

TO: Board of Directors, Society for the Study of Social Problems
FROM: Vicki Smith, Chair, 2002 C. Wright Mills Award Committee
RE: Final Report on Committee Work, 2002-03
July 10, 2003

The C. Wright Mills Award Committee is proud to announce the co-winners of the 2002 Award. We selected, first, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (MIT Press) by David Pellow, Associate Professor, Ethnic Studies, University of California, San Diego. The co-winning book is *The Job Training Charade* (Cornell University Press) by Gordon Lafer, Assistant Professor at the Labor Education and Research Center, University of Oregon.

The Committee was delighted with these two winning books. Both exemplify key aspects of the C. Wright Mills tradition: they both address social issues of great significance to American society; both undertook their research using a mode of critical inquiry; and both challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world. Committee members all report that the process was an enjoyable one: our top finalists were all excellent, it was difficult to rank these finalists as being “better” and “worse” than one another; yet our two final winners handily rose to the top of the list.

The winners were chosen from among a list of seven finalists. The finalists included:

Kathleen Blee. *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*. University of California Press.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn. *How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. Harvard University Press.

Martha Huggins, Mika Haritos-Facouros, and Philip Zimbardo. *Violence Workers: Police Torturers and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities*. University of California Press.

Eric Klinenberg. *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. University of Chicago Press.

Gordon Lafer. *The Job Training Charade*. Cornell University Press.

David Pellow. *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago*. MIT Press.

Francesca Poletta. *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*. University of Chicago Press.

As was true of the preceding year, the 2002 Committee worked quite well together, with a notable amount of intellectual and procedural flexibility. Interestingly, when everyone had ranked the seven finalists, there was virtually no consensus on any one top-ranked book. I suggested to the committee members that we designate co-winners of the award, in order to reflect the fact that everyone thought highly enough of the two co-winning books that each member had ranked at least one of the books as their number one or their number two choice. We are satisfied with the fact that each of these books rose to the top; each award is richly deserved.

This year I, as chair, faced some of the same dilemmas that Rhys Williams, last year’s chair, noted in his Report to the SSSP Board. There are three problems related to publishers. The first has to do with the fact some publishers seem to send any and all books on their lists. These included fiction, journalistic books that weren’t sociological, and books that weren’t published in 2002. Practically speaking, it is not onerous for the chair to weed these books out (they numbered somewhere between 15 and 20 this year). The problem, it seems to me, is that it suggests that publishers simply decide to saturate the awards scene with any and all books, probably with the hope that randomly, one of their books will win. It’s a bit tedious and disheartening. However, maybe this is an unavoidable burden to bear in the process of getting the appropriate books!

This raises a second, contrary issue. It is difficult to figure out publishers' logic regarding which books they nominate for awards. Specifically, two of the major publishers (Chicago and California—so I assume other publishers as well) nominated some excellent books but did not nominate other excellent sociology books which I knew had been published in 2002. It was beyond my time and effort to individually contact authors and/or publishers about nominating other books that would have been strong contenders for the award (I'll admit that I only really grasped the fact that it happened after the deadline had passed). In the future, the Board might want to relay this observation to new Mills Award Committee Chairs. They, in turn, might keep their eyes open during the fall and early winter months when books are being sent, and possibly contact the publisher about no-nominated books. Also, maybe at the professional meetings or via email, editors and publicity coordinators could be asked about this issue. In general, SSSP members and C. Wright Mills Award Committee members might encourage authors/friends/colleagues to make sure their books get nominated, starting at the ASA and SSSP meetings the August prior to any given year's award cycle.

Third, publishers are inconsistent in who they send their nominated books to. All of the committee members never received one or a few of some book or another. This created some additional and clumsy administrative work. I don't know how our process is communicated to publishers, but they should be encouraged to make sure that they have the names and addresses of all the committee members.

Related to this: if an individual is not a member of SSSP, they may not learn about the deadline for the award. And if their publisher neglects to nominate their book, then they're left out in the cold. Does SSSP advertise the C. Wright Mills Award deadline in other venues, such as ASA Footnotes or some of the relevant ASA section newsletters? I don't recall having seen it but I could have missed it. (Also, see second point, above.)

Procedurally, we followed the steps that committees in previous years have followed: after the deadline for receiving books, I created a spread sheet and assigned about 19 or 20 books to each committee member. I gave them approximately two months to read and rank them. We used the ranking sheet that has been circulating since I first served on this committee in 1997-98. Nearly everyone mailed their ranking sheets to me, with numerical values and written comments. Others emailed comments about their top choices.

Using numerical scores but also relying on qualitative comments, I compiled the list of seven finalists and gave the committee members approximately five additional weeks to read and rank them. All members then read all seven books. Here, the evaluation procedure was different: we didn't assign numerical scores but used a more general evaluative process to assess the strength of each book, as an exemplar of the Mills' tradition and of excellent scholarship. As noted earlier, there was no consensus on any one book but a very strong and enthusiastic preference for the two co-winning books.

Finally, as Chair of the committee, I want to express my appreciation to the committee members who worked with me this year. In particular, I should note that committee members performed under a considerable amount of personal stress; three of us lost a parent in the past year; another of us lost a mother-in-law; and one of us lost a sister to cancer. My great colleagues include:

Beth Schneider, Chair-Elect, University of California, Santa Barbara
Mitchell Duneier, Princeton & CUNY Graduate Center
Phoebe Morgan, Northern Arizona University
Belinda Robnett, University of California, Irvine
Ronnie Steinberg, Vanderbilt University
Javier Trevino, Wheaton College

Respectfully,

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