

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Social Justice Work: Purpose-Driven Social Science

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In August 2010, we gathered for the sixtieth annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP). Ours is not a professional association per se, such that our mission or purpose is not to advance careers within the academy or in applied fields of the social sciences. We are different: Our purpose is to facilitate, communicate, and promote the work done by those who pursue social justice locally, nationally, and in the wider world. Thus, this article brings into focus social justice work by using illustrations of the different types of scholarship that characterize it.

My intent is to plait three strands of inquiry. First, I identify and summarize the key features of social activist and social advocacy scholarship, that which is typically recognized as social justice work. Second, based on those features, I posit that critical community engagement work is a form of social justice work that SSSP can and should recognize and promote. Third, to examine some of the best social justice work, and to tie together advocacy and engagement work, I visit what SSSP has honored, since 1964, with the C. Wright Mills award. A number of the award winners are exemplars of critical community engagement scholarship.

Before turning to the work of many SSSP members, I acknowledge that organizations, such as Project South, the Innocence Project, and the Center for the Study of Social Justice at the University of Tennessee, commit all their work to social justice. Further, I recognize the importance of what researchers do outside the boundaries of the social sciences. Natural and man-made disasters need responses, and better yet, preventive practices that depend on scholars and practitioners from every imaginable field of work. As do some of the most persistent social problems, such as war, inadequate food, and unclean water. The social sciences cannot claim exclusive ownership of social justice work.

For example, at Purdue University, an agronomist named Gabisa Ejeta is the 2009 World Food Prize winner. His research develops sorghum that is resistant to a specific weed that kills the grain. He does this work because he is deeply committed to searching for solutions for one of the world's most basic social problems, i.e., starvation. He calls his work "Purpose-Driven Science." His mission is to reduce hunger throughout the world, especially in his native Ethiopia and other African nations, without making them dependent on the United States to produce grain seeds. With Ejeta's approval, I use his terminology, "purpose driven," throughout this article.

Activist and Advocacy Work

Members and friends of SSSP tend to engage in social activist and social advocacy work. Social problems persist regardless of knowledge and social institutional practices that are

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designed to amend them. Scholars disagree strongly on what explains this persistence, though recognizing the urgent need to “do something” when a law or a policy or an event harshly spotlights the problem. Thus, activists gather to protest—now, not later—to demonstrate commitment to changing the problem. The character and organization of protests, demonstrations, and social movements transform, usually to reflect changing communication technologies. Nowadays organizers have social networking tools to bring together social movement members and protestors who attract multiple forms of media attention and thus sharpen the lens that examines a social problem (Fisher and Boekkooi 2010; Muijs, West, and Ainscow 2010; Olsson 2008; Della Porta and Mosca 2005; Postigo 2010).

In the spring of 2010, Arizona Senate Bill 1070 provoked deep concern and criticism for its inevitable racial and ethnic profiling. Protests around the country were planned and executed quickly, including those by SSSP members, while acknowledging that this is a battle that has only begun. As social movements perspectives suggest, strategies were discussed to maintain commitments to oppose legislation that discriminates against Latino/a and new immigrant populations.

Successful and sustained social movements, those that respond to global problems, or to the problems caused by globalization (Barnartt 2010; Beck 2009; Menjivar 2010; Parker 2009; Weber, Thomas, and Rao 2009), and rights movements within the United States (Amenta et al. 2009), represent a substantial portion of the work published in this journal, *Social Problems*, and by book authors.

Some social justice endeavors approach problems by working within and across organizations. The purpose of this type of work, known as social advocacy work, is to bring about deep change within social organizations or institutions. Advocacy research often depends on private foundations, such as the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, or the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation that are committed to improving specific conditions, such as employment or health conditions, which affect millions upon millions of people in the United States and around the world.

An example of advocacy research is the work that, over several years, effectively brought about changes to the ways rape crisis centers provide assistance for rape victims; how hospital emergency rooms use rape kits to obtain evidence; and the methods prosecuting attorneys use to achieve convictions in rape cases (Gruber 2009; Kadish 1999; Martin et al. 1985). Scholar advocates who do this type of work need to work in cooperation with organizational and community leaders. They advocate for specific populations, e.g., victims of rape, and they advocate changes that depend on leaders and influence brokers to alter policies and practices.

The Sloan Foundation recently funded a mixed-methods study of a labor-management partnership in a unionized, continuous-operations plant. Researchers focused on how shift work affects employees and their families, and they sought to develop practices to give workers greater voice in formulating shift-work policies.

A team of interdisciplinary researchers from two campuses collected survey data from managers, workers, and their families, and they made direct observations of workers and held informal conversations with them and their managers over a four-year period of time. Researchers unexpectedly found greater job satisfaction among night shift workers. Compared to day workers, night workers felt they had greater control over their work time (Brimeyer, Perrucci, and Wadsworth 2010).

The research team also photographed one method that shift workers use to virtually bring their families to the plant. They titled the practice “Bring Your Children to Work Day: Blue Collar Style.” Workers affixed photos of their children and their spouses or partners in their toolboxes.

This study is anything but discipline focused, or dispassionate social science. One of the principal investigators said: “[We] are working as embedded researcher[s]. When we meet with labor-management groups to discuss change, and there is resistance or disagreement . . . we are not detached observers . . . we are part of the process and [we are] implicated in the dynamics of the process” (Perrucci 2004:10).

