quarter of New Orleans based on observations by one of the authors within 55 bars in the French Quarter over an 18 month period.” The leading author, Windham, had published many books and reports in his capacity as Director of the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University.

Quite sober and prescient too, Kathleen Handy’s (Louisiana State University-Shreveport) paper on “Blacks and the Criminal Justice System” is important even today: “This paper focuses on the status of minorities in the . . . administration of justice. For most Americans, the legal system works fairly well . . . [but] breaks down for those who differ substantially in culture or economic status from white middle class norms. Minorities face disadvantages throughout the judicial process from arrest, bail, trial to imprisonment. . . . In reference to the control of the structures of justice, law enforcement agencies, throughout most of the nation are staffed exclusively or overwhelmingly by whites.” Among other things, Handy (1984) would go on to publish similar work in *Sociological Spectrum*. Finally, the 1981 conference offered new sociologies, one paper in the medical sociology session on an “overlooked health profession,” namely, that of podiatry, by Jerri Bullard, James Hughes, Kenneth Perkins, and James Skipper of VPI and State University, and a session on maritime sociology chaired by John R. Maiolo of East Carolina University-Greenville, who later published at least three articles on that subject area. Beyond the academics, the conference in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1981 was especially noteworthy for the illustrations in the meeting program, the fine work of one of Clifton Bryant’s secretaries, Deborah Rhea.

The location of the 1985 conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, was the first time that a location beyond Monroe, Louisiana, had been chosen for the second time, the first Little Rock conference being held in 1980.²¹ Marsha McGee was now President, Dennis Peck was the President-Elect and Program Chair, and *Sociological Spectrum* was being edited by Sarah Brabant and Robert Grambling of the University of Southwestern Louisiana. The theme of the conference was “Technology, Social Change, and Sociology,” appropriate perhaps given the launching of relatively inexpensive personal computers: the Macintosh PC by Steve Jobs, and the Dell Computer by Michael Dell in 1984. Prior to that, computers cost the equivalent of \$7,200 in today’s dollars, but Dell was able to cut that by 74%. Windows would appear in 1985.

The plenary address was given by William R. Catton Jr. of Washington State University, “Homo Colossus and the Technological Turn-Around.” Catton was well known for his book *Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change* (1980), now thought to have been years

ahead of its time given the current focus on climate change, environmental degradation, and the “sixth extinction.” The 1985 conference was also the first time the MSSA reflected on its history with a panel discussion chaired by Dennis Peck that included Russell Meier, now of McMurry College, and Dale Welch, Meier’s department chair when the MSSA was established. A more formalized attempt at a history of the MSSA was made by Welch a year later but was ultimately unsuccessful for unknown reasons.

Under the presidency of James Skipper, Mobile, Alabama, was the location for the 14th annual meeting (1988), a new state venue. The theme was “Sociology: The Concerned Science,” and there were three special addresses: “Skimming Off the Cream: Mobility as a Seed-Bed for Segregation,” by Raymond W. Mack of Northwestern University; “South African Saga: An Affair of the Heart,” by Elaine Burgess of the University of North Carolina-Greensboro; and “The Lynching of Michael Donald and the Suit that Toppled the Klan,” by Pat Clark, the Director of Klanwatch in Montgomery, Alabama. Beginning his career at the University of Mississippi, Mack became sociology Chair at Northwestern in 1959 and Provost there in 1974. Elaine Burgess, a sociologist of race relations and inequality, authored *Negro Leadership in a Southern City* (1962).²² Her address to the MSSA was published in *Sociological Spectrum* in 1990. Klanwatch was a project by the Southern Poverty Law Center that was eventually combined into the Law Center’s “Intelligence Project,” focused on hate groups. Clark currently serves as Programs and Operations Director of the Fund for Nonviolence.

Among the most active members at the 1988 conference were Clifton Bryant, who presented a paper on Taiwan, was a discussant in the two sessions on Taiwan, and the one on work and occupations; Marc Matre, who presented two papers; K.S. Murty, from Atlantic University, who presented three papers; and Gloria J. Palileo, who presided over two sessions and presented the paper “Sex Role Attitudes, Locus of Control and Perceived Locus of Blame in Wife Battering.” Murty, currently a department Chair at Fort Valley State University in Georgia, went on to have a long career and was an occasional coauthor with Julian Roebuck. Palileo (1993) continued her work on women and published a paper in *Sociological Spectrum*.

During the 1980s, the association adopted several new administrative procedures and increased its support for scholarly achievement. Beginning in 1986, the process of site selection and contract negotiation was made more robust. A Site Selection Committee was created, and in 1988 the position of Hotel Contract Negotiator was designated. A Budget Committee was created in 1985, and a Committee on Honors, chaired by Clifton Bryant, was established in 1986. The latter began including student paper sessions in annual meeting programs, with some student paper sessions “competitive” and others “noncompetitive.” Committees were created to administer undergraduate and graduate student paper contests and designate the winning papers. Contestants have been required to follow guidelines and meet deadlines. Competitive paper winners receive awards at the annual meeting (monetary prizes beginning in 2017). In addition, winners of student paper contests have been given editorial help in developing their papers by the editorial team of *Sociological Spectrum*. Some years have brought more student participation than others, and the quality of student presentations has varied. In recent years, students have been encouraged to participate in poster sessions. In 2005, the family of Stanford M. Lyman (President, 1993–94) donated funds to establish the Stanford M. Lyman Memorial Scholarship, which is regularly awarded for the best dissertation.

1990s and beyond

Membership in the MSSA was strong and growing in the 1990s with eight years totaling more than 300 people, including three years (1990, 1995, and 1999) that had the highest student membership at 94 for each of those years. The most attended of the annual meetings was the one in Lafayette, Louisiana, in 1994 with 299 conferees. MSSA’s annual conferences continued to be

geographically close to its origins with the farthest conference away from Monroe, Louisiana, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1992. In all, the MSSA visited Alabama three times; Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi twice; and Tennessee once.

