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1527 New Hampshire Ave
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Dear members of the APSA Council:

I am writing in my capacity as the first president of the Sexuality and Politics Section of the APSA to express my deep concern about the controversy over siting APSA's annual convention in New Orleans in 2012. APSA 2012 will be only the fourth convention at which our Section will be organizing panels and conducting a full slate of Section-related activities. I am confident that our Section will be firmly established by then, but as a relatively new Section, we face challenges and vulnerabilities that Sections with lengthier histories do not. Already, I can anticipate that this controversy will become entangled with the early history of the Sexuality and Politics Section, and I worry about the implications for the Section and for the study of sexuality and politics within the discipline more generally. I urge the Council 1) to take the necessary time to consider the full complexity of these issues, even if it requires waiting until its next meeting in Boston to make any decisions, 2) ultimately to adopt a policy that recognizes the interests of LGBT members of the APSA in being able to attend meetings without putting their family ties at risk or facing denigration of their families as families, 3) to decide not to go to New Orleans, and 4) if siting in New Orleans is not to be changed, to develop a comprehensive and concrete plan for accommodating individuals, groups, and organized Sections that will face difficult and painful choices about how to manage the meeting. In all the discussions of this issue I have seen and in which I have participated, I think Joan Tronto has said it best in her recent email to the Caucus listserv: "the bright line through the decisions to site our meetings has to be that when people's rights are in jeopardy, no amount of other factors can compensate for that threat."

Many participants in the Sexuality and Politics Section are themselves members of the LGBT community. Most others are strong allies of this community. The LGBT Caucus, as you know, has been discussing both the question of how siting decisions should address the existence of state-level bans on same-sex marriage and the incidences of it, and the specific issue of New Orleans. The Caucus discussions have revealed a range of opinions on both siting and New Orleans. Nonetheless, many Caucus members are unwilling to attend an annual convention sited in New Orleans if the policy does not change before 2012. They have noted that not only did Louisiana adopt a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage and incidences thereof almost a year prior to Hurricane Katrina, but also that New Orleans residents voted in favor of the ban. And a substantial number of Caucus members would like to see the APSA adopt a

formal policy on siting to address discrimination against same-sex couples, following the precedents of the ERA and the MLK, Jr. holiday controversies. I understand that a proposal to do so is now on the table.

While you have received significant feedback from Caucus members opposing holding APSA 2012 in New Orleans, I recognize that the dimension of sexuality in New Orleans has more complicated depths. As Gary Segura has pointed out on the Race and Politics blog,¹ New Orleans has a rich tradition of embracing both racial diversity and out members of the LGBT community. In fact, New Orleans' Southern Decadence celebration, billed as a "celebration of gay life, music, and culture," traditionally takes place the same weekend as the APSA annual meeting and presumably would be observing its 40th anniversary during APSA 2012. This apparent irony places those who support LGBT equality in the difficult analytic situation of trying to sort out what equality rights mean and in particular what same-sex marriage means. Following Carl Stychin, I am troubled by the political use of same-sex marriage to separate "good gays" (who are the same as upstanding middle-class monogamous heterosexual couples in every regard except for the gender of their partners) from "bad queers" (who are sexual and cultural transgressors in need of social and legal disciplining). Despite this tension, however, I urge APSA to take seriously the clear voices of many APSA members who see Louisiana as an unsafe place for them and their families. Further, I see the message of denigration implied in the Louisiana amendment as more than just a bar to same-sex couples' access to middle-class respectability. It actively defines the family as a heteronormative institution and deeply disrespects all same-sex intimate relationships. It also places these families and their members at concrete risk in the event of unexpected emergencies.

Many members of the Section, however, are also invested as scholars and critics in the politics of race. As a scholar of both race and sexuality, I personally recognize that going to New Orleans for our annual meeting could be a political and economic act supporting the rebuilding of a city with a long and proud African American history. I felt this potential tension when, as a member of the LGBT Status Committee, I first began to participate in discussions about siting before Hurricane Katrina struck. At that point, I and others could relatively easily conclude that New Orleans, despite its racial history, was a problematic site due to the passage of the same-sex marriage amendment (which passed in Orleans Parish by a margin of 54.6% to 43.4%).² Katrina, however, laid bare the deep connections between racial and class bias on the one hand and the disingenuousness of pleas of state incapacity and failed responses on the other. These connections have remained clear, extending from the moment of the crisis to the present day, and call for critical intervention. Where we site our annual meetings matters both politically and economically, due to the financial benefits that our increasingly large conventions bring into a city and the potential for critical political engagement afforded by the conference itself. Considered from this perspective, for APSA to abandon New Orleans would seem to place some members' interests in racial and class-based justice in tension with other members' interests in equality. And siting in New Orleans could provide an unparalleled opportunity to focus our

¹ Located at <http://haterfreeraceandpolitics.blogspot.com/>; see threads "Discussion until 10/27/2007" at <https://www.blogger.com/comment.g?blogID=36219386&postID=1857575577942063284> and "Discussion of Jobs, Offers, the Field . . ." at <https://www.blogger.com/comment.g?blogID=36219386&postID=5633137501054343879> (accessed March 26, 2008).