A Career of Work Dedicated to One Important Issue

Michael Radelet is a scholar-activist-advocate whose career of work is focused on one issue, i.e., the abolition of the death penalty in the United States. He was among the first to document empirically that victim race, rather than defendant race, is the strongest nonlegal predictor of the death sentence (Radelet 1989a). His anti-death penalty work began almost by accident. Radelet was trained as a medical sociologist, in graduate school and through a post-doctoral fellowship in psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin Medical School. When he took his first academic job, he was invited to analyze death penalty data. In recent correspondence he explained his specialization (May 12, 2010): “Medical sociologists are known for their efforts to reduce mortality from such causes as heart disease or stroke. I have used my training in medical sociology as a foundation for attempting to reduce deaths caused by electric chairs, gas chambers, and lethal injections” [and I add, by the firing squad].

Radelet testified in 75 death penalty trials and before U.S. House and Senate committees. Somewhat unusual for an academician, but not unusual for a scholar activist, he is connected closely with the subjects of his social justice work. More than 50 executed persons invited him for their “last visits.”

One measure of success for those who depend on the academy for a paycheck is the production of journal articles and books that reflect the scholarship of social justice. Radelet is well known for his 1987 *Stanford Law Review* article that documented 350 cases of innocent persons who were convicted of first-degree murder. He has authored seven books (Bedau and Radelet 1987; Jones, Savel, and Radelet 1996; Miller and Radelet 1993; Radelet 1989b; Radelet, Budau, and Putnam 1992; Radelet and Vandiver 1988) and numerous law review and social science articles, always making the case for the abolition of capital punishment.

Characteristics of Social Justice Work

These examples and illustrations of activist and advocacy research reveal characteristics of social justice work. Within SSSP we find scholars, within and outside the academy, committed to various social issues—most summed up by one or more of the SSSP special divisions. Persistent social problems within the United States or in the wider world motivate social justice workers to struggle and understand major challenges. But understanding is the beginning and not the product of social justice work. Scholars communicate with our varied publics and audiences, including the subjects of our research, what needs to be done, or what needs to change. We struggle to explain how social problems are defined, and why some persist across centuries, regardless of changing laws and policies, or changing political landscapes. Members of SSSP have engaged in social justice work for 60 years, yet this is the essence of recently re-discovered “public sociology” (Burawoy 2005; Calhoun 2005; Schwartz 2008; Turner 2005).

Social justice work is problem-drive scholarship. That is, the social problem addressed by the scholarly work is the answer to the question “why do it?” Urgent and persistent local and global challenges initiate social justice work that is informed by the most sophisticated and the most suitable theory and methods for explaining the problem. War, genocide, greed-made environmental disasters, injustices and discrimination, or inequalities are some of the challenges that the social justice worker addresses, often with interdisciplinary perspectives. The purpose for the work is to understand, and then take whatever advocacy or activist actions are necessary to provoke change. In other words, social justice work is action focused. It can advocate the abolition of the death penalty or the legality of death with dignity. It can protest offshore drilling, windmills, or nuclear power. It can provoke a demonstration or a work strike. It can advocate for specific populations. It can challenge leaders, whether local, national, or international. And, it can be used to inform them.

Rich, descriptive studies are not out-of-bounds for social justice work, whereas such work may not find its way to the mainstream social science journals. Not to disparage what some

social scientists call pure or basic research, I do, nonetheless ask the question: Is the social justice worker motivated primarily to aspire professional promotion or publication in an academic discipline's "top" journal? Of course, the best social justice work ends up in the most influential journals and in the most influential books.

Critical Community Engagement Work

Critical community engagement work is a form of advocacy work in pursuit of social justice. Community engagement work was recognized in the early twentieth century in "The Wisconsin Idea," a mission statement prepared in 1904 by University President Charles Van Hise. He argued that universities are closely connected to the communities in which they are located, and to the state's political and economic structures (Anonymous 1992). Thus, he encouraged strong academic-community partnerships. Van Hise declared that he would "never be content until the beneficent influence of the university [is] available to every home in the state" (Anonymous 2003).

Although community engagement work is not new, it benefits from the Carnegie Foundation's new classification system (Driscoll 2008; Driscoll 2009; Holland 2009). Whereas many universities, until 2005, were simply "R1" universities, all colleges and universities now have multidimensional Carnegie classifications. The community engagement classification is elective, and universities must apply for it. Figure 1 shows the Carnegie classifications for the University of Wisconsin and Purdue University for illustrative purposes. The classifications for the two universities—which were both known as R1 universities until 2005—are identical. They differ only in the total number of students on campus.

Critical community engagement work can be a form of social justice work when it takes a grassroots approach to understand and improve circumstances for the least powerful, e.g., the homeless, the incarcerated, or the poor, to advocate on their behalf and negotiate necessary changes with community and organizational leaders. It is a continuous process of observation, analysis, and negotiation (see Figure 2). The critical community engagement scholar advocates changes in practices and policies on behalf of the least powerful, gives voice to the least powerful, and negotiates changes in practice within the community.

