



Applied Anthropology at a Crossroad

83rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology

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Juliana McDonald, Program Chair

Applied anthropology is at an important crossroad. Longstanding political, sociocultural, and environmental problems persist, even as new problems emerge in an increasingly complex world reeling from the continuing impacts of a global pandemic, systemic inequalities, and increasing geopolitical instabilities. Never has there been a more urgent need to understand humans and the structures and systems that frame their choices, or to employ the social sciences to find solutions to pressing needs at every level: local, regional, national, international, and global. This moment presents opportunities for integration of theory and practice, for greater collaboration between teachers, researchers, and practitioners.

How can we better train future generations of anthropologists and other social scientists for the work they will do and the jobs that await them? Where and how can our methods and findings be better employed to ameliorate the problems of our time, and how can we more effectively influence decision makers in public and private spheres? How can we “put to use” a decolonized applied anthropology to meet the challenges of the 21st century and promote social and racial justice? The annual meeting offers a forum for the articulation of innovative approaches to more creative teaching, research, and practice in anthropology and related social sciences. In so doing, it can foster greater collaboration across different disciplines and subdisciplines, thereby creating new synergies to ethically employ anthropological research for social impact.

The Society for Applied Anthropology’s 2023 annual meeting will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio. From its founding at the confluence of the Ohio and Licking Rivers in 1788, Cincinnati has been a crossroad. In antebellum America, Cincinnati stood at the border between slavery and freedom, serving as an important stop on the Underground Railroad. Its iconic Roebling Suspension Bridge has linked Ohio and Kentucky since 1866, and today major interstate highways crisscross the metropolitan area. The Queen City is a central gathering place for the arts, music, museums, food, and cultural events for Northern and Central Kentucky and Southern Ohio. As such, “Cincy” (or “Nati”) is a superb venue for us to gather as we consider where applied anthropology has come from, where our field may be going, and what we can do as applied scholars and practitioners.

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