

To: SSSP Board of Directors

From: Heather Dalmage, Chair, 2008 C. Wright Mills Award

RE: Committee Report

Date: July 8, 2009

I have been a member of the C. Wright Mills Award committee twice and chaired it once. Through this committee I have read scores of books and gained knowledge of myriad sociological topics. This committee is time-intensive and very rewarding. I have thoroughly enjoyed serving SSSP through this committee work.

The 2008 committee consisted of seven members who worked diligently over the course of several months to determine our 2008 winner. The committee members are:

Debra Street, *Chair-Elect*, University at Buffalo
Charles André Christie-Mizell, Kent State University
Kimberly J. Cook, University of North Carolina Wilmington
Elizabeth Ettorre, University of Liverpool
Anna M. Santiago, Wayne State University
Peter Venturelli, Valparaiso University
Johnny Williams, Trinity College

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 2008 award will be presented at the 59th Annual Meeting in San Francisco, CA on August 8, 2009.

Eighty books were nominated for the award; however, two were ineligible because they were either edited volumes, did not have a 2008 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 for the 2008 C. WRIGHT MILLS AWARD (*in alphabetical order*)

Xavier de Souza Briggs, *Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe*, MIT Press

Daniel Faber, *Capitalizing on Environmental Injustice: The Polluter-Industrial Complex in the Age of Globalization*, Rowman and Littlefield, Publishers, Inc.

John M. Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture*, University of Minnesota Press

Jody Miller, *Getting Played: African American Girls, Urban Inequality and Gendered Violence*, New York University Press

Martín Sánchez-Jankowski, *Cracks in the Pavement: Social Change and Resilience in Poor Neighborhoods*, University of California Press

Committee Process:

We began receiving books near the end of 2008. The receiving of nominated books took an extended period of time mostly due to travel by committee members. Several members, including me, were overseas during the process. Books were shipped internationally, but delays and a large number of books ‘went missing.’

My goal was to have two members read each of the books in the first round. At the end of the first round, tally up the evaluation scores and move to a finalist list. Each member of the committee would read the finalist list books and decide the winner. In order to make this happen (given the seemingly large number of missing books), I had to use a modified random assigning of the books to committee members. Following in the footsteps of my predecessor, Dr. Kathy Lowney, I set up a google.docs spreadsheet to track the books. Once all nominations were in, the committee sent lists of missing books. Michele Koontz and Sharon Shumaker quickly and diligently followed up on each of the missing books. In the meantime, I began the process of assigning two readers to each nominated book. However, several of the books were received by none, one or only a few committee members. In this case, I reworked the ‘random’ book assignments in the first round to ensure that each book was assigned to a committee member who had received it. In this way, the committee could begin the process of evaluation without greater delay.

By April 5, 2009 each of the received *and* eligible books (78 total) had been evaluated and ranked. As we moved to name the finalist list, the committee engaged in discussion about the ranking process. Originally, in order to name the top finalists, I tabulated the numeric total for each evaluation and then ranked them.

Committee members were asked to use the following form as they read and evaluated each book:

Please rate this book on how well it meets the following criteria on a five point scale (1= minimally; 3= moderately; 5= to an outstanding degree)

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 _____

Total points _____

Given this particular ranking system, 30 would be the highest possible number of points.

Some committee members had total scores for books at 30 or close to 30 and thus saw several of the books they read on the finalist list, while other members tended to rank few of the books above 20 and thus saw none of their books on the finalist list. **In other words, some books made or missed the finalist list due to the committee members' interpretation of the numeric ranking. Through discussion, the committee decided on a tabulation process that would accommodate the differing sensibilities and still create a fair finalist list.** Each committee member was to rank the books they were assigned (approximately 20 per person) from 20 to 1 with 20 being their top choice. The numbers were then tabulated again and a finalist list of five was created.

The finalist books were read by each committee member and by May 28, 2009 (using the method discussed above), we determined the winner. The winner was ranked #1 by the majority of the committee and received the most overall points.

The winner: *Cracks in the Pavement: Social Change and Resilience in Poor Neighborhoods*, by Martín Sánchez-Jankowski.

Letters have been sent to the finalists and a letter has been sent to the winner.

I want to thank the 2008 Mills committee. Despite committee members international travel, health issues and regular work schedules, the committee was able to give their time and energy to this committee to determine the winner. I appreciate the seriousness with which each person read, ranked and commented on the books. I am also grateful to the committee for creating a tabulation method that was fair for us and the nominees. It was a pleasure to chair this committee.

Thanks also to Kathy Lowney, past-Chair, for being so organized and leaving a path that was easy to me to follow. From the introduction of google.docs to the various e-correspondences, I am grateful to Dr. Lowney. My ability to organize this committee work is a direct reflection of Dr. Lowney's stellar organization skills.

As always, thanks to Michele Koontz for her support throughout the process. It is always such a pleasure to work with Michele. Thanks to Tom Hood and Michele Koontz for encouraging me to Chair of the committee despite my travels outside the U.S. And, thanks to SSSP for creating such a great committee for me to work with – it made my life much easier.

Finally, thanks to SSSP. I am proud to be a member and to serve this organization.

Sincerely,

Heather M. Dalmage, Chair
2008 C Wright Mills Award Committee