It is the negotiation that makes this type of work somewhat different from other forms of social advocacy work. Researchers advocate and negotiate change simultaneously within the community. Thus, engagement researchers must be vigilant to guard against cooptation by making sure they work within the community and not for community leaders. Critical engagement work, as all forms of social justice work, is not limited to a research methodology. It

Level	4-year or above
Control	Public
Classification	Category
Undergraduate instructional program:	Arts & sciences plus professions, high graduate
Graduate instructional program:	Coexistence
Enrollment profile:	Comprehensive doctoral with medical/veterinary
Undergraduate profile:	Majority undergraduate
Size and setting:	Full time four year, more selective, lower transfer in
Basic	Large four year, primarily nonresidential
This institution participated in the following elective classification	Research universities (very high research activity)
Community engagement	Curricular engagement and outreach and partnerships

Figure 1 • University of Wisconsin and Purdue University: Carnegie Classifications

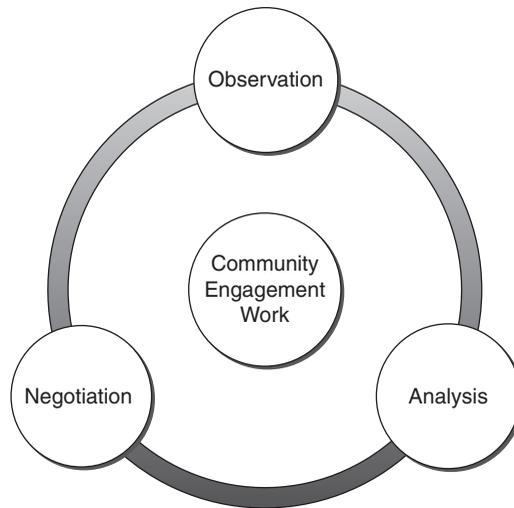


Figure 2 • The Process of Engagement Work

may be reflexive ethnography, institutional ethnography, or unstructured observational work. Most often it depends on mixed methods, because stakeholders often ask for “the evidence.”

Engagement work does not challenge grassroots movements or social protests. It does not seek, as some critics complain (Mehaffy 2005; Michener et al. 2009; Milburn et al. 2009; O’Brien 2009; Ochoa Jr and Nash 2009; O’Meara 2008; Orians et al. 2009; Raghelli and Craig 2010; Rockwell 2008; Rycraft and Dettlaff 2009; Scull and Cuthill 2010; Senier et al. 2008; Sirajblatchford 1995; Stoecker 2008), to de-radicalize a social movement. Instead it complements other forms of praxis. Engagement work brings a scholar’s expertise to the community, and what the scholar learns from the community is translated into the scholarship of engagement. In sum, critical community engagement work is purpose-driven and action-focused work that is conducted within a local community. The local community may be Lafayette, IN, a neighborhood in Los Angeles or New York, or a village in Swaziland.

Local Community Engagement Work in Lafayette, IN

Focused on the Greater Lafayette (IN) area, with an estimated current population of 168,000, I conducted community surveys for the public defender’s office, testified in state court trials and federal district court hearings, and worked in the domestic violence prevention and intervention program over two decades.

I was introduced to engagement work in 1985 when an attorney asked me to prepare testimony, *pro bono*, to argue in federal court against an Indiana law that prevented those with felony convictions from receiving state-sponsored educational loans. Said differently, I worked on behalf of a prison inmate to sue the state of Indiana and won. I worried about my job a few months later.

In 2005, I began a new round of community engagement work when a state court trial court judge asked me to join him and a team of criminal justice workers to design, implement, and evaluate a set of problem solving courts. Problem solving courts (PSC) are judge-run programs that address individuals’ and community problems simultaneously. The PSC takes a comprehensive approach, addressing needs of program participants, especially employment, housing, health, and family issues, while simultaneously addressing the needs of the community, such as a high crime rate, visits to hospital emergency rooms, and homelessness.

The collaboration was productive, and led to more work, resulting in a number of Department of Justice and Health and Human Services Grants, and state housing grants that are all sponsored by Housing and Urban Development (Miller and Johnson 2009).

I brought to the table my academic specialization, the sociology of law, and my experiences within the community. I knew two things going into my first problem solving court program. I could not impose my supposed expertise on the judge who had ruled against defense motions following my expert testimony in two major felony trials (Miller and Simons 1997). And I was taking on the responsibility for reporting evaluation study results to major stakeholders, though I was committed to working with a highly disadvantaged population, i.e., the seriously mentally ill, those in serious trouble with the law, and residents returning to the community following years of living in state prisons.

The second challenge, which is data collection and report writing, is addressed by social scientists who recognize that “the political right” has very effectively used empirical data to support their positions, while “the political left” has been very cautious or wary of using quantitative data to support their positions (Jeness 2001). Social justice workers must use the tools they command to influence community leaders. This does not imply that data need to be manipulated in any way to support desired program outcomes. It does imply that the community-engaged scholar must be willing to collect and analyze the type of data that organizational or political leaders look at to determine if the policy or program works and to make decisions.

Key sociological insights emerged from the recent PSC-focused community engagement work:

(1) Community engagement work can promote blended social organizations. By that, I mean that the purpose or mission of an organization changes and incorporates the mission of another organization. For example, the community mental health agency takes on the mission of corrections as soon as it administers drug screens. A corrections agency, in turn, takes on the mission of mental health when it advises program participants and directs them to counseling services. This issue is experienced at a national level, in that state prisons and local jails are now the leading mental health providers in the United States (Cummins 2006; Frisman et al. 2006; Howerton et al. 2009; Rutherford and Duggan 2009; Tsai et al. 2009; Weisman, Lamberti, and Price 2004).

(2) Nonprofit organizations measure their inputs, outputs, and outcomes and depend on performance measures to obtain or retain funding, whether from the federal government or the local United Way. Local social service and criminal justice agencies, therefore, take great interest in critical community engagement work. In this climate of new privatization (Jurik 2004), agencies need to measure the services they deliver, the number of persons they serve, and what happens to their clients. Without intending to, a community engagement project can affect an agency’s funding. When a mental health agency finds that the number of patients from a new program is too few to affect its bottom line, the agency will withdraw services. Likewise, when an agency finds that its most successful clients come from a community-based program, it uses the data (and sometimes the researcher) to convince funders to increase support for the agency.

