

July 26, 2026

Society for the Study of Social Problems
C. Wright Mills Award 2025

Summary:

The successful discharging of committee work for the C. Wright Mills Award would have been a task too great without Michele Koontz and Kelsey Whitaker. The 2025 award season saw 112 submissions, and Michele and Kelsey were irreplaceable resources from start to finish. Kelsey organized the committee, responded to emails outside of reasonable hours, chased down missing books with publishers, and provided a roadmap for how to run the committee to meet deadlines. Michele provided a detailed spreadsheet of the submissions and was my primary point of contact any time I needed something. I only saw the front-facing efforts of the administrative side of what made our committee work possible, and I am sure that they addressed many more real and potential issues and tasks behind the scenes. As chair of the committee, I am forever grateful for their partnership.

Initially there were eleven members; however, soon after the first round of reviews began, one vacated the committee for personal reasons. The remaining members were:

Michael L. Walker, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Chair
Asad L. Asad, Stanford University
David Brunsma, Virginia Tech University
Shantel Gabriel Buggs, Florida State University
Patrice Collins, Northeastern University
Marta M. Maldonado, Oregon State University
Diana Papademas, SUNY Old Westbury
Mahala Dyer Steward, Hamilton College
Derron Wallace, Brown University
Siyue Lena Wang, University of California-Los Angeles

I fielded inquiries about the award and created a filing system to keep track of PDF versions of book submissions, nomination letters, and which committee members had received which books. I checked my system against Michele's master list when the submission deadline closed and reconciled any differences.

Broader committee work began via a short series of emails among members to address any glaring conflicts of interest and establish our criteria for the award. Michele provided the traditional 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

We accepted these and agreed to score each book from “1” to “5” with a score indicating the quality of the book *relative to the field of submissions*. Thus, a “1” did not indicate a low-quality submission; but it did mean there were other submissions that were superior and more deserving of the award according to the criteria.

We went through three rounds of review and held three meetings in addition to regular email updates as necessary. On December 19th, 2025, I sent out the list of reading assignments for the first round. The books did not divide evenly among committee members, so I assigned the heavier workload to associate and full professors, and I tried to ensure an equal distribution of reviewers by rank for each book. Thus, I tried to protect the time of our lone graduate student and our assistant professors while trying to give each book a read from scholars at different stages of their careers. I thought a bit about the areas of study for each committee member, and whenever possible, I tried to assign readings such that there would be a subfield expert contributing a score.

The first round of reviews included three reviewers per book, and we made significance progress towards establishing a semi-finalists list. Finding a time when we could all meet proved impossible given time constraints, so on March 4th, 2026, 8/10 members took the first meeting. Prior to starting the meeting, I aggregated the committee scores and provided a simple tally (e.g., $4 + 2 + 4 = 10$). Professor Asad, thankfully, caught the weakness in using sum relative to an average. On the spot, I calculated the scores as averages across the three reviewers. We agreed upon a necessarily arbitrary cutoff score, and discussed (a) books on the margin of the cutoff, (b) books missing the cutoff that any committee member felt strongly enough about to make a case for, and (c) books with wildly different scores (e.g., a “1” and a “5”). We finished that meeting in under an hour, and later I sent out new committee assignments for the remaining 36 books.

We made an important change for the second round of reviews: each book was given a review by four or five members. Again, the heavier loads went to tenured members. We began readings for the second round of reviews with a desire to establish a list of semi-finalists. We held some discussion about variances in scoring, and we agreed to be stricter with the criteria. Scores were due on April 2nd; we met April 28th, 2026. The meeting followed the same protocol for discussing the scores as with the first meeting and ended under an hour. Initially, we thought there could be only five semi-finalists; however, there was precedent for having more, and several books deserved the honor. After some discussion, we agreed upon six semi-finalists. I gave the list to Michele Koontz, and she alerted the authors.

Most of the reviewers had read at least one of the semi-finalist books, so for the final round of reviews, we prepared ourselves to make a serious case for our scores. We met May 19th, 2026. I had compiled the scores and distributed them to the committee members. In that meeting, the scores told an unmistakable story of who won. We spent some time discussing what we loved about the book and what we loved

about others. That was helpful for building a collective sense of having arrived at the right decision.

Wrapping up the meeting, I expressed my sincere gratitude for each committee member. It really was a collaborative effort with a *lot* of reading in conjunction with our respective duties that could not be shirked. I emailed Michele Koontz our final decision. She sent over templates for explaining the committee's rationale to semi-finalists and the winner in letters. I added a personal touch to the letter to the winner, including comments from the discussion we had in our final meeting. Thus ended the committee's work, leaving the committee chair with the honor of presenting the award in New York at the SSSP's annual conference.

Cordially,

Michael L. Walker
Beverly and Richard Fink Professor in Liberal Arts—Sociology
2025 Chair of the C. Wright Mills Award

Michael L. Walker