The themes of the 1990s conferences varied greatly, including "Teaching of Sociology," "Society and the Environment," "Race, Gender, and Culture in Society," "Environment, Technology and Human Community," "Sociology Grounded in Reality," "Public Health and Quality of Life," "Technology, Innovation and Higher Education," "Diversity in Action: Applying Sociology to Community Issues," and "Sexualities, Families and Agendas: Public and Private." Noted plenary speakers included Jack Levin of Northwestern University, who addressed the group with a presentation titled "Mass Murder: Myth and Reality." At the current count, Levin has authored or coauthored 33 books on violence and hate and is still teaching. In 1991, John F. Schnabel, a leading expert in the area, spoke on "Challenges of Teaching Sociology in a New Millennium." The plenary speaker in 1992 was Charles B. Lempeis, Chief of Staff, Office of United States Nuclear Waste Negotiator, who spoke on "The Social Ecology of Siting Nuclear Waste Facilities." E. Doyle McCarthy, known for her work in sociology of knowledge, culture, and emotions, spoke on "Imagined Communities: Widening Circles of identity Formation." In 1994, Kai Erikson of Yale spoke to the group on "Disaster, Culture, and the Alutiq Villages of Alaska." In 1996, Joycelyn Elders, the first African American appointed as Surgeon General of the United States, addressed the MSSA. The following year, Valarie G. King, Director of the Office of Diversity Initiatives for the University of Central Florida, spoke on "Implementing Diversity Initiatives." Pepper Schwartz of the University of Washington, nationally known in the field of sexuality and sexology, finished out the decade of plenary speakers.

In the 1990s, the number of annual conference sessions varied from a low of 71 in 1997 to a high of 94 in 1996. Six of the 10 conferences had at least 80 sessions. There were 41 sessions on women's issues and gender for the decade, 60 related to minorities, and 44 concerning students. Of the sessions concerning women, 51.2% were in the middle of the decade (1994–96), and 24.4% were both prior to that time and following 1996. High years for minority sessions were 1991, 1993, 1996, and 1998, or 61.7% of all minority sessions. The lowest number of minority sessions was 1990 with only one. Student sessions varied less with three for 1992, 1998, and 1999, to a high for 1997 with seven sessions and six in 1991. With the possible exception of the earliest years, these differences may say more about the interests of conference-goers than the lack of support for diversity. And, of course, these are historical data. Today there are no barriers in the MSSA with regard to service and conference participation. Mirroring the discipline of sociology as a whole, the majority of members and conferees today are female; most of the Board of Directors are women; since 2018 (vol. 38, issue 3), the majority of published authors in *Sociological Spectrum* have been women; and the last two *Spectrum* awards for best paper have also gone to women.²³

In the early 1990s, *Sociological Spectrum* was still dependent on the MSSA for strong papers, and members did their part to support the journal. The following is a list of MSSA members who contributed papers to and were published in *Sociological Spectrum* in the half-decade beginning with 1990: Alan C. Acock, Bertram Allen, Conner Bailey, William B. Bankston, Russell P.D. Burton, Thomas C. Calhoun, Jay Corzine, Arthur G. Cosby, Donna K. Darden, J. Kenneth Davidson, Christopher L. Dyer, Charles E. Faupel, Craig J. Forsyth, DeAnn Gauthier (Kalich), David Gay, Duane A. Gill, Gary Griffin, James W. Grimm, Stephen B. Groce, Frank M. Howell, Alice A. Kemp, William F. Kenkel, J. David Knottnerus, Steve Kroll-Smith, Anthony E. Ladd, Shirley Laska, Anthony Margavio, Dan McMurry, Eddie Palmer, F. Dale Parent, Steven Picou, David J. Pratto, Joy B. Reeves, Jerry Salomone, James Skipper, Cynthia Wade, J. Gipson Wells, Athur Wilke, and Steven Worden. This list includes 15 presidents of the MSSA. It is clear that without their support in the form of publishable contributions, the journal would not have been as successful and may not have continued through to the present day.

In 1991, the Committee on Small and Community Colleges, which had been an ad hoc committee, became a standing committee. In 1992, the Stanford M. Lyman Distinguished Book Award was created and criteria and procedures were established by Jackie Eller. In 1994, editors of *Sociological Spectrum* began serving as chairs of the *Sociological Spectrum* Award Committee, an award given to the author(s) of the best paper published in that year. In 1996, an official webmaster was appointed. In 1999, the Association established funds to support the travel and scholarship of minority students. As noted previously, a Code of Ethics and Policies and Procedures of the Committee on Professional Ethics were created in 2001.

These diverse initiatives have expanded the scope and strengthened the efforts of the association to support the scholarship of members, recognize accomplishments, and uphold ethical standards of the profession. In addition, the association honors the careers of outstanding sociologists by presenting Lifetime Achievements Awards. The *Sociological Spectrum Award*, the Stanford M. Lyman Distinguished Book Award, and other awards have become highlights of the annual meeting banquet.²⁴

In the 20 years of MSSA conferences (2000–2019), of the more popular paper sessions and topical presentations by subject area, roughly 600 in all, about 60% were in four general areas: crime and deviance, gender and sexuality, health and illness, and race and ethnicity. Of those 60%, 20% accounted for crime and deviance; 15% for gender and sexuality; and together, health and illness and race and ethnicity about 25%. Another 30% composed seven general areas: environmental issues, teaching, education, disaster research, professional issues, religion, and marriage and the family. Of these, environmental issues lead the way with more than 5%, whereas religion and marriage and the family together were last, making up a total of about 7%. Historical sociology, disability status, popular culture, aging, social problems, and social psychology lagged behind. These findings are similar to the work of Kersen and Perry (2010), and as noted by these authors it is common for sessions to combine subject areas (especially across race, gender, and class), such that precision with regard to subject area percentages is problematic. Recent trends show an increase in sessions devoted to disasters and a decrease in sessions on applied research, aging, and theory. While we do not have data from other regional conferences, the general impression among colleagues is that the strong focus on crime and deviance is typical across other meetings, although the MSSA focus on gender and sexuality, and race and ethnicity may exceed the work done elsewhere.

