

[2018 Working-Class Studies Association Awards for work produced in 2017](#)

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PRESS RELEASE

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. This year, they will be awarded in June 2018 at WCSA's conference, hosted by the Center for the Study of Inequalities, Social Justice, and Policy at Stony Brook University. The review process 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 results are in for the annual WCSA Awards for significant contributions to working-class studies in the year 2017; the winners are listed below, along with judges' comments. Together these works demonstrate the scope and vitality of cultural and scholarly production in working-class studies, and serve as an inspiration to future work in the field.

C.L.R. James Award for Published Book for Academic or General Audiences (two awards)

Direct Democracy: Collective Power, the Swarm, and the Literatures of the Americas by Scott Henkel

Judges' comments:

"In *Direct Democracy*, Scott Henkel seeks to do nothing less than recover a tradition of direct democracy and collective action inherent in the people of the Americas. This theoretically-sophisticated book contains both strong evidence and a compelling argument that a tradition of direct democracy and collective action has challenged the constraints of power in the past, and will, by implication, do so again in the future."

"Henkel outlines a new approach to the role and potential of collective action and the concept of power to analyze a variety of intersecting class struggles that have traditionally been viewed within distinct racial and gender boundaries. His interdisciplinary approach combines literary and historical analysis in a way that brings alive the complexity and interconnectedness of a variety of struggles for basic human rights."

Class, Race, and Marxism by David Roediger

Judges' comments:

“Roediger has spent a lifetime addressing the complexities between the constructs of class and race, and this book is a culmination of what he has discovered over those many years. The introductory essay, “Thinking Through Race and Class in Hard Times,” should be required reading for anyone trying to understand the era of Trumpian politics. Roediger has a writing style that draws one in, even when talking about difficult subjects. This is an important book, with lessons that some way wish to ignore, but at their peril.”

“Roediger addresses the challenges that class and race continue to present for U.S. radicals. His sympathetic yet critical analysis conveys to the reader just how difficult and important such challenges are. Indeed, his persuasive analysis strongly suggests that until those challenges are addressed, working-class solidarity, the subject of the last article in the collection, is likely to remain more of a possibility than a probability.”

Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing

The Weight of This World by David Joy

Judges' comments:

“The Weight of This World is a testimony to the power of love, friendship, and many hungers leftover from childhood. Pain bubbles up and spills enters our senses, not like ash, but like a terrible ache in the jaw-dropping world of these troubled characters. A master storyteller, David Joy's on-the-fringe people become visible, so

alive their deeds impale themselves into our hearts long after the final page. It's a world we'd rather not see, ledgers about settling scores and carrying secrets. It's a compelling narrative driven by whispers and screams that show our deepest wounds in a night where no mother comes.”

“This novel is a raw look at the lives people live when left with very little kindness or opportunity, and few options. A powerful, pointed narrative that's hard to read, but harder to turn away from.”

John Russo & Sherry Linkon Award for Published Article or Essay for Academic or General Audiences

“Instrument in Tow: Bringing Musical Skills to the Field” by Liza Sapir Flood

Judges' comments:

“Flood's essay “Instrument in Tow” is an elegant and surprising analysis of a specific ethnographic situation, the nature of ethnography, and the assumptions researchers bring with them to the field. At the essay's start, a reader is led to expect a study that is relatively traditional in its methodology, but by the essay's end, Flood has delivered insights about the project's case study, about the role of a scholar, and about the ends of scholarship itself. Those insights— specifically, about the key concept of autonomy, and how a feminist approach to autonomy can move the scholarship away from an understanding of autonomy as freedom from social obligation to an understanding of autonomy as an obligation to a community—can have implications for a range of disciplines beyond ethnomusicology.”

"I appreciated Flood's reflexivity about her classed position in relation to her ethnographic research. I especially like that she brings working-class studies to the field of ethnomusicology and vice versa. Another strength is the intersectionality of her analytical lens—she fruitfully explores the intersections of class and gender and brings them together in the theoretical framework she uses to analyze her experiences in the field."

Studs Terkel Award for Media and Journalism

"Below Deck" by Lizzie Presser

Judges' comments:

"Presser's piece is a real feat of gorgeous writing combined with painstaking research, and sheds light on the dark side of an entire industry. I was especially impressed by the thoroughness of the reporting, as it was clear that she put in significant time in the Philippines searching out current and former workers, and her ability to sift through what must have been mountains of legal documents, complaints, etc., to emerge with an engaging narrative about a single man that includes so much more."

"A wonderfully in-depth investigative journalism piece about exploitative working conditions for Filipino laborers on U.S.-based cruise lines like Carnival. Well-written and with great visuals, the piece suggests an impressive amount of research, including interviews with workers, doctors, lawyers and others in the Philippines as well as the United States, as well as the compiling of evidence relating to systematic patterns of abusive conditions for workers. The article provides an excellent example of journalism that combines close attention to conditions of labor and to working-class voices—both classic concerns of working-class studies—with the ways such labor has been reconfigured and re-racialized in our contemporary global economy."

Constance Coiner Award for Best Dissertation (two awards)

Health & Efficiency: Fatigue, the Science of Work and the Working Body in Britain, c.1870-1939 by Steffan Blayney

Judges' comments:

"Blayney has written a history of a commercial science and professionals' contribution to managing the worker as a body to be fragmented, controlled, and so optimized for the extraction of surplus value. What I liked most is that this dissertation topic, in its capable, de rigueur execution, suggested exciting paths forward for scholarship. It permits to the community of scholars the further specification of the socio-economic conditions (industrialization) and specific antihuman products (industrial physiology and industrial psychology) of nationalization and nationalism, suggesting comparisons with capitalism-constrained communist and social democratic nationalisms."

"Blayney's polish and theoretical sophistication were hard to ignore. As well, it is a valuable addition to the growing corpus of research monographs on aspects of working-class phenomenology, and the working-class body in motion."

Working-Class Heroics: The Intersection of Class and Space in British Post- War Writing by Simon Lee

Judges' comments:

"Lee's interpretation of the diverse, location-attentive cultural ferment of the era resulted in *Working-Class Heroics*. In surveying British working-class "kitchen sink" literature, Lee finds that post-war British writing expresses a contingency of being in opposition to pre-war working-class solidarity. It is this expression, he contends, that gives rise to a proliferation of spatially-discrete British subcultures. Paying contemporary theoretical respects to the structuring agency of the manufactured and owned material world, Lee submits a classic contribution to the great Atlantic tradition celebrating the restoration of a universalist cosmopolitan cultural viewpoint, highlighting the freedom and humanity in cultural distinctions."

"Lee's work is very valuable in advancing the field of working-class studies. He made great use of archival material, provided cogent analysis of the meanings of the "Kitchen Sink" movement, and used spatial theory well."

Special thanks to those who served as judges:

Jeanne Bryner, Poet

Tim Francisco, Youngstown State University

Mara Fridell, University of Manitoba

Karen Gaffney, Raritan Valley Community College

Scott Henkel, University of Wyoming

Allison L. Hurst, Oregon State University

Gary Jones, American International College

Christie Launius, University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh

Sean McPherson, Bridgewater State University

Jeanetta Calhoun Mish, Poet

Cherie Rankin, Heartland Community College

Tim Strangleman, University of Kent

Gabriel Thompson, Journalist

Christine Walley, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Joseph Varga, Indiana University at Bloomington

Contact Info:

Michele Fazio, immediate-past president of the WCSA and 2017 awards organizer

Contact Email:

michele.fazio@uncp.edu

URL:

<https://wcstudiesassociation.wordpress.com>