

PRESS RELEASE

Working-Class Studies Association Awards for work produced in 2020

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Each year, the Working-Class Studies Association ([WCSA](#)) issues a number of awards to recognize the best new work in the field of working-class studies. The review process of submitted work is organized by the past-president of the WCSA, and submissions are judged by a panel of three readers for each of the categories of awards.

The awards are awarded at the annual WCSA conference, which due to the pandemic, is currently ongoing, virtually. Please see the [conference website](#) for further details; to become a WCSA member, please visit [the organization's website](#), and follow the link to "Join the WCSA!"

The 2020 Working-Class Studies Association award winners are:

The winner of the C.L.R. James Award for Best Book for Academic or General Audiences is Sarah Attfield, for *Class on Screen: The Global Working Class in Contemporary Cinema*. As the award judges write, Attfield's "ambitious survey" demonstrates that "Working-class representation in film matters." *Class on Screen* "offers a theoretically sophisticated and empirically rich analysis of the representation of the global working class in contemporary cinema." The book examines over 150 films from around the world released between 2000 and 2019. Attfield presents them in "thematic chapters on work and unemployment, culture, immigration and diaspora, gender and sexuality, and race, and discusses in a concise, lucid, informative, and insightful manner." The book demonstrates "the cosmopolitan nature of the contemporary global working class and even suggests the potential for greater internationalism in the future. *Class on Screen* will undoubtedly be of enormous interest and value to all those concerned about working-class culture and representation in film during the global era."

The Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey Award for books by writer(s) of working-class origins or work that speaks to issues of the working-class academic experience goes to Matt Brim, for *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University*. The award judges write that this is "exactly the sort of work that the Ryan & Sackrey Award was intended to honor. One of the main insights of writing by working-class academics is that class is imbricated throughout our academic institutions; that there is no 'escape,' there is only erasure (mostly at elite institutions that can afford this). [...] This is a book full of insights and powerful personal anecdotes and one that makes an important argument: 'Poor Queer Studies' can 'galvanize interclass [anti-racist] cross-institutional queer formations that do not rely on a unidirectional, aspirational model of

progress' (3). We can remake our institutions so that they serve all of us, and this is one great example of where to start.”

There are co-winners of this year's Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing: *RESPECT: The Poetry of Detroit Music*, edited by Jim Daniels and M. L. Liebler, and also *Winter Counts*, by David Heska Wanbli Weiden. Judges write that *Respect* “is a gorgeous book of poetry and lyrics rooted in the diverse, working-class soul of a city” and “an amazing feat.” A collection of poems and songs about the music of Detroit, Michigan, *RESPECT* “embodies itself, it riffs off its own subject; it pushes the boundaries, between poetry, music and history, and dissolves the boundaries between exposition and experience. And *RESPECT* delivers its messages right to the heart; deep in the heartbeat of the blue soul; and to the complicated tangles of the curious mind. This book [...] sings to you, cries with you, plays with you. It promises to love you, crooning softly, ‘What’s goin’ on?’ But, watch out! Because then it pelts rivets into your head: ‘And the people rise in anger/And the streets begin to fill/And there’s gunfire from the rooftops/ And the blood begins to spill.’”

One judge describes *Winter Counts* as an “important narrative of a sector of the working class that is far too often forgotten.” The novel “is part crime-fiction, part anthropological exposé of American Indian life on Reservation land (Rosebud, South Dakota), part love-story and part existential-reckoning. It is a rocketing page-turner with depth, guts and soul. . . . From revenge to redemption, this novel is a wild ride with a smooth landing that quietly educates.” Another writes that *Winter Counts* “is pathbreaking in its portrayal of indigenous and working-class life.” Judges praise its attention to the “small details of class” and suggest that it deepens our “understanding of class, colonization, and two-world living as a nation within a nation.”

The winner of this year's Russo & Linkon Award for Best Published Article or Essay for Academic or General Audiences is “Slaggy Mums: Class, Single Motherhood and Performing Endurance,” by Katie Beswick. Judges write that the article “offers an elegant and intriguing study of performance writing by working-class mothers.” Beswick considers the “historical context of a classed and gendered insult by introducing ‘slaggy’ and how the working-class mothers stage and perform their experience of endurance.” Another judge notes that “Slaggy Mums” “carefully attends to the subtle ways that the slaggy mum figure is racially codified: despite nearly always being presented as white, the chav mum is a degraded white woman, one who is racially suspect in large because of her widely assumed sexual availability to men of color and lower- or working-class white men.”

This year's Studs Terkel Award for Single Published Articles or Series, Broadcast Media, Multimedia, and Film in Media and Journalism goes to "Protesta Per Sacco & Vanzetti," by Joseph Sciorra. A judge writes that the piece includes "extensive research into the songs related to the men's arrest, trial and executions," a case they compare with the death of George Floyd. "The balm for xenophobia is knowledge, but the challenge is to bring people to that table. I'm there." Also, a judge writes that Sciorra has "preserved a vital record of American anarchist history, giving credit to the working-class reproductions of this period's emotive sounds and sensations of this historical moment." The essay's "focus on Italian language items provides an explicit example of working-class experience across languages, cultures, and people."

There are also two winners of the Constance Coiner Award for Completed Dissertations: Lindsay Bartkowski's "Figuring Women's Work: The Cultural Production of Care and Labor" and Michelle Gaffey's "Subjects of Economy: Social Documentary Poetics and Contemporary Poetry of Work." Of Bartkowski's dissertation, judges praise its "sweeping account of representations of what comes to be known as 'women's work' from the antebellum period to the contemporary world of service work." The study "demonstrates how myths have persisted over time, and breaks those myths down to examine the reality behind the alienating world of social reproduction and the harsh details of labor often assigned by gender." Another writes that "Bartkowski's project is laudably ambitious and important." Bartkowski's "attention to rethinking the ideology of separate spheres and the distinction between the public and private spheres in understanding women's work is really interesting."

Judges write that Michelle Gaffey's dissertation, "Subjects of Economy: Social Documentary Poetics and Contemporary Poetry of Work," "attempts to redefine documentary itself, and to redirect our basic understanding of how words, images, style, form, and media combine to structure our understanding of working-class life and of solidarity." The project "embodies many aspects of the field's ethos. Her focus on memory-work and her argument that the texts she reads enact textual solidarity are central concerns to the field of working-class studies. She pays careful attention to the role of the writer/poet/photographer and the ethics of representing the suffering of marginalized groups [...]. In short, this project makes a key contribution to the field of working-class studies."

Special thanks to those who served as judges:

Sarah Attfield
Jeanne Bryner
Luka Cheung
Jamie Daniel
Jessica Femiani
Nathan Heggins Bryant

Scott Henkel
Allison Hurst
Barb Jensen
Gary Jones
Christie Launius
Jessica Pauszek
Cherie Rankin
Jen Vernon
Joe Varga