(3) Agency workers interpret dialogue and observations through lenses that translate information into output or outcome measures. Their interpretations are purposeful. They need to account for their work and their own success. In some instances, interpretations can be extremely harmful for the groups or individuals with whom the community-engaged researcher works (Aldred 2007; Campbell 1998; Devault 2006; Eveline, Bacchi, and Binns 2009; Lane, McCoy, and Ewashen 2010; Moreira 2010; Nichols and Griffith 2009). An agency client, for example, may disclose a misunderstanding of a case manager’s instruction to an agency worker. The worker, rather than probing for explanation, looks at the weekly progress form and sees the “failed to follow instructions” box, and checks the option, resulting in a sanction for the client (Faris Miller and Johnson 2009).

The Liberal Critique

Critical community engagement research must address the liberal critique (Dates et al. 2009; Head 2007; Murphy 2009). Do programs, ostensibly designed to improve circumstances or “help,” only shore up power imbalances, keeping individuals and social groups dependent, while providing jobs and income for the “helpers?” Are the populations served involved in decision making? Is the community-engaged scholar simply applying the band-aid instead of working to stop the hemorrhage? It is indeed possible to avoid the liberal trap. At the onset, the engaged scholar needs to work with residents and community leaders. Further, continuous, deliberative, and action-focused research can prevent falling into the trap of becoming a quasi-social service provider.

Ethics of Engagement Work

The engaged scholar cannot drop into a community, collect data, write an analytical report, and leave. Nor can s/he ever stop planning work that connects to the actual rather than presumed needs of disadvantaged populations. Finally, the engaged scholar needs to be ready to advocate for the population served, even when community leaders protest; yet, the engaged scholar continuously needs to be fully aware of the delicate relationship between the researcher and the community leader. The scholar is not working for the community leaders, yet must work with them in a struggle to achieve social justice.

The ethics of community engagement work (Boser 2006; Cheney 2008; Shore 2006) are different than they are for basic or applied social science research (Emmett et al. 2009; Kokanovic et al. 2009; Paradis 2000; Ross et al. 2010; Shore 2006; van der Voort, Glac, and Meijs 2009). We all depend on our professional ethics. For example, the American Sociological Association makes its code of ethics available for members and nonmembers alike to study and review. In our employment places we submit proposals for IRB approval to make sure we are considering the protection of human research subjects. Research integrity officers at all universities were created for the purpose of having one central source to report research misconduct, i.e., all the misbehaviors that occur following data collection (Office of Research Integrity, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2000).

We transcend the limits of institutionally defined ethics when doing critical community engagement work. In some ways the researcher is more dependent on the self than on an institution or organization to address ethical issues. Workers must continuously ask what we are doing and why we are doing the research.

The “what” question needs to account for every imaginable consequence, intended or not, that can result from community engagement work. If the academic-community collaboration succeeds in significantly reducing the homeless population in a city, how is the emergency overnight shelter affected? Are its funding sources challenged?

The engaged scholar must continuously reflect on the question of whether we are using our expertise appropriately. What do we bring into a community? The expert cannot assume he or she has appropriate responses for the community’s needs. A child-care expert on the Purdue campus was invited by a Lafayette community leader to offer advice on child care for the most poor within the community. The expert eagerly presented the published research findings to the community, but could not make suggestions for what to do when women face the need for child care with no resources, not even a voucher for child care.

When doing community engagement work, the researcher can never neglect the question: Whose lives am I affecting and how? Regardless of intentions, is the quality of life for a woman made homeless in response to partner abuse improved or made worse by a community engagement program that provides supportive, long-term housing? How are the neighborhoods in which apartments are located to house the chronically homeless affected?

When working within a community and with its residents it is not possible to ignore the social relationships that are somehow changed. When problem solving court graduates invite researchers to their weddings should the researcher attend? When a participant dies, should the researcher attend the funeral? Community-engaged scholars must recognize that they do not and cannot know all that they should.

Finally, the engaged scholar must be willing to tell an accurate story using straightforward language. She or he must be prepared to pick up the microphone at a public meeting or to stand in front of a television news camera or a newspaper reporter to communicate what the general population will hear or see about a community engagement program. People tend to watch the local television news while eating dinner. So, a researcher needs to communicate why a community-based response to a social problem matters. The story must be told in a straightforward way, and in a manner that whets the curiosity appetite rather than a desire to change the channel. There is no guidance from our IRB application or in our research integrity office to help us guarantee that we are communicating clearly to the general population. There is no guidance to tell us how to insure we are achieving desired outcomes without harming other segments of the local population.

C. Wright Mills Award Winning Books: The Best Examples of Social Justice Work

Examples of books presenting purpose-drive and action-focused scholarship that received the C. Wright Mills award are also outstanding examples of critical community engagement work. The author of *Made in China* (Pun Ngai 2005) slept on factory-provided cots, and she worked with the “factory girls”—as they are called—for eight months in an urban Chinese sweatshop. Her purpose was to understand how young women cope with the physical and emotional pain of their demanding work, and how some attempt to ignore work rules and regulations in order to get through their work shifts. She concludes her book with a very strong chapter on opening up new and organized fronts of resistance.

For the purpose of understanding the fair trade movement, the author of *Brewing Justice* (Jaffee 2007) lived in villages and towns in Oaxaca to study families working as coffee farmers. He concludes that depending on markets cannot generate fair trade. He calls for “grass-roots movements to counteract the harmful effects of global free trade and to rein in corporate power” (p. 263).