In the year 2000, the annual MSSA conference was held in Knoxville, Tennessee, the furthest from its roots in Louisiana. But in 2005 it went to Atlanta, Georgia, and in 2016 North Charleston, South Carolina. It would have been in Nashville, Tennessee, in 2020 but for COVID-19 (the conference will be online), and Charlottesville, South Carolina, the following year. In 2001 a last attempt was made to include a “Proceedings” of the conference (although it was not called that at the time), and 44 abstracts of program presentations made their way into the program.²⁵ Some highlights included a paper by Holli R. Drummond of the University of Georgia, and Walter K. Jeznach of the University of South Alabama, for their paper “The Impact of Physical Block Characteristics on Adolescent Hopelessness.” Based on prior research related to adolescent hopelessness and risk behavior, the paper focused on the physical characteristics of neighborhood blocks as an important link between hopelessness and risk behavior, a notion that was important in the Chicago School and later work by criminologists concerning social disorganization theory (e.g., Sampson and Groves 1989). Drummond also revisited these themes in a paper published in *Deviant Behavior* (Drummond, Bolland, and Harris 2011). Drummond currently serves as Chair of the Sociology and Criminology Department at Western Kentucky University. Another paper from the 2001 conference was Carl Bankston’s “No Bowling at All: Television, the *Vita Inactiva*, and Social Capital.” With data from the General Social Survey, Bankston found that “the more individuals are active in their recreational lives, the more they tend to socialize informally with others and the more they tend to be members of formal

organizations. Television watching, however, is negatively related to recreational involvement and informal and formal social engagement.” Bankston (2003) went on to publish this paper and was the President of the association in 2006 to 2007.

Economic inequality increased in the United States in the 1980s, what economists call the great divergence (Noah 2013). The national economy was changed in ways that increased income and wealth shares for persons at the top of society and proportionally reduced these shares for others. Effects were nationwide but may have produced particularly stressful conditions in mid-South states, all of which tend to rank toward the bottom on measures of income and wealth. In spite of these pressures, finances of the MSSA appeared healthy until the national credit bubble burst, producing the Great Recession of 2008. Perhaps the high point for the association to date came in 2002 and 2003 when more than 200 papers were presented at the conferences. However, during the subsequent economic downturn after the recession, association membership and meeting participation declined. Officers of the association were faced with difficult decisions. In 2013, important changes were made to improve administrative and accounting practices of the organization. To facilitate this, Earl Wright (President, 2012–13), Tim Gongaware (President, 2013–14), and Ruth Chananie, the Secretary-Treasurer (later President, 2017–18) took action to review past business records, change banking practices, recoup losses, and make appropriate organizational changes. Subsequently, the association increased its use of electronic banking services and its reliance on electronic communication. By 2015, nearly all Executive Council business was being conducted with electronic documents. In addition, the internet was being used to conduct council meetings, reducing the need to travel. These innovations reduced costs, particularly costs associated with serving as an officer of the association.

In 2015, the President of the MSSA was Anita Bledsoe-Gardner of Johnson C. Smith University in North Carolina (the second African American woman to head the MSSA, following Ollie G. Christian in 2009–10), and the conference theme was titled “On the Edge of Theory and Practice: A Sociology Without Borders.” There were three plenary addresses that year, the first by Thomas J. Durant Jr., President of the association (1996–97), a Professor at Louisiana State University, recipient of many academic awards and honors, and the author of numerous books and articles, including *Plantation Society and Race Relations: The Origins of Inequality* (1999) and *Charity Hospitals of Louisiana: A Study of Poverty, Politics, Public Health and the Public Interest* (2010), as well as Editor of an important special issue of *Sociological Spectrum*, “Sociology in the 21st Century: State of the Profession” (1995) that included articles by Durant, Alvin Bertrand, Clifton Bryant, Craig Forsyth, David Knottnerus, Brenda Maguire, Clyde McDaniel, Eddie Palmer, and Edwin Rhyné. The second plenary speaker was Dennis McSeveney (President, 1997–98), whose presentation was titled “It’s Not the Institutions, It’s the People: American Higher Education in the 21st Century.” Dennis has had a long career as an administrator and professor, including roles as the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Associate Provost at the University of New Orleans, with publications in journals such as *Adolescence* (Cindia, Hugh Floyd, and McSeveney 1983), *Urban Studies* (Laska, Jerrol Seaman, and McSeveney 1982), and *Sociological Spectrum* (Allen, McSeveney, and Bankston 1981). The final presentation focused on a documentary film by Kinko Ito, Professor of Sociology at University of Arkansas, “Have You Heard About the Ainu? Elders of Japan’s Indigenous People Speak.” Ito is internationally known for her work on Japanese popular culture and the Ainu people.

Among the strong papers presented at the 2015 conference were, “Fantasies of Safety,” in the deviance session that was later published in *Deviant Behavior* by Ross, Deshotels (President, 2020–21), and Forsyth (2018) from Jacksonville State University; “Work–Family Balance and Marital Satisfaction: The Mediating Effects of Mental and Physical Health,” in the workplace inequality session by Yucel (2017) from William Paterson University, published in *Society & Mental Health*; and “Urban Poverty, Disaster Recovery, and Hurricane Katrina,” in the panel session on Hurricane Katrina by Jessica Pardee of the Rochester Institute of Technology, which in

part was based on her book *Surviving Katrina* (2014). Pardee won the Stanford M. Lyman Distinguished Book Award for her *Surviving Katrina* work and currently serves as Secretary-Treasurer for the association.

Membership and participation in the MSSA have fluctuated over the years. Totals have never exceeded many hundreds of persons, with many members coming from smaller colleges and universities. However, smaller size has provided significant advantages. From the beginning, it has been easier for members, especially young members and students, to get on the annual meeting program. Organizers and presenters have also had the liberty to explore specialized, even offbeat, research interests. And the ambience at the annual meeting is usually relaxed and friendly (if not always as relaxed as Eddie Palmer's memory of one fully clothed and otherwise distinguished member being fished out of a hotel pool), a pleasant and welcoming environment for students and newcomers beginning their professional careers. Perhaps this represents a striking contrast to some academic environments where encouragement and kindness may take a back seat to careerism and ambition.

Given its origins and current circumstances, sustaining the MSSA presents three major challenges, which are sometimes at odds with one another. To serve its members in the competitive world of American academics, the MSSA must validate professionalism and set high standards. A tint of what some might call elitism helps with this. On the other hand, to facilitate careers of persons who might be excluded or who are at risk for not reaching their full potential, the MSSA must remain open and supportive. Tolerance and resources are needed to manage this. Finally, costs must be controlled to keep participation within the reach of members. The MSSA continues to allocate its resources in an effort to meet these challenges.

