

To: SSSP Board of Directors

From: Kathleen Lowney, Ph.D.
Chair, 2007 C. Wright Mills Award Committee

Re: Committee Report

Date: April 23, 2008

This committee is one of the most interesting committees on which I have ever served. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to work on behalf of the SSSP and to interact with these wonderful committee members. I wish to thank them for all their hard work:

Committee Members:

Maggie L. Andersen, University of Delaware **
Aneesh Aneesh, University of Wisconsin
Heather Dalmage, Chair-Elect, Roosevelt University
Ione DeOllos, Ball State University
Lara Foley, University of Tulsa
Mark Goodman, York University
Kathleen S. Lowney, Chair, Valdosta State University

** Originally, Daphne Phillips, University of the West Indies was a member of the committee. Due to the political situation in her country, she resigned and Maggie Andersen was appointed to replace her.

The C. Wright Mills Award was established in 1964 and is awarded annually. It carries with it a stipend of \$500 for the author(s) of the winning book(s). The 2007 award will be presented at the 58th Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts on August 1, 2008.

One hundred and three books were nominated for the award; however, ten were ineligible because they were either edited volumes, did not have a 2007 copyright, or clearly did not fit the criteria for the award (i.e., were journalism). The criteria are that the book:

- 1) critically addresses an issue of contemporary public importance,
- 2) brings to the topic a fresh, imaginative perspective,
- 3) advances social scientific understanding of the topic,
- 4) displays a theoretically informed view and empirical orientation,
- 5) evinces quality in style of writing,
- 6) explicitly or implicitly contains implications for courses of action.

Finalists:

Abu-Lughod, Janet L. 2007. *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Brown, Phil. 2007. *Toxic Exposures: Contested Illnesses and the Environmental Health Movement*. NY: Columbia University Press. Foreword by Lois Gibbs.

Clear, Todd R. 2007. *Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Conrad, Peter. 2007. *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Desmond, Matthew. 2007. *On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Igo, Sarah E. 2007. *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Jaffee, Daniel. 2007. *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Lee, Ching Kwan. 2007. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Pellow, David Naguib. 2007. *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Szasz, Andrew. 2007. *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

The Committee Process:

With the consent of Committee members, I set up several Google Documents spreadsheets. These documents were available to all Committee members to view, but only I could modify them. As a book arrived, I assigned it to two Committee members and entered it into the assignment spreadsheet. As Committee members returned their reviews, an "X" was entered into the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet allowed each member to see what books were still to review, what new ones had been assigned, and when I had received their reviews. I set up two additional spreadsheets; one was for scores of reviews and the other was a list of every book which was nominated and if

each member of the Committee had received the book.

By February 15th, nearly all the books had been reviewed by two members in this first round of reviewing. Six of the ninety three eligible books were either not reviewed at all or only reviewed by one member. Five books, while nominated, were never received by any of the Committee members. This was despite my and the SSSP Executive Office's repeated contacts with the publishers, requesting that the books be sent. One book was only received and reviewed by one member of the Committee; the publisher never sent it to the other members.

At that time, the Committee was able to discern a clear difference between the books which had the highest scores and those which did not. While we first tried to narrow the list of finalists down from 10, we finally decided that all these books deserved the full Committee's review.

Committee members then read all of ten of the finalists' books. For some members of the Committee, that meant they had only to read two books, because they had reviewed nearly all the finalists. On the other hand, one Committee member had not read a single one of the finalists in the first round of reviewing and had to read all ten of them in this round.

Separate Google Documents spreadsheets were set up for the finalist books and the Committee's scores for these books. Committee members had until April 15th to read the finalists. At that time, I calculated each finalist's scores and announced them to the Committee.

At that point, our process got a bit complicated. Two books clearly were ranked higher than the others; however, there was not a clear pattern in the ranking. One book - while receiving the highest overall score - was only ranked as the #1 book by one Committee member. Another book was ranked #1 by four members of the Committee but was second in the scoring.

These differences caused us to have five days of electronic communication as we worked our way to consensus. We considered for a while having co-winners, but after consulting Tom Hood, the SSSP's Executive Officer, and Hector Delgado, last year's Chair of the C. Wright Mills Award Committee, for their advice about this situation, and further discussion with the Committee, we chose not to do that. We worked through it collectively, with people discussing their rankings, etc. Eventually, we arrived at the consensus that the book which more people ranked as #1 was our winner. Members felt that any book which had more than half of the Committee ranking it as the #1 book truly was the most outstanding book.

The Winner: Jaffee, Daniel. 2007. *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

I have written the nine finalists who were not the winner as well as the winner. Those letters should be arriving this week. I urged all the authors to attend the Banquet so that the SSSP can honor their outstanding achievements.

Issues Which Cropped Up:

Many of these issues are likely perennial ones, but I feel that I should mention them.

1. Books arrive sporadically and some were not sent to all Committee members. Thus there is always the worry that some members of the Committee have books that others do not. We used the Google Documents spreadsheet as way to track this. I asked each member, during the time when most books were arriving, to check the spreadsheet once a week (not just for the books assigned to them, but the entire list of books that had been received). There was always the chance that others were receiving books that I did not; this was our way of checking for that.

By February 15th, I and the SSSP Executive Office – both Michele Koontz and Sarah Hendricks – worked diligently to contact all these publishers. Some sent the missing books; others, despite their promises, never did. While we regret not being able to review these few books, we did not know what else to do.

2. A few books were ineligible due to their copyright being either 2006 or 2008. During the nomination period, I as the former chair, will nominate all those books which had a 2008 copyright for next year's award. That way those books - which clearly people wanted to be considered for the award - will be nominated in the appropriate year, just in case the person who nominated the book this year does not do it next year. I feel that is just the ethical thing to do.
3. One book had both a 2006 and a 2007 copyright. Since it did have a 2007 one, we reviewed the book. It was not one of the finalists.
4. The Committee sometime struggled with criterion #3 for the award, which states that the book should "advance social scientific understanding of the topic." The debate is how to rank books that are not sociological but do advance a social scientific perspective. Some members of the Committee felt that books which use sociological theories ought to be ranked higher than those, for example, which are from our sister social sciences, but never use sociological theories/concepts/analyses. One of this year's finalists, for example, is written by a historian and uses only historical theories and concepts. Some members, while recognizing the book's excellence, ranked it lower than others because it was not sociological. I am not sure there is an answer to this; rather I think each year Committee members will have to sort this out for themselves.

In closing, I would like to thank several people who were so supportive to me as Chair of this Committee. First and most important, is Michele Koontz. Whenever I had a

question, she would answer it clearly and concisely, usually in just a few hours. She is a SSSP treasure; I know we all know that, but I don't think we can ever tell Michele that enough.

Next, I want to thank Hector Delgado, the previous Chair of this Committee. Despite being SSSP Program Co-Chair this year (and as a past Program Chair, I know how busy that can be), he always replied quickly to any email I sent him. While we only communicated three times, each one of those was very useful to me and helped this year's Committee process move forward. I promise to Hector to be as gracious and helpful to Heather Dalmage, next year's Chair, as he was to me.

I also want to thank Tom Hood, the SSSP Executive Officer, for his wisdom in the last week of our deliberations. Sarah Hendricks, at the SSSP Executive Office, also deserves thanks. She contacted publishers on the Committee's behalf – sometimes frequently – and that was a big help in getting some publishers to step up and get books to us.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve the Society.