The author of *In Search of Respect* (Bourgois 1996) spent three and a half years in a poor neighborhood, befriending crack dealers. He wanted to understand the economics of exclusion, and how it encourages urban drug dealing. He concludes his study with a call for “destroying the profitability of narcotics trafficking by decriminalizing drugs” (p. 321). These authors, and other C. Wright Mills winners, did not initiate their research programs for the purpose of understanding a social problem and calling it a day. Understanding the issue is imperative, as is long-term field research to uncover reasonable suggestions for what to do to amend the social problem under investigation.

A Descriptive Picture of the 54 Award Winners

The first C. Wright Mills award¹ was made in 1964 and honored a book, *Delinquency and Drift* (Matza 1964), which has become a classic in the field of criminology. The book, however, did not drift far from a conventional academic approach. It is an example of a type of traditional and academic work, i.e., synthetic and discipline-focused work. Compare this author statement, which characterizes the book, to the characteristics of purpose-driven and action-focused books.

1. The Appendix shows the 54 books and the year of award. The 2009 winner is included in the Appendix but not in the analysis.

The author, David Matza (1964), states: “An alternative image of the delinquent can be developed by accepting the implication of soft . . . determinism. One effect of restoring choice to man [sic] is to render feasible a joining of classical with positivist assumptions” (p. 27). During that same decade, the 1960s, the C. Wright Mills award recognized the finest and the most controversial urban ethnographies: *The Social Order of the Slum* (Suttles 1968), *Tally’s Corner* (Liebow 1967), and *Tearoom Trade* (Humphreys 1970).

At least six C. Wright Mills award winners went on to win other prestigious book prizes. *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (Starr 1982) won the Bancroft Prize in American History and the Pulitzer Prize in General Non-Fiction. *States and Social Revolutions* (Skocpol 1979) won The ASA Award for a Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship. *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Wilson 1987) was named one of *The New York Times* Book Review’s Best Books. The Robert K. Merton Professional Award of the ASA was made for *Impure Science* (Epstein 1996). *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont 2000) received the Mattei Dogan Prize for the Best Comparative Book, and *Life is Hard* (Lancaster 1992) received The Ruth Benedict Award of the Society of Lesbian & Gay Anthropologists. One book, *Doméstica* (Hondagneu Sotelo 2001), won four book prizes following the C. Wright Mills award. Three are ASA section awards, and one is the Pacific Sociological Association’s Distinguished Scholarship Award.

Over the decades, the 54 award-winning books have addressed global and local problems and some have embraced the controversial. An example of synthetic and controversial work is *The Job Training Charade* (Lafer 2002). The author provides irrefutable evidence to demonstrate that two of the most prominent federal jobs training programs, i.e., CETA, which was replaced by the Job Training Partnership Act, are unmitigated failures. They did not reduce poverty and they did not reduce unemployment. Nonetheless, these two programs garnered strong support from both Democrats and Republicans for decades, illustrating how elected officials tend to ignore economic distress for the purpose of supporting programs that appeal to their constituencies.

An example of controversial, and purpose-driven and action-focused work, is *Cracks in the Pavement* (Sánchez-Jankowski 2008). The author conducted urban ethnographic studies over a period of ten years. He focuses on key neighborhood features: the housing project, the small and local grocery store, the barbershop or beauty shop, the gangs, and the high school. His book provides neighborhood-level insights as he shows how poor neighborhoods can be supportive for their residents and creative in solving problems. Further, he advocates caution: Changing one neighborhood feature has consequences for all the other key features within the neighborhood.

Generally, the books that receive C. Wright Mills awards transcend the boundaries of any particular academic discipline. For example, the author of *Doméstica* (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) advocates improved conditions for domestic workers in the United States, and especially California. She accounts for immigration laws, the history of race and ethnic group relations in the United States, and labor and employment laws and regulations at the state and federal levels. With this interdisciplinary orientation, she can explain two very important findings: employers strongly disvalue care work, and employers are more likely to view a domestic worker as a “commodity” rather than an “employee.”

Seventy percent ($N = 37$) of the award-winning books present purpose-driven and action-focused research. That is, the answer to the question, “why write this book?” is the author’s commitment to understanding the problem and doing something about it. Examples are *Stations of the Lost* (Wiseman 1970), *Sidewalk* (Duneier 1999), and *Flat Broke with Children* (Hays 2003).

Thirty percent ($N = 16$) of the books are synthetic or discipline-driven scholarship. Excellent examples are *Pricing the Priceless Child* (Zelizer 1985), *Black Feminist Thought* (Hill Collins 1991), *States and Social Revolutions* (Skocpol 1979), and *The Contentious French* (Tilly 1986). Thirty-seven (68.7 percent) of the award winners are studies conducted within a U.S. city or community. Fifteen percent ($N = 8$) are cross-national, comparative studies, and 17 percent ($N = 9$) are studies conducted outside the United States.

Poverty and inequalities (including homeless studies) represent 28 percent ($N = 15$) of the C. Wright Mills award-winning books. Social class and work (including organizational studies) or unemployment represent an additional 24 percent of the books ($N = 7$). Two research methods characterize the majority of winners, i.e., ethnographies and in-depth, face-to-face interview studies. There is little news value here. But, what is noteworthy is the percent of authors (22 percent) who spent more than three years in the field to gather their initial data.

The Influence of C. Wright Mills Award Winners

Pardon the expression, and with apologies to a few of my colleagues: The “hard” social scientists look at the social science citation index to show that a peer-reviewed journal article has impact on an academic discipline or an interdisciplinary field. The numbers are published and readily available. With books, it is different. For books, we must resourcefully construct and use measures that can capture influence (Bekoff and Bekoff 1989; Bressler 1999; Erne 2007; Goode 1980; Nock 2001). Two measures have been used in the humanities and social sciences. In earlier years, and in a recent issue of the American Sociological Association’s magazine, *Contexts*, a book’s sales figures were used.