In 2017 the MSSA, with the help of Nashville, Tennessee, attorney Lynn Egan, became a non-profit corporation under provisions of the Tennessee Nonprofit Corporation Act and was renamed Mid-South Sociological Association Inc.²⁶ Before that, it was an unincorporated association. Being incorporated facilitates business transactions, provides a well-understood procedural structure common to all nonprofit legal entities, and provides protection from certain liabilities to the association and the members who manage it. These legalities have not altered the nature of the MSSA or the way it operates. This action entailed some changes in terminology in its governing documents to conform to the requirements of Tennessee statutes regarding corporations. For example, the Constitution is now known as the Bylaws. The Executive Council is called the Board of Directors.

Beginning in 2017, the association seems also to have found its footing again with regard to membership and participation in the annual meetings. Following several years of decline, more than 150 papers were presented each during the 2017 and 2018 conferences. The most recent and 45th annual conference of 2019 was held in Jackson, Mississippi, only about 100 miles west from where the association began in Monroe, Louisiana, in 1975. The theme was "Focusing Attention on Intersecting Systems of Oppression in the #MeToo Era," and the plenary speaker was the noted Lynn Weber, who titled her presentation "Doing Intersectionality—From Theory to Action." Weber is Distinguished Professor Emerita of Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of South Carolina, and with Reeve Vanneman (1987) is the author of *The American Perception of Class*, recently selected by the National Endowment for the Humanities as an Influential Book.²⁷ The theme of the conference was well timed, as *Sociological Spectrum* expects to publish a special issue on the topic of intersectionality edited by Sarah Donley and Melencia Johnson in 2020 or early 2021. (Another special issue on the COVID-19 pandemic edited by DeMond Miller and Roland Thorpe Jr. will be published in 2021.) While only a short time has passed since the conference was held, at least one paper has already been published. Because suicide rates for men are considerably higher than that for women (five to one, mainly the result of the use of guns as a method of suicide), much less attention has been paid to the topic of women and suicide. In the session on Health, Morbidity, and Mortality, and

recently published in the medical journal *International Journal of Women's Health*, Kposowa, Ezzat, and Breault (2019) show that unemployed women are three times more likely to commit suicide than unemployed men, a finding that may well be related to the issues exposed by the MeToo movement.²⁸ Finally, at the 2019 conference, the first inaugural Thomas C. Calhoun Excellence in Mentoring Award was presented to Jackie Eller for her outstanding help mentoring students and younger colleagues.

Indeed, mentoring is MSSA's long suit. The organization prospers with the steadfast support from sociologists and other scholars at all levels in the academic world, including graduate and undergraduate students. *Sociological Spectrum* continues to be a part of this approach. It regularly publishes with no thought to seniority, titles, academic affiliations, and the curriculum vitae of authors. If an author has something important to say, and says it reasonably well, *Sociological Spectrum* will likely publish the author, whether he or she is a student or the president of the association. MSSA support to its members takes the forms of generosity and determined service. As in the past, it continues to provide opportunities in sociology and related disciplines for many who would otherwise lack them, and to younger people who might not ever consider an academic career. It is important to emphasize that from the beginning, although it was rarely put down in writing, the MSSA has been strongly supportive of student involvement and professionalism. Careerism and ambition are never absent in academic organizations, but the MSSA has always taken action to privilege the lives and careers of member students. In writing this article, dozens of stories were shared; the most common, and the ones remembered most fondly by members, are of the generous, supportive and protective ways in which younger and less senior members were treated by more established members. Compared with many academic associations, the MSSA receives high marks in the way that members of the association have behaved toward younger colleagues and students, and we can only hope those largely unwritten values will continue. The MSSA has always been a welcoming organization. One need not be accomplished, have written an important paper, or indeed any paper at all to be welcomed. The MSSA standard since 1975 is that if you show up, the association and its members will help. Today, 45 years since the founding, we don't know of a better organizing principle.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, material for this history can be accessed in the MSSA Archives (see [Appendix 1](#)).
2. In talking with several members two misconceptions about the early history of the MSSA are common. First, Julian Roebuck was the first President but not the founder of the association or the person who originated the idea of a new regional sociology association, and Russell Meier, a new Associate Professor at the time, was not the department Chair at NLU. That position was indeed held by G. Dale Welch, who had a PhD in sociology at Louisiana State University in 1970. Welch was supportive of Meier's plans and as early as 1977 was interested in the history of the MSSA. He became the first Archivist (1978–2002). The association also briefly had a position of Historian beginning in 1978, held by Richard Rettig of Oklahoma State University.
3. Roebuck (1978) reports that Russell Meier met with Larry Williams and James Harrison in 1974 and 1975 to pursue Meier's plan for establishing a new regional sociology association. According to Ron Aday of Middle Tennessee State University, Meier may well have come up with the idea of a new sociological association when he was at Arkansas State University prior to his association with NLU.
4. Jerry Waxman acted as "Temporary Secretary" at the first organizational meeting on November 6, 1975, and was responsible for the minutes of that meeting, which are currently available in the MSSA Archives.
5. Given its title, perhaps the most interesting paper from the potpourri session was one by E. Peelle and B. Purdy from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, "A Case Study of Community Effects at Two Operating Nuclear Power Plants." While the most serious nuclear power plant accident would not occur for a few more years in 1979 at Three Mile Island, discussion about safety was a concern from the beginning (Osif and Baratta 2006).
6. Another paper based on the same research was presented by Chiappetta, McSeveney, and Floyd (1977) at the Midwest Sociological Society in April 1976.

