

August 7, 2004

TO: Board of Directors, Society for the Study of Social Problems
FROM: Beth E. Schneider, Chair, 2003 C. Wright Mills Award Committee
RE: Final Committee Report, 2003-04

The C. Wright Mills Award Committee is proud to announce the winner of the 2003 Award. We selected *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform* (Oxford University Press), by Professor Sharon Hays of the University of Virginia.

The book exemplifies key aspects of the C. Wright Mills tradition: it addresses a social issue of great significance; it undertakes research using a mode of critical inquiry; it challenges taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world; and it speaks directly to policy makers and an informed citizenry. Committee members report that the selection process was an educational and enjoyable, if arduous, experience. So many of the nominated books were quite strong, and the top finalists were all excellent.

The seven finalists included:

Elizabeth M. Armstrong, *Conceiving Risk, Bearing Responsibility: Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and the Diagnosis of Moral Disorder*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Michael K. Brown and colleagues, *White-Washing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society*. University of California Press.

Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. University of California Press.

Sharon Hays, *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. Oxford University Press.

Kim Hopper, *Reckoning with Homelessness*. Cornell University Press.

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. University of California Press.

Deirdre A. Royster, *Race and the Invisible Hand: How White Networks Exclude Black Men from Blue-Collar Jobs*. University of California Press.

As was true in the preceding year, the 2003 Committee worked quite well together, with a notable amount of intellectual and procedural flexibility. Thanks to email, the coordination of the nine-member committee was relatively uncomplicated. It strikes me that given the number of nominations, at least nine members are needed to complete the job in a timely and effective manner.

This year, I faced some of the same issues encountered by previous chairs. There are three persistent problems related to publishers. First, some publishers send many books on their lists seemingly without systematic screening related to the Mills Award criteria, so that fiction, journalistic accounts without sociological grounding, and books not published in 2003 found their way to committee members. Practically speaking, it is not onerous of the chair to weed out these books, though often enough some will slip through the eligibility screening. In some years, 15-20 books were eliminated; this year, I eliminated only 10, though subsequent reading by the committee members indicated that at least another 10 could have been declared ineligible early on. The lack of precision by some publishers may be, as Vicki Smith suggested last year, an unavoidable consequence of the process of getting the appropriate books.

Conversely, getting the appropriate books is not an easy task. By the deadline, the committee received nominations for 71 books. The committee did not need more to read. However, there is tremendous unevenness in the nomination process. One major publisher nominated many excellent books (as reflected by the list of finalists), but others nominated none, and other nominated only some of the very strong sociology books on their 2003 lists. It is beyond the scope of the Chair of the committee to individually contact authors or publishers, and indeed, like the previous chair, Vicki Smith, I too found impossible to know what was missing until the deadline. In the future, the committee members might make sure that the call for nominations is circulated widely in the fall of the relevant year. Likewise, perhaps someone in the Executive Office could send an email to editors and publicly coordinators to make certain their books get nominated. By the way, self-nomination is a rarely used tool - we received three such nominations this year. In two instances, the publishers had already sent the books to committee members.

The third problem is with the distribution of books. Initially, none of the members received all of the nominated books and, of the books we received, we often enough received different ones. This created some additional administrative work for both the Chair and for the Executive Office to ensure that all committee members received their copies as quickly as possible. Again, it is not at all clear if there is a solution that would prevent this problem.

Procedurally, we followed the same steps that committee have used in previous years. After the deadline, I eliminated some books, then created a spreadsheet and assigned 19-20 books to each committee member, based on their areas of expertise. In my experience with this committee, it is now clear to me that the larger the committee, the more likely a full range of substantive areas are represented among the readers.

The same ranking sheet, with six broad criteria, was used again this year. Committee members had approximately 3 months to read and rank in the first round. Three committee members read each eligible book. Everyone mailed their rankings to me, with numerical values and occasional written comments. Using those scores and the comments, I compiled the list of seven finalists and gave the committee members approximately 6 weeks to read and rank them. All members read, ranked the seven books, and often wrote extensive comments.

As Chair of the 2003 C. Wright Mills Awards Committee, I want to express my appreciation to Michele Koontz for her timely interventions, and to the 2003 committee members who worked professionally and in a timely fashion to complete this major task.

These great scholars and colleagues include:

Wendy Simonds, Chair-Elect, Georgia State University

Joel Best, University of Delaware

Toni Calasanti, Virginia Polytechnic Institute

Ione Deollos, Ball State University

Mitch Duneier, Princeton University

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Colby College

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, University of Southern California

Ken Kyle, Pennsylvania State University

Respectively submitted,

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