Contemporarily, the number of libraries holding a given book, as reported in a national or an international union catalog, is typically used (White et al. 2009). Taking the measurement issue a step further, the percentile ranking of the book’s position among all books with the same Library of Congress (LOC) class descriptor permits the researcher to compare the relative influence of a specific book to others within the same LOC class. For example, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (Starr 1982) is the 1982 C. Wright Mills award winning book and the 1982 Pulitzer Prize winner for general nonfiction. A total of 2,648 libraries around the world hold this book. Its LOC class descriptor is RA395.A3. There are a total of 2,673 books in this category, with the first-level description “Medical Care, United States, History.” *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* is held or owned by the most libraries within this group of 2,673 books. Said differently, it is ranked first and its percentile ranking is .00038 ($1 \div 2673$).

In contrast, *Abused and Battered* (Knudsen and Miller 1991), which is not an award-winning book, is held by only 898 libraries. Its LOC class descriptors are HV6626.2 and HQ809.3.U5. A total of 2,185 books fall into these LOC categories, with the descriptions “Wife Abuse, United States. Child Abuse. Family Violence.” *Abused and Battered* is ranked 28th within this group of 2,185 books. Its percentile ranking is .012815 ($28 \div 2185$).

The smaller the percentile ranking (e.g., .00038 compared to .012815), the more influential the book is. An important caveat should influence the reader’s interpretations of the percentile rankings. If a book is a niche book, with few others with the same LOC class descriptor, the percentile ranking cannot be compared fairly to a percentile ranking for a book that falls into a LOC group that includes a large number of books. An example that illustrates this point is the 1988 C. Wright Mills co-winner, *Socialist Entrepreneurs* (Szelenyi 1988). It falls into a LOC group that includes 11 books. It is ranked 1st in library holdings yet its percentile ranking is .09.

For this analysis, I used Purdue’s access to WorldCat² and first examined the counts, or the number of libraries that hold each of the books. I also found the LOC class descriptor for each winning book and computed the percentile ranking for each. Though less than ideal, each book’s percentile ranking is an indicator of the book’s relative influence.

2. Seventy-one thousand libraries in 112 countries participate in WorldCat. It was created in 1971, it contains more than 150 million different records pointing to over 1.4 billion physical and digital assets in more than 470 languages. It is the world’s largest bibliographic database. OCLC makes WorldCat itself available free to libraries, but the catalog is the foundation for other fee-based OCLC services (such as resource sharing and collection management). WorldCat was founded by Fred Kilgour in 1967.

In 2003, OCLC began the “Open WorldCat” pilot program, making abbreviated records from a subset of WorldCat available to partner Web sites and booksellers, to increase the accessibility of its member libraries’ collections. In 2006, it became possible to search WorldCat directly at its Web site. In 2007, WorldCat Identities began providing pages for 20 million, predominantly authors and persons who are the subjects of published titles.

Descriptive Data

All told, (as of June 15, 2010) libraries around the world hold 61,151 copies of books that are C. Wright Mills award winners. The simple count of library holdings ranges from 236 libraries that hold an award winner, to nearly 2,700 libraries that hold a C. Wright Mills award-winning book. Generally speaking, the early award winners, compared to the more recent winners, are held by more libraries.³ The books held by the most libraries are: *Justice Without Trial* (Skolnick 1966), *Regulating the Poor* (Piven and Cloward 1971), *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (Starr 1982), *The Secret Trauma* (Russell 1986), and *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Wilson 1987).

There are notable exceptions to this pattern of publication year and simple library counts. Among this decade's winners, *Flat Broke with Children* (Hays 2003) and *Off the Books* (Venkatesh 2006) are already held by a total of three thousand libraries.⁴

All of the 54 award winning books were numerically coded along the following dimensions: year of publication, the SSSP division that most closely captures the substantive content of the book, author sex, author race and ethnicity, author nationality, study conducted within United States versus comparative study versus study conducted outside United States, research methods used, synthetic/theoretical/discipline-focused versus purpose-driven and action-focused book; and the book's percentile ranking based on the number of library holdings and the Library of Congress classifications.

Overall, variation in the simple number of libraries that hold C. Wright Mills award winners can be understood when inspecting the descriptive data. Controlling for the publication year, books that are purpose driven and action focused, compared to synthetic or discipline focused, tend to be held by more libraries. Books that present studies that were conducted exclusively outside the United States are likely to be held by fewer libraries. Author gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality are not significantly associated with library holdings.

Over the years, one university press stands out with respect to publishing award winning books. The University of California Press is responsible for publishing 22 percent ($N = 12$) of all the C. Wright Mills award winners. Naomi Schneider, one person, is the editor of eight C. Wright Mills winning books. This year, the new Naomi Schneider imprint was launched. According to the University of California Press Web site, "These books will highlight the lives and experiences of the disenfranchised; these select titles . . . spur unconventional thinking about contemporary social and political [issues] . . ." (University of California Press n.d.).

Clearly, the press matters, as do those who, behind the scenes, devote their intellects and direct their concerns to an unusual type of monograph. Most of the C. Wright Mills winning authors are anything but objective and dispassionate, two terms we often hear when social scientists establish their bona fides.⁵ As a collection of books, they are focused on understanding and explaining social problems as experienced by the social groups most affected by them. Authors tackle the underground economy, poverty and inequalities, and social movements. They observe and document conditions that make us wonder how some survive and thrive under the harshest circumstances, and they help us realize the need to challenge the basic inhumanities that characterize a number of social institutions.