7. The SSS was formed at a meeting in April 1935. E.T. Krueger of Vanderbilt University was the first President. The first annual conference was in 1936 in Atlanta, Georgia, with a membership of 154. Members were from 13 states, with the highest state total being North Carolina followed closely by Georgia. By 1960, the majority of members were from North Carolina. The first African American President of the SSS was Charles S. Johnson in 1946. In the 10 years prior to the MSSA (1965–74), the following were the institutional affiliations of presidents of the SSS: University of Miami, North Carolina College, University of Kentucky, Vanderbilt University, Duke University, Emory University, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Florida State University, and University of Georgia, none of which were from small colleges or universities. For more on the history of the SSS, see Brooks and Bertrand (1962). In the half decade beginning in 1965, 228 articles were published in *Social Forces* (Vol. 43.3–48.2), of which 19 (8.3%) were from authors in the association's mid-South region, and 4 (1.8%) were from authors who were not at large universities, namely, Kentucky Southern College, Tuskegee Institute, University of Alabama-Huntsville, and West Georgia College. Although a woman (Katharine Jocher, University of North Carolina) had been the president of the SSS as far back as 1943, after that no female had taken the post until 1983. MSSA's first woman President was Martha McGee (1984–85). Five of the first eight Vice-Presidents of the MSSA were women (1975–83): Sarah Brabant, Marsha McGee, Shirlee A. Owens, Mary E. Benjamin, and Joy B. Reeves (Appendix 8). McGee was the first editor of *Sociological Forum* and with James K. Skipper Jr. was the first editor of *Sociological Spectrum*. None of the 19 articles in *Social Forces* (1965–69) that were from states designated by the MSSA as part of its region had a female author. Dennis McSeveney (President, 1997–98) and Dennis Peck (President, 1985–86), among others, strongly support the notion of the important influence of Sarah Brabant, Marsha McGee, and Shirlee Owens in the early development of the MSSA (personal communication). Finally, Joy Reeves (President, 1991–92) of Stephen F. Austin University in Texas, reported minutes as Chair of the Women's Caucus in 1980 indicating that 36% and 27% of presenters of the 1979 and 1980 conferences, respectively, were female. That compared with 28% of presenters at the American Sociological Association meetings in 1979. Reeves also estimated the membership of the MSSA to be 25% female in 1980.
8. The SSSA, the oldest regional social science association founded in 1919, was established by members of the Department of Government at the University of Texas (Ewing 1950). The stated reason for founding the group was the difficulty of attending the American Political Science Association meetings. The first presidents of the SSSA were government officials, including mayors, state senators, and judges.
9. In a 1984 letter to Dale Welch, Chair of Criminal Justice, Social Work, and Sociology at NLU, Alvin L. Bertrand of Louisiana State University, third President of the MSSA, wrote, "My first reaction on receiving the mimeographed notice of the formation of the Society was somewhat mixed. I was not sure another society was needed or would thrive—we had not had much luck with a state organization. However, my strong feeling was that any young sociologist who had an idea or "dream" should be helped out in any way possible—so I tried to encourage Russ and the others, as much for their own professional growth as for the development of a new society."
10. See Salomone's (1982) interesting survey of sociology from 1961 to 1981 from his presidential address at the MSSA's 1981 meetings in Shreveport, Louisiana.
11. C. Eddie Palmer, President of the MSSA in 1989 to 1990, was the main advocate for establishing the Operations and Procedures Manual.
12. This ordering of names is taken from the first issue (Fall 1978, vol. 1) and appears to be based on seniority and academic reputation at the time.
13. An Ad Hoc Committee on Journal Merger, consisting of Clifton Bryant, Marsha McGee, Julian Roebuck, and James Skipper, was formed and tentatively named the new journal *Sociological Context*. The financial issues were largely alleviated by a loan of \$5,000 to the MSSA by Jerry Salomone.
14. The third and last female author in *Sociological Forum* was Diane E. Taub in the Fall 1980 issue.
15. The first volume of *Sociological Spectrum* had five female authors of 47 total, or 10.6%.
16. Julian Roebuck was upset about the trends in publication in *Sociological Spectrum*. In 1986 he wrote the following to Dale Welch, Chair of Criminal Justice, Social Work and Sociology at NLU: "Our plans were to publish a journal with an authorship primarily from the membership. I now see articles authored by people all over the United States. Moreover, some of them from within and without the South are members of elitist universities. This makes me sick!" As if in counterpoint, Marsha McGee independently wrote Welch—who was then putting together a history of the association—the following more inclusive sentiment one week later: "Although most of the MSSA's membership is drawn from the South, participation in the organization has increased to include people from all over the country and other nations during the years since we began. Our journal, *Sociological Spectrum*, is widely respected and continues to thrive."
17. Of course, at the beginning rejection rates were low, and well into the 2000s rejection rates were 40% to 50%, sometimes lower. However, rejection rates tended to go up in the 2000s.

18. Dennis McSeveney reports on a relationship between faculty and students that is characteristic of the welcoming nature of the association: “When Martin Levin left Emory to become head of the Department of Sociology at Mississippi State University, he immediately began encouraging MSUs faculty and doctoral students to participate in the MSSA. MSU began hosting an annual, large, open reception at MSSA meetings and did so until Levin left MSU to chair the department at Memphis” (personal communication).
19. Pearson (1982) is the author of a paper that is of value today. Based on survey research from his PhD dissertation at Southern Illinois University, Pearson wrote on 557 African Americans who had obtained doctorates in the natural sciences: “The typical black U.S. scientist is a male who grew up in a predominantly black neighborhood in a lower middle-class family . . . graduated in the top quartile of a predominantly black school . . . enrolled in a predominantly black college . . . [pursued a PhD from] a university located in the Midwest . . . and returned to the South to pursue a career in a predominantly black college.” Pearson remains an active member of the association with 23 conference presentations beginning in 1997 and has published six books on African Americans and science. His most recent are *Changing the Face of Engineering: The African American Experience*, edited with John Brooks Slaughter and Yu Tao (2015), and *Advancing Women in Science: An International Perspective*, edited with Lisa M. Frehill and Connie L. Neely (2015).
20. Dennis McSeveney suggested, “Key events at annual meetings that have reinforced the racial and gender diversity of MSSA are the luncheons for the Women’s Caucus and the Minority (now renamed) Caucus. These have fostered community with MSSA and nurtured future leaders” (personal communication).
21. The first conference location beyond Monroe, Louisiana, was in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1978. Overall, the most common conference location was Jackson and Mobile, Alabama, with six conferences each, followed by Lafayette, Louisiana, with five and Little Rock, Arkansas, and Monroe, Louisiana, with four. Three of the four Monroe-based conferences were held in the first three years of the organization. By decade and state, three conferences in 1980 to 1989 were in Louisiana: Baton Rouge (1989), Monroe (1984), and Shreveport (1981). From 1990 to 1999, Alabama had the most conferences: Huntsville (1997), Mobile (1995), and Montgomery (1993). From 2000 to 2009, Alabama and Louisiana had three conferences each, and from 2010 to 2019, Alabama again had the most conferences—three. Note that discussion of all conference programs in this article was not possible given space consideration.
22. Burgess was President of the Southern Sociological Society in 1983.
23. It should be said that today, most academic journal decisions are based on reviewers’ assessments and not those of the editors, and because generally papers in the social science are blinded, the chance of discrimination based on gender or minority status is reduced. Of course, this does not mean it does not happen. Experienced scholars can become familiar enough with the topics, themes, and writing styles of their colleagues and able to identify them even in a blinded process.
24. Previously called the MSSA Book Award established in 1990, Stanford Lyman received four awards and two honorable mentions.
25. Including presentation abstracts in conference programs is an effective way to create a record of the scholarly activities of conferees.
26. The lack of a comma before the “Inc.” is a legal formalism. The inclusion of a designation of corporate entity status such as “Company,” “Incorporated,” or “Inc.” is required under Tennessee corporate law. For this reason, the Inc. designation was added to the MSSA name when it was incorporated in 2017.
27. See also Timberlake, Cannon, and Higgenbotham (1988).
28. Another paper by the same authors—Kposowa, Ezzat, and Breault (2020)—offered a new theoretical approach to Durkheim’s theory of suicide and was based on a 2018 MSSA conference paper and published in *Spectrum*.

