

To: SSSP Board of Directors

From: Karyn Lacy, Chair, 2011 C. Wright Mills Award Committee

Re: Committee Report

Date: July 13, 2012

## OVERVIEW

Established in 1964, the C. Wright Mills Award is presented annually to the author of the book that best fulfills a set of criteria outlined by the Society for the Study of Social Problems for the award. Thus, the committee evaluates each book based on the following 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.
- Explicitly or implicitly contains implications for courses of action

The award committee identifies between five and ten finalists prior to selecting a single winner. The winning author receives a \$500 monetary award as well as two complimentary tickets to the SSSP award banquet to be held in Denver this August. It is at the banquet that the winning author is officially recognized as this year's award recipient. The 2011 award winner is Shamus Khan for his book *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School* (Princeton Press, 2011).

In addition to the chair, the award committee included the following members:

Monica Casper, Arizona State University  
John Dale, George Mason University  
Lara Foley, University of Tulsa  
Shirley Jackson, Southern Connecticut State University  
Raymond Michalowski, Northern Arizona University  
Wilson Palacios, University of Southern Florida  
Suzanne Staggenborg, University of Pittsburgh

Sixty-eight books were nominated for the award. One book was ineligible because it was published in the year prior, not 2011. I will say more about this in the recommendations section of this report. After reading the books and deliberating, the committee selected seven finalists for the 2011 C. Wright Mills Award:

Julie Guthman, *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*, University of California Press

Shamus Rahman Khan, *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*, Princeton University Press

Mignon Moore, *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood among Black Women*, University of California Press

Shehzad Nadeem, *Dead Ringers: How Outsourcing is Changing the Way Indians Understand Themselves*, Princeton University Press

Victor M. Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, New York University Press

Steven J. Tepper, *Not Here, Not Now, Not That! Protest Over Art and Culture*, University of Chicago Press

Karolyn Tyson, *Integration Interrupted: Tracking, Black Students, and Acting White after Brown*, Oxford University Press

## **COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS**

Nominations for books began to pour in online and by snail mail in December 2011. Each time I received a nomination, I added the book to a spreadsheet which included the author's name and the title of the book. The day after the deadline, I sent this spreadsheet to committee members, asking them to check off the books they had already received and to tag missing books. Michele Koontz had been keeping a spreadsheet of nominated books as well. She provided much-needed assistance by contacting the publishers in all cases where committee members reported that they had not received books that were listed on the spreadsheet.

The third week in December, I assigned each nominated book to two members of the committee based on their reported areas of interest and a few requests from committee members to evaluate certain books in the first round. At this stage, I had not realized that one of the committee's members had authored a book which was nominated for the award. I mistakenly assigned his book to him! After reviewing the spreadsheet, he sent an email informing me that he'd been assigned his own book. I reassigned his book and added a different book to his list of books. I will have more to say about this in the recommendations section.

Our goal in the first round was to generate a short list of top-scoring books to be read by all committee members rather than only two. All 67 books were ranked on a scale from 1-5, with one representing the highest score. Some committee members used .5 along with whole numbers in their rankings. The committee briefly discussed whether committee members should be required to use whole numbers only, not fractions, in their rankings. The ten top-

scoring books made the list. Four books did not receive the highest average score, but I included them on our shortlist because there was significant variation in the two rankings assigned to them, i.e. one committee member assigning a top score of one, another assigning a much lower score of four or five. These books were labeled “greatest disparity in scores” and we discussed them along with the “top ten” books in our deliberations about what books to include on the short list.

An important technological innovation this year was the introduction of the conference call as the site for our deliberations as opposed to conducting these “discussions” via email. Raymond Michalowski was familiar with a website called FreeConferenceCall.com. The site does exactly what the name suggests: it allows you to set up conference calls weeks in advance at no charge to the person initiating the call or the participants. The advantage of this process is that we could respond immediately to a committee member’s comments as opposed to responding via email. One constraint is that some committee members live on the west coast. As a result, identifying a time convenient for everyone was a challenge. We settled on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

The committee identified seven books to put forth as finalists for the award. I emailed the list of finalists to Michele Koontz on April 29<sup>th</sup>. All seven finalists were notified by email on May 1<sup>st</sup> that their work had received this important recognition. The committee held a second conference call on May 6<sup>th</sup> to determine which of the seven books should receive the award. The committee discussed whether to choose a clear winner and an honorable mention. I consulted Michele Koontz about this and learned that the honorable mention category employed in the distant past had been eliminated as it diminishes the significance of the clear winner. I emailed the winner to Michele on May 7<sup>th</sup>. The C. Wright Mills Award winner was notified on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. I contacted him by phone, Michele followed up with a letter from SSSP.

## **CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The committee offers three recommendations for the SSSP administrative office’s consideration.

Our first concern is related to the nomination process. We received one book that was published in 2010, not 2011. I served on the Mills Award Committee last year too and happened to remember reading the book in last year’s pool of nominees. I suspect this is happening quite a bit. Authors and/or publishers hope that committee members will not check the publication date of the books they receive. Thus, the award committee recommends that subsequent committee members remain vigilant about verifying eligibility. This step is especially important for books first published as hardbacks (and nominated in the first year of publication) then resubmitted for the Mills Award one or two years later when the paperback version is published. The administrative office should clarify eligibility of subsequent paperback versions of the same book—both on the website and printed versions of the award’s guidelines.

Second, each year, the Mills receives nominations for books that are clearly inappropriate for the Mills award. The committee discussed how to avoid having books nominated for the award

that do not meet the criteria. We discussed whether nominations should be limited to SSSP members only. In the end, the group decided against this idea. Apart from explicit guidelines dictating which kinds of books are a good fit for the award competition (which SSSP already provides) the committee did not reach consensus regarding additional measures that could be implemented to discourage authors and publishers of inappropriate books.

Finally, our committee was composed of one member who also had a book in this year's pool of nominees. We did not discuss this issue as a committee; however, I want to recommend to the administrative office that authors who have a book published in their year of service should not be allowed to serve on the award committee. In cases where the author has already agreed to serve on the committee and learns after the fact that his or her book was nominated, the person should be required to resign from the committee. I imagine it is very difficult for a nominated author to rank the pool of books objectively when he or she has a stake in the outcome. We recommend the selection of a core Mills committee as well as three to four alternates, SSSP members who have agreed to serve if needed.

Overall, the committee did an outstanding job, reading a large pool of books in a very short period of time. I am grateful for their service, for Michele's assistance each step of the way, and to Hector Delgado for his unwavering support.

Respectfully submitted,



Karyn Lacy  
Chair, 2011 C Wright Mills Award Committee