As shown in Figure 3, there is indeed a connection between social justice work and C. Wright Mills award winning books. Social justice scholars tend to engage in three major types of work: social activism, social advocacy, and engagement. C. Wright Mills award winners

3. To account for this issue, I measured the number of library holdings, divided by the age of the book. The results range from 15.95 library holdings to 517 library holdings.

4. These data are accurate as of June 10, 2010.

5. There are a small number of exceptions. For example, Mary Furrer's book, *Advocacy and Objectivity* (1975), examines the professionalization of economics, political science, and sociology in the nineteenth century. Michael Useem's (1984) book meets the tests of objectivity and dispassionate inquiry.

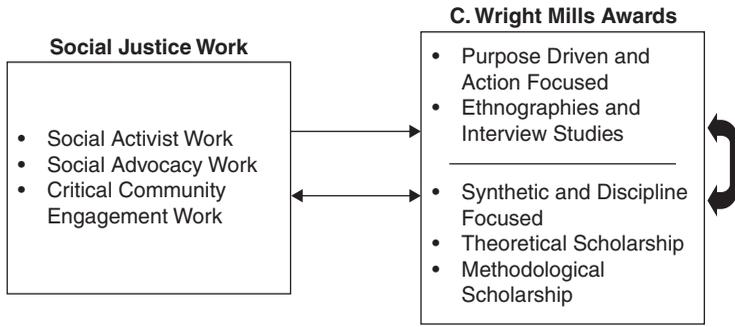


Figure 3 • Social Justice Work & C. Wright Mills Awards

fall into two types of books. One is the type of social justice scholarship that is purpose driven and action focused. A second type of award winning book makes major contributions to a social science discipline. These disciplined-focused, synthetic books are valuable for informing all of our work, including purpose-driven and action-focused scholarship.

Analysis of the Book’s Influence Based on Percentile Rankings of Library Holdings

An ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model was specified to account for variation in the percentile ranking of the books (the dependent variable, percentile rankings, is described and illustrated above). The smaller the percentile ranking, which we call the book’s score, the more influential the book is. The 54 C. Wright Mills award winning books have influence scores that range from .00038 to .50. The five most influential books, based on percentile rankings, are shown in the top panel of Table 1 and the four least influential books are shown in the bottom panel. One of the less influential books is omitted due to its recent publication date.

What is immediately apparent is the high influence of the most as well as the less influential books. The percentile ranking of .50 means that half the books in the LOC category are less influential than *Garbage Wars* (Pellow 2002). These influence scores must, of course, be interpreted with caution. The number of books in a LOC category range from two to 5,164 (mean = 838, s.d. = 1,224). The number of libraries worldwide that hold C. Wright Mills award

Table 1 • The Most and Less Influential C. Wright Mills Award Winning Books

Book Title and Publication Year	Percentile Ranking
Most Influential	
<i>The Social Transformation of American Medicine</i> (1982)	.00038
<i>Men and Women of the Corporation</i> (1977)	.00039
<i>Flat Broke with Children</i> (2003)	.00042
<i>Delinquency and Drift</i> (1964)	.00048
Least Influential	
<i>Whose Keeper?</i> (1989)	.125
<i>Mean Streets</i> (1997)	.200
<i>What Machines Can’t Do</i> (1994)	.333
<i>Garbage Wars</i> (2002)	.500

Table 2 • Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analysis

	<i>Book Influence Scores (Percentile Rankings)</i>	
	<i>Standardized beta</i>	<i>t</i>
Year of award	.453	3.420***
Number of books in LOC category	-.321	-2.604*
Author sex	.119	.992
Author race	.305	2.271*
Adj. <i>R</i> ²	.237	<i>F</i> = 5.109**

p* < .05 * *p* < .001

winning books range from 236 to 2,668 (mean = 1,118, s.d. = 639). Both of these distributions affect the percentile ranking and thus what is called the influence score.

Table 2 shows a simple OLS analysis. With a small number of cases, various models (not shown here) were specified. All told, the models showed that few of the variables coded for this study have significant net effects on explaining variation in the influence score. The model presented here controls for the year of publication and the number of books in the Library of Congress category. The control variables are responsible for most of the variance explained. Beyond the control variables, the author’s race matters but the author’s sex does not. Award-winning authors are more likely white than black, but are no more likely to be men than women.

Conclusions: Purpose-Driven Work and Influential Books

In summary, when we glance at the scholarship that typifies what SSSP members do, when we examine different types of social justice work, and when we take a closer look at some of the books we treasure on our book shelves—the C. Wright Mills award winners—we can reach straightforward conclusions. SSSP members have worked tirelessly to understand persistent social problems, and to do something about them. Regrettably, we face no shortage of persistent or new challenges.

Social justice workers engage in purpose-driven and action-focused research in the United States and throughout the wider world. A form of social-justice work is critical engagement work that takes place in local and global communities. This type of work represents a university-community collaboration that is anything but new. Yet, it must be attentive to research ethics in ways that are not yet addressed explicitly or thoroughly by a university’s institutional review board and its research integrity officer. Though many if not most universities embrace community engagement work, departments or other academic units within those universities do not necessarily recognize this form of scholarship. Until more widespread acknowledgment of community engagement work characterizes our research units within and outside the academy, there will, perhaps, be inadequate attention paid to this form of scholarship or to the research ethics that should guide it.