Author notes

Marc Matre, a Professor at the University of South Alabama, with a PhD in 1969 from Ohio State University. He authored many journal articles including in *Sociological Spectrum*, and was the longest serving Secretary-Treasurer, 1986–1994 & 1996–1999, and MSSA Archivist from 2015 until his death in 2018.

Kevin Breault, a Professor at Middle Tennessee State University, with a PhD from the University of Chicago in 1986. He has publications in *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, and medical journals among others, and is Editor-in-Chief of *Spectrum* and Archivist of the MSSA. His main interest is social epidemiology.

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Appendix 1. Acknowledgments and Archival Sources

This article would not have been possible were it not for the contributions of a large number of anonymous reviewers, many more than the journal requires for regular submissions. Most of the reviewers were MSSA members who had firsthand experience with and were instrumental in the early development of the association. In addition, the membership was asked for its input into the project, and many responded. Material was also added from other sources, including interviews in our newsletter, *Forum* (Deshotels 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Durant, 2016; Gongaware, 2015). Especially helpful were the efforts, written material, and personal interviews from the following: Ronald H. Aday, Roger Bates, the late Thomas Calhoun (President, 2005–2006), Ruth Chananie (President, 2017–18), Kim Davies (President, 2008–09), Tina Deshotels (President, 2020–21), Thomas Durant (President, 1986–87), Jackie Eller (President, 2003–04), H. Hugh Floyd, Tim Gongaware (President, 2013–14), Roma Hanks (President, 2010–11), Thomas Kersen, David May, Dennis R. McSeveney (President, 1997–98), Eddie Palmer (President, 1989–90), Willie Pearson (President, 1986–87), Dennis Peck (President, 1985–86), and Catherine Potter. An article previously published in *Sociological Spectrum* by Abbott Ferriss (2004) was useful on the establishment of the MSSA journals, *Sociological Forum* and *Sociological Spectrum*. Similarly, Jackie Eller's (2006) Presidential Address about *Spectrum* was quite helpful, as was Thomas Kersen and Doris Perry's (2010) presentation to the MSSA. It is also important to note those who were singled out in personal correspondence concerning those who in recent years were especially important to the association: Jessica Abbott (President, 2019–20), Anita Bledsoe-Gardner (President, 2014–15), Thomas Calhoun, Ruth Chananie, Nicola Davis Bivens, Tina Deshotels, Sarah Donley, Lynn Egan, Jackie Eller, Tim Gongaware, Patricia Gleich, Melencia Johnson, David May, Shelly McGrath, DeMond Miller (President, 2015–2016), Jessica Pardee, Dennis Peck, Jason Ulsperger (President, 2018–19), and Earl Wright (President, 2012–13). Finally, research for the paper was critically aided by the two MSSA archives: one at the University of Louisiana-Monroe containing 51 boxes, and the other 4 boxes in the hands of the current MSSA Archivist, Kevin Breault (see below). Heather Pilcher, a Research Librarian at the University of Louisiana-Monroe library, spent many hours on the project, and her help is greatly appreciated. Finally, Ruth Chananie and Lynn Egan closely read the paper for the inevitable mistakes.

ARCHIVES

Mid-South Sociological Association Collection at the University of Louisiana at Monroe in Document Storage Boxes:

1. Boxes 1–9: 90 Sociological Spectrum manuscripts.
2. Box 9: President Reception & Invitations, and material related to MSSA Committees.
3. Boxes 10–13: MSSA Correspondence from 1978–1992.
4. Box 14: Misc. and Forum publications for 1993–1994.
5. Box 15: Misc. and material related to the Constitution and Operations & Procedures Manual.
6. Box 16: Misc. and material related to the Constitution.
7. Box 17: Misc. and Membership Lists and Directories 1983–1994.
8. Box 18: Membership Directories for 1994–1995.

9. Box 19: Misc.
10. Boxes 20–23: Registration & Dues for 1987–1992.
11. Boxes 24–28: Financial information.
12. Box 28: Misc., material related to the Secretary-Treasurer, and *Spectrum* issues 17:1–2.
13. Box 29: *Sociological Spectrum* volume 17:3 and four manuscripts.
14. Boxes 30–35: *Sociological Spectrum* manuscripts and volumes 17:3–4, 18:1–4.
15. Box 36–38: Election material.
16. Box 38: Receipt Books.
17. Box 39: Ledgers.
18. Box 40: Check Stub Receipts.
19. Boxes 41–42: *Sociological Spectrum* volumes 1–19 (1981–1999).
20. Box 43: *Sociological Forum* volume 1 (1978), misc.

Mid-South Sociological Association Collection, Univ. of Louisiana at Monroe in Book Boxes:

1. Eight boxes given to the university by Marc Matre including copies of *Sociological Forum*, *Sociological Spectrum*, *Forum*, Annual Conference Programs, *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association*, meeting minutes, misc.

Mid-South Sociological Association Archivist Collection: Currently with Kevin Breault

1. Boxes 1–2: Misc. from Marc Matre's office, most material from his position as Secretary-Treasurer.
2. Boxes 3–4: Conference Programs: 1, 3, 7–32, 34–45, minutes, *Mid-South Sociological Association 1981 Annual Proceedings*, misc.

