

To: SSSP Board of Directors

From: Gale Miller, Chair, 2010 C. Wright Mills Award, Marquette University

RE: Committee Report

Date: May 19, 2011

The C. Wright Mills Award was established in 1964 and is awarded annually for the book that best reflects scholarship meeting the criteria SSSP stipulates for the award. The author(s) receives a stipend of \$500 and two complementary tickets to the award banquet where the 2010 C. Wright Mills Award will be presented at the 61st Annual Meeting in Las Vegas. This year's award goes to Mark Hunter for his book *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa*. Indiana University Press.

The other members of the 2010 C. Wright Mills award committee were:

Ronald Berger, University of Wisconsin – Whitewater

Elliott Currie, University of California – Irvine

Kathryn Fox, University of Vermont

Karyn Lacy, University of Michigan

Anna Leon-Guerrero, Pacific Lutheran University

Lois Presser, University of Tennessee

Darin Weinberg, Cambridge University

Ninety-two books were nominated for the award. Several were ineligible because they were either edited volumes or did not have a 2010 copyright. More vexing were submissions that did not fit the criteria for the award. The committee developed a procedure for dealing with the latter issue, which I will discuss below.

Members of the committee worked very hard and diligently on this task. They deserve special thanks from the Board of Directors and, more generally, the SSSP.

Each book considered for the C. Wright Mills Award committee is evaluated based on 6 criteria:

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

FINALISTS for the 2010 C. WRIGHT MILLS AWARD (*in alphabetical order*)

Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert, *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*. Oxford University Press.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America*. Harvard University Press.

David J. Harding, *Living the Drama: Community, Conflict, and Culture Among Inner City Boys*. University of Chicago Press.

Sandra Morgen, Joan Acker, and Jill Weigt, *Stretched Thin: Poor Families, Welfare Work, and Welfare Reform*. Cornell University Press.

Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*. University of Minnesota Press.

Committee Process:

The committee began receiving books near the end of 2010. Over a period of 6 weeks or so, the committee coordinated evolving lists of nominee books, first to identify “missing” books (books that were nominated but had not reached individual committee members, or in some cases, books that had been nominated but not yet sent by publishers to any on the committee). We received valuable assistance from Michele Koontz and Kelley Flatford in rounding up the missing books.

We followed the round one tradition of each nominated book being reviewed by at least two members. In organizing these subcommittees, I tried to match every member of the committee with each of the other committee members. Before I assigned reviewers, I first provided the entire nominee list to all committee members asking each to indicate any books that they were particularly interested in reviewing. The goal was to honor the traditional review processes associated with this committee, which include balancing committee members’ opportunities to read books in their substantive areas with the need to read outside “familiar zones” by also assigning some of non-requested books from a very diverse pool. Each committee member read 23-24 books in round one.

Based on committee members’ rankings, we generated a short list of 15 books that all members read. I should add that members were given the opportunity to recommend additional books not ranked in the highest group. We then rank ordered the ratings of the 15 books to determine the winning book and 5 other books for the final list.

Much of the committee’s discussion about how to evaluate the books dealt with the matter of inappropriate nominations. We addressed this issue in the two-person subcommittees of round one. Members were asked to, first, evaluate the books in terms of the criteria for the C. Wright Mills Award, that is, “Do did they minimally address all of the criteria?” When both members of a subcommittee agreed that a book did not meet this standard, it was removed from consideration. The books that were deemed appropriate were then rated based on a 0-100 scale. These ratings were the basis for discussions from which the 15 books read in the second round were generated. A similar scale was used to rank the final 15 books.

I notified the SSSP administrative office about the winning book and 5 books worthy of public notice in the second week of May, 2001. The finalists were informed of their status in a letter sent out by the SSSP administrative office during that week. A second letter informing the finalists that a winner had been selected was sent on July 1, 2011.

Some Thoughts and Recommendations:

1. As noted above, the committee spent some time discussing the criteria for evaluation. The problem we faced was that books are like people. While we can all be assessed based on a range of shared “human” characteristics, all of us are still different. We are distinctively strong in some areas and not so strong in other areas, plus we all have our own styles for exhibiting the characteristics that we generally share with others. These are also good reasons why we cannot adequately assess books by simply adding up rankings that weight each of the C. Wright Mills Committee criteria equally. Some books are fantastic at addressing one or two of the criteria and simply adequate at addressing other criteria. Thus, we tried to include room for committee members to assess each book on its own terms, while also generating numbers that allowed us to rank them.

Kathy Fox has done a very good job of summarizing this process by constructing the following rubric that subsequent C. Wright Mills Award Committees might consider and improve upon.

C. Wright Mills Book Award
Evaluation Rubric

Criterion	No=0	Adequate=1	Significant=2
Issue of Importance			
Fresh Perspective			
Advances Social Scientific Perspective			
Theoretically Informed View/Empirical Orientation			
Quality of Writing			
Course of Action (Implicit or Explicit)			

Total points= _____

Overall grade for book (score between 0-100) = _____

Strengths/Weaknesses based on rubric:

2. Committee members also discussed the advantages of moving the final nomination date into December – specifically to December 15. We recommend such a change to the Board of Directors. We do not believe that this change will be a hardship for people nominating books for the award, since the vast majority of books coming out in a given calendar year have appeared in print prior to December 15. Further, books that are not yet in print can still be nominated and sent along later when they become available.

The advantages of this change for reducing the demands on committee members' energies are at least twofold. First, it would allow members to begin reading the books over their winter breaks from their universities and colleges. As you know, life gets very busy once classes start and it often becomes busier as the end of the school year approaches. A second advantage is that the committee could complete its work earlier. My experience over the last two years on this committee is that it is very difficult for the committee to complete all of its work very much before May 1, which is also the time when classes are coming to a close. This change should also give Michele Koontz more time to complete her responsibilities within the process.

3. Finally, members of the committee recommend that the nomination process be altered. We ask that people nominating books for the C. Wright Mills Award submit cover letters for each of the books that they nominate. The letters should specify how nominated books address each of the criteria for the award. We are not talking about a lengthy form or even lengthy letters, but specific statements about what nominators think makes nominated books appropriate for committee consideration. This information could be useful to committee members in assessing the books, and would encourage nominators to be more thoughtful in choosing books to nominate.

I want to thank the 2010 Mills committee. Despite the many unavoidable demands on committee members, they found the considerable time and energy to complete this task. I appreciate the professionalism of each of them. Michele Koontz and other members of the SSSP administrative office also deserve our thanks. Michele kept the process moving, and offered useful advice when it was needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Gale Miller
Chair, 2010 C. Wright Mills Award Committee