C. Wright Mills award-winning authors have produced books that exemplify critical community engagement work. They clearly reflect the work of social justice. The more recent winners are more likely than the earlier winners to produce engagement-focused, i.e., purpose-driven and action-focused, monographs. Authors seek understandings of social problems, whether local or global, and propose social action. Other winning authors produce books that are theoretically or methodologically driven. One purpose of some of the winners is to synthesize all that we know academically to advance a discipline or a field of study.

What can we predict for the future? It is reasonable to posit that future books, honored by the C. Wright Mills award, will challenge both persistent and emerging social problems: Some will present the best critical community engagement work that will encourage colleagues in the social sciences or interdisciplinary fields to understand problems for the purpose of doing something about them. Others will provide theoretical and methodological advances that will inform our social justice work. We can be certain that C. Wright Mills award winners will produce the best syntheses and scholarly advances, and the best examples of social activism, social advocacy, and critical community engagement work that is produced within and across the social science disciplines and interdisciplinary fields. Their intended audiences, like those of past winners, will not be limited to academics interested in promoting professions, the self, or a particular academic agenda.

Appendix • C. Wright Mills Award, Past Winners

2009

Mario Luis Small. 2009. *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. Oxford, UK and New York: Oxford University Press. (Not included in analysis.)

2008

Martín Sánchez-Jankowski. 2008. *Cracks in the Pavement: Social Change and Resilience in Poor Neighborhoods*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

2007

Daniel Jaffee. 2007. *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

2006

Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh. 2006. *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

2005

Pun Ngai. 2005. *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

2004

Mario Luis Small. 2004. *Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

2003

Sharon Hays. 2003. *Flat Broke With Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. New York: Oxford University Press.

2002 Co-Winners

Gordon Lafer. 2002. *The Job Training Charade*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

David Naguib Pellow. 2002. *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press.

2001

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. 2001. *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

2000

Michèle Lamont. 2000. *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

1999

Mitchell Duneier with photographs by Ovie Carter. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

1998

Monica J. Casper. 1988. *The Making of the Unborn Patient: A Social Anatomy of Fetal Surgery*. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press.

1997

John Hagan and Bill McCarthy in collaboration with Patricia Parker and Jo-Ann Climenhage. 1997. *Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness*. Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press.

1996

Steven Epstein. 1996. *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1995 Co-Winners

Philippe Bourgois. 1996. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro. 1995. *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*. New York: Routledge.

1994

Robert Thomas. 1994. *What Machines Can't Do: Politics and Technology in the Industrial Enterprise*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1993

David Wagner. 1993. *Checkerboard Square: Culture and Resistance in a Homeless Community*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

1992

Roger N. Lancaster. 1992. *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1991

Sharon Zukin. 1991. *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1990

Patricia Hill Collins. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

1989 Co-Winners

Doug McAdam. 1988. *Freedom Summer*. New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Alan Wolfe. 1989. *Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1988 Co-Winners

Ivan Szelenyi. 1988. *Socialist Entrepreneurs: Embourgeoisement in Rural Hungary*. Madison: The Wisconsin University Press.

John Sutton. 1988. *Stubborn Children: Controlling Delinquency in the United States, 1640–1981*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1987

William J. Wilson. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

1986 Co-Winners

Diana E. H. Russell, 1986. *The Secret Trauma: Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers.

Charles Tilly. 1986. *The Contentious French: Four Centuries of Popular Struggle*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Joyce Rothschild and J. Allen Whitt. 1986. *The Cooperative Workplace: Potentials and Dilemmas of Organizational Democracy and Participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

1985

Viviana A. Zelizer. 1985. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. New York: Basic Books.

1984 Co-Winners

Michael Useem. 1984. *The Inner Circle: Large Corporations and the Rise of Business Political Activity in the U.S. and U.K.* New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Richard Madsen. 1984. *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1983

Manuel Castells. 1983. *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1982

Paul Starr. 1982. *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry*. New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers.

1981

Judith Lewis Herman with Lisa Hirschman. 1981. *Father-Daughter Incest*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

1980

Michael Lipsky. 1980. *Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

1979

Theda Skocpol. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press.

1978

Walter Korpi. 1978. *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism: Work, Unions and Politics in Sweden*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

1977

Rosabeth Moss Kanter. 1977. *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

1976

Janice E. Perlman. 1976. *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

1975

Mary O Furner. 1975. *Advocacy & Objectivity: A Crisis in the Professionalization of American Social Science, 1865–1905*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

1974

Harry Braverman. 1974. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

1973 Co-Winners

James B. Rule. 1973. *Private Lives and Public Surveillance: Social Control in the Computer Age*. London: Allen Lane.

Isaac D. Balbus. *The Dialectics of Legal Repression: Black Rebels before the American Courts*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

1972

David M Gordon. 1972. *Theories of Poverty and Underemployment: Orthodox, Radical and Dual Labor Market Perspectives*. Lexington, MA and Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company.

1971

Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward. 1971. *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*. New York: Vintage Books.

1970

Jacqueline P. Wiseman. 1970. *Stations of the Lost: The Treatment of Skid Row Alcoholics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

1969

Laud Humphreys. 1970. *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. New York: Aldine Publishing Company.

1968

Gerald D Suttles. 1968. *The Social Order of the Slum: Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1967 Co-Winners

Elliott Liebow. 1967. *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Street Corner Men*. Boston: Little Brown.

Travis Hirschi and Hanan C. Selvin. 1967. *Delinquency Research: An Appraisal of Analytical Methods*. New York: The Free Press.

1966

Jerome H Skolnick. 1966. *Justice Without Trial*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

1965

Robert Boguslaw. *The New Utopians*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

1964

David Matza. 1964. *Delinquency and Drift*. New York: Wiley

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