Appendix 2. Mid-South Sociological Association Executive Council, 1975–1976

President

Julian Roebuck

Department of Sociology

Mississippi State University

President-Elect

Donald E. Allen [Database]

Department of Sociology

Oklahoma State University

Vice-President

J. Larry Williams

Department of Sociology

Arkansas State University

Vice-President-Elect

Russell H. Meier [Database]

Department of Sociology

Northeast Louisiana University

Secretary-Treasurer

Jerry J. Waxman

Department of Sociology

University of South Alabama

Committee on Nominations

Emory G. Davis, Chair

Department of Sociology

Texas Tech University

Program Committee

Donald E. Allen, Chair

Department of Sociology

Oklahoma State University
 Membership Committee
 Don Sieger, Chair
 Department of Sociology
 University of Arkansas
 Committee on the Profession
 H. Paul Chalfant, Chair
 Department of Sociology
 Texas Tech University
 Committee on Women
 Marsha McGee, Chair
 Department of Sociology
 Northeast Louisiana University
 Committee on Minorities
 Gloria Javillonar, Chair
 Department of Sociology
 University of South Alabama

Appendix 3. MSSA Membership for the First Annual Meeting by Affiliation

ALABAMA, UNIV. OF:
 Ficken, Roland
 ALABAMA-BIRMINGHAM, UNIV. OF:
 Binderman, Murray B.
 AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
 Carey, Phil
 ARKANSAS, UNIV. OF:
 Sieger, Donald D.
 ARKANSAS-MONTICELLO, UNIV. OF:
 Farace, Dominic
 ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY:
 Aday, Ronald H.
 Williams, Larry
 CAMERON UNIVERSITY:
 Adrus, Charles E.
 GEORGIA, UNIV. OF:
 Garbin, Albeno P.
 JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY:
 Rao, V. Nandini
 Rao, V.V. Prakasa
 LOUISIANA DEPT. OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE:
 Clark, Stuart
 LOUISIANA REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMIN.
 Grimes, J. Robert
 LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY:
 Conway, William
 MISSOURI SOUTHERN STATE COLLEGE (now University):
 Clowers, Larry E.
 MISSISSIPPI, UNIV. OF:
 Liao, Winston
 Smith, Mickey C.
 MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY:
 Quan, Robert
 Roebuck, Julian B.
 NEW ORLEANS, UNIV. OF:
 Abbott, Daniel J.
 Calónico, James M.

Chiappetta, William
Edgar, Richard E.
Floyd, H. Hugh
Margavio, Anthony
McSeveney, Dennis
NORTHEAST LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY (now Univ. of LA-Monroe):
Forwood, Frank
Hale, Harry
Kratz, Lawrence A.
McGee, Marsha
Meier, Russell H.
NORTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY:
Moore, Dean F. [Database]
Pippin, Roland N.
OAK RIDGE NATIONAL LABORATORY:
Peelle, E.
Purdy, B.
OKLAHOMA DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS:
Miller, Betty
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY:
Allen, Donald, E.
Bixler, Terry J.
Bynum, Jack E.
Dodder, Richard B.
Terry Norris
Sandhu, Harjit S.
Sumervill, Charles
Sumervill, Winona
Webster, Edgar
OUR LADY OF HOLY CROSS (now Univ. of Holy Cross):
Morrison, Betty L.
SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY:
Bennett, Walter H.
SOUTH ALABAMA, UNIV. OF:
Church, Avery G.
Javillonar, Gloria
Mader, Paul Douglas
Mizell, Terrence A.
Reed, John P.
Waxman, Jerry J.
SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY:
Levy, Louis
SOUTHWESTERN LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY (now Univ. of Louisiana-Lafayette):
Brabant, Sarah
STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY:
Clagett, Arthur
Dickerson, Ben
Ott, Mary
Thompson, Leslie [Database]
Wade, M.B.
TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY:
Chalfant, H. Paul
Cummings, Lawrence E.
Davis, Emory G.
Palmer, C. Eddie
Roper, Brent
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY:
Mader, Frederick H.

Appendix 4. MSSA Membership for First Annual Meeting by Location

Alabama: 8
 Arkansas: 4
 District of Columbia: 1
 Georgia: 1
 Kentucky: 1
 Louisiana: 20
 Mississippi: 6
 Missouri: 1
 Oklahoma: 11
 Tennessee: 2
 Texas: 11

Appendix 5. President, Mid-South Sociological Association, 1975–2020

1975–1976 Julian B. Roebuck, Mississippi State University
 1976–1977 Donald E. Allen, Oklahoma State University
 1977–1978 Alvin L. Bertrand, Louisiana State University
 1978–1979 H. Paul Chalfant, Texas Tech University
 1979–1980 Samuel E. Wallace, University of Tennessee–Knoxville
 1980–1981 Jerome J. Salomone, Southeastern Louisiana University
 1981–1982 Clifton D. Bryant, VPI & State University
 1982–1983 Gene F. Acuff, Oklahoma State University
 1983–1984 Donald R. South, University of South Alabama
 1984–1985 Marsha G. McGee, Northeast Louisiana University
 1985–1986 Dennis L. Peck, University of Alabama
 1986–1987 Willie Pearson Jr., Wake Forest University
 1987–1988 James K. Skipper Jr., University of North Carolina–Greensboro
 1988–1989 William F. Kenkel, University of Kentucky
 1989–1990 C. Eddie Palmer, University of Southwestern Louisiana
 1990–1991 Donna K. Darden, University of South Florida
 1991–1992 Joy B. Reeves, Stephen F. Austin State University
 1992–1993 Arthur G. Cosby, Mississippi State University
 1993–1994 Stanford M. Lyman, Florida Atlantic University
 1994–1995 J. Steven Picou, University of South Alabama
 1995–1996 Craig J. Forsyth, University of Southwestern Louisiana
 1996–1997 Thomas J. Durant Jr., Louisiana State University
 1997–1998 Dennis R. McSeveney, University of New Orleans
 1998–1999 Lin Huff–Corzine, University of Central Florida
 1999–2000 J. Kenneth Davidson Sr., University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire
 2000–2001 Peter L. Heller, Middle Tennessee State University & Texas Tech University
 2001–2002 Obie Clayton Jr., Morehouse College
 2002–2003 J. David Knottnerus, Oklahoma State University
 2003–2004 Jackie L. Eller, Middle Tennessee State University
 2004–2005 Duane A. Gill, Mississippi State University*
 2005–2006 Thomas Calhoun, Southern Illinois State University
 2006–2007 Carl L. Bankston III, Tulane University
 2007–2008 Keith F. Durkin, Ohio Northern University
 2008–2009 Kimberly Ann Davies, Augusta State University
 2009–2010 Ollie G. Christian, Southern University and A&M College
 2010–2011 Roma Hanks, University of South Alabama
 2011–2012 Mark Konty, Public Scholar
 2012–2013 Earl Wright II, University of Cincinnati
 2013–2014 Timothy B. Gongaware, University of Wisconsin–LaCrosse
 2014–2015 Anita Bledsoe–Gardner, Johnson C. Smith University
 2015–2016 DeMond S. Miller, Rowan University
 2016–2017 Kevin Breault, Middle Tennessee State University