² Orleans Parish is coextensive with the boundaries of New Orleans. Vote totals available at the Louisiana Secretary of State's website at <http://www400.sos.louisiana.gov:8090/cgi-bin/?rqstyp=elcmp&rqsda=09180499925271> (Accessed March 26, 2008).

scholarly attention on broad and intersectional concrete questions of justice and the duties of states to their denizens, which will surely remain on the table in 2012.

This dimension, however, is not as clear as it might appear at first glance. While at the Western meetings, I heard from an old friend about the settlement of a fair housing lawsuit against St. Bernard's Parish, which had passed an ordinance requiring city "council approval for owners to rent homes to anyone who was not a blood relative."³ Fair housing advocates charged that, due to the racial makeup of the parish, the ordinance would largely have barred people of color from renting there. In a report published two years after Katrina, the Institute for Southern Studies further criticizes reconstruction efforts that have focused heavily on homeowners to the detriment of renters and that have aimed to tear down and replace undamaged public housing with mixed-income housing.⁴ This raises for me, and I hope for others, very serious questions about what is being reconstructed in New Orleans, and what kind of city will await the arrival of approximately 7000 political scientists in 2012. Spending tourist dollars to boost a multicultural and multiracial New Orleans in the process of remaking itself from within is a very different proposition from supporting a recreated, sanitized, and whitened New Orleans theme park.

My point here is that we need to study and think through the question of New Orleans more. I believe that APSA should not go to New Orleans. But if APSA is to go to New Orleans, the council must develop concrete plans to address the concerns of its members about the location, and, I would argue, should take advantage of the opportunity to consider the site itself critically and productively through a scholarly lens.

On the siting question generally, I would simply second the observations that have been passed along to the Council by LGBT Caucus members and allies. In the past, APSA has not feared taking a stance on coercive anti-labor policies, the passage of a holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. I acknowledge that barring the siting of our annual meetings in locations that have adopted bans on same-sex marriage and its incidents will not eliminate discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered folks. Nor did APSA expect to achieve full equality for women by refusing to go to Chicago when Illinois had rejected the ERA, or to achieve complete racial justice by tying siting practices to state stances on the MLK, Jr. holiday. It may not be our duty as an association to change the world, but it is incumbent upon us not to stand silent in the face of injustice. Further, as an association, we owe it to our members not to place them in the impossible position of having to choose between safety and professional advancement.

Finally, I urge the Council to take seriously the challenge of managing a meeting in New Orleans and recognize what it is facing. The first step in this process is to continue to improve communications between the Council and APSA leadership and the members and member organizations interested in this issue. In my discussions with members of the Caucus, the Sexuality and Politics Section, and the LGBT Status Committee in the last few months, I have gotten a strong sense that many people do not feel like they know what is going on, what kinds of things are being considered, or even what decisions are on the table. I also strongly recommend that APSA devote some space in an issue of *PS* to a full discussion of the complexities of the issues from a range of perspectives, which will enable the broader

³ Bob Warren, "St. Bernard, Housing Group Reach Accord over Rental Law," *Times Picayune*, February 27, 2008.

⁴ Institute for Southern Studies, *Blueprint for Gulf Renewal: The Katrina Crisis and a Community Agenda for Action*, August/September 2007.

membership of the association to understand better why the siting question is so significant – and painful – for some members. Next, if the meeting is held in New Orleans, I wish to register now my request as head of Sexuality and Politics that counts for our panel proposals for the 2012 meeting and for panel attendance at the 2012 not be considered in determining panel allocations for the 2013 meeting. Siting in New Orleans will have a disproportionately negative impact on the Sexuality and Politics Section. I further request that APSA provide additional support in the coming years to the LGBT Status Committee so that the Status Committee and APSA can do the necessary work of connecting with local LGBT organizations and researching New Orleans' queer friendly hospitals, insurance agents, and attorneys versed in LGBT issues and choice of law issues. I also ask that APSA extend the accommodation period for Sexuality and Politics as a new Section, as this controversy's impact on our efforts to build up and institutionalize are at this point quite difficult to predict. I am sure that the Section chairs who follow me will have other specific requests to try to contain the damage that this issue may do to our Section.

I do not want to have to decide whether to go to New Orleans in 2012. But if I do face that decision, I will do so by trying to imagine an APSA meeting without Ken Sherrill, Joan Tronto, Harry Hirsch, Martha Ackelsberg, Ellen Andersen, and many other well known and not so well known voices that have been vitally important to me as a scholar, a teacher, and a member of the profession for many years. That conference, stripped of so many critical and political voices, would not represent the American Political Science Association for me. I hope that conference does not happen.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Novkov".

Julie Novkov
President, Sexuality and Politics