2017–2018 Ruth Chananie, University of Northern Iowa
 2018–2019 Jason Ulsperger, Arkansas Tech University
 2019–2020 Jessica Abbott, Dixie State University
 2020–2021 Tina Deshotels, Jacksonville State University
 *Frank Glamser of the University of Southern Mississippi was briefly President in 2004.

Appendix 6. Secretary-Treasurer, 1975–2020

1975–1977 Jerry J. Waxman, University of South Alabama
 1977–1980 Emory G. Davis, Texas Tech University
 1981–1983 Dean F. Johnson, Northwestern State University
 1984–1986 Dennis McSeveney, University of New Orleans
 1986–1994 Marc Matre, University of South Alabama
 1994–1995 Paul L. Leslie, Greensboro College
 1996–1999 Marc Matre, University of South Alabama
 1999–2009 Sahadeo Patram, Morehouse College
 2009–2013 Jamie Baird, Morehouse College
 2013–2015 Ruth Chananie, University of Northern Iowa
 2015–2018 Shelly McGrath, University of Alabama–Birmingham
 2018–present Jessica Pardee, Rochester Institute of Technology

Appendix 7. Editor of Sociological Spectrum, 1975–2020

1980–1981 Marsha McGee & James K. Skipper Jr., Northeast Louisiana University & VPI & State Univ.
 1981–1984 Jerome J. Salomone & H. David Allen, Southeast Louisiana Univ. & Univ. of New Orleans
 1985–1986 Sarah Grambling & Robert Grambling, University of Southwestern Louisiana
 1987–1989 G. David Johnson & Donald R. South, University of South Alabama
 1990–1993 Frank M. Howell & J. Gipson Wells, Mississippi State University
 1994–1995 Charles E. Faupel & Arthur S. Wilke, Auburn University
 1996–1999 Jay Corzine & Thomas Calhoun, Univ. of Central Florida & Univ. of Nebraska–Lincoln
 2000–2001 Jackie L. Eller & Peter L. Heller, Middle Tennessee State University
 2002–2006 DeAnn M. Kalich, University of Louisiana–Lafayette
 2006–2009 David A. Gay & John Lynxwiler, University of Central Florida
 2009–2011 John Lynxwiler, University of Central Florida
 2012–2013 Kevin Breault & Brian P. Hinote, Middle Tennessee State University
 2014–present Kevin Breault, Middle Tennessee State University

Appendix 8. Vice-Presidents, 1975–2020

1975–1976 J. Larry Williams, Arkansas State University
 1976–1977 Russell H. Meier, Northeast Louisiana University
 1977–1978 Sarah Brabant, University of Southwestern Louisiana
 1978–1979 Sarah Brabant, University of Southwestern Louisiana
 1979–1980 Gene F. Acuff, Oklahoma State University
 1980–1981 Marsha McGee, Northeast Louisiana University
 1981–1982 Shirlee A. Owens, Northeast Louisiana University
 1982–1983 Mary E. Benjamin, Jackson State University
 1983–1984 Joy B. Reeves, Stephen F. Austin State University
 1984–1985 James K. Skipper, VPI & State University
 1985–1986 C. Eddie Palmer, University of Southwestern Louisiana
 1986–1987 William Bankston, University of Southwestern Louisiana
 1987–1988 Arthur Cosby, Mississippi State University
 1988–1989 Donna K. Darden, University of Arkansas
 1989–1990 John S. Miller, University of Arkansas
 1990–1991 Charles U. Smith, Florida A&M University
 1991–1992 Craig J. Forsyth, University of Southwestern Louisiana
 1992–1993 Bruce B. Williams, University of Mississippi
 1993–1994 Charles E. Faupel, Auburn University

1994–1995 Donald W. Bogie, Auburn University
1995–1996 Carol Y. Thompson, Texas Christian University
1996–1997 Jay Corzine, University of Central Florida
1997–1998 Paul I. Leslie, Greensboro College
1998–1999 Thomas Calhoun, University of Nebraska–Lincoln
1999–2000 Rebecca M. Watson, Virginia Intermont College
2000–2001 DeAnn M. Kalich, University of Louisiana–Lafayette
2001–2002 Jackie Eller, Middle Tennessee State University
2002–2003 Duane A. Gill, Mississippi State University
2003–2004 Carl Bankston III, Tulane University
2004–2005 David A. Gay, University of Central Florida
2005–2006 Keith F. Durkin, Ohio Northern University
2006–2007 Kimberly Davis, Augusta State University
2007–2008 Shirley A. Rainey, Austin Peay State University
2008–2009 Larry Hall, Spring Hill College
2009–2010 Timoshy B. Gongaware, University of Wisconsin–La Crosse
2010–2011 David LoConto, Jacksonville State University
2011–2012 Ruth Chananie, University of Northern Iowa
2012–2013 DeMond Miller, Rowan University
2013–2014 Rodger Bates, Clayton State University
2014–2015 Shelly McGrath, University of Alabama–Birmingham
2015–2016 Jeremy Ross, University of Northern Iowa
2016–2017 Theresa Davidson, Samford University
2017–2018 Jessica Abbott, Dixie State University
2018–2019 Erin Rider, Jacksonville State University
2019–2020 Patricia Gleich, University of West Florida