



## WCSA 2025 Awards for Work Published in 2024

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### CONTACT:

[Jen Vernon](#), WCSA immediate past president and awards coordinator

The Working-Class Studies Association issues six annual awards each year to recognize the best new work in the field of working-class studies. The review process is coordinated by the immediate past president. Committees of three judges review nominations and select a winner for their category. A seventh lifetime achievement award is also occasionally given and announced at WCSA's annual conference.

The 2025 annual WCSA Awards for significant contributions to working-class studies published or completed in 2024 are listed below with comments from the judges. Please join me in celebrating this exciting new work; now more than ever, we need it!

### The Constance Coiner Award for Best Dissertation

The Constance Coiner award for best dissertation completed in 2024 goes to **Emily Coccia** for **"Workingwomen and Pleasured Reading: Nineteenth-Century Sensation Fiction and the Formation of Queer Readers,"** University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The Committee writes:

- ★ The WCSA Coiner Dissertation Award committee was impressed and inspired by the goals and scope of Coccia's dissertation. Through an examination of a wide range of

archival materials from the 19th century (“labor periodicals, newspaper editorials, political speeches, correspondence, diaries, story papers and dime novels”), Coccia explores the ways in which working-class women created a sense of belonging through their engagement with mass culture (sensation fiction) as active readers (as opposed to passive consumers).... [The] committee was also inspired by Coccia’s integration of queer theory and concepts from contemporary media literacy. According to a committee member, “This is beautiful and profound work. Both rigorous and methodologically innovative, this is a significant piece of research that will be of great use to many scholars.”

### **The CLR James Award for Published Book for Academic or General Audiences**

The CLR James award for the best published book for academic or general audiences in 2024 goes to **Patrick McKelvey** for ***Disability Works: Performance After Rehabilitation***, New York University Press. The Committee writes:

- ★ *Disability Works* provides a unique and much-needed contribution to the fields of theatre studies, labor studies, working-class studies, and, of course, disability studies. It has frustrated those of us teaching in the latter field that all of these disciplines have tended to ignore the experiences and contributions of disabled workers. McKelvey’s attention to the intersection of rehabilitation discourses, “disability theatre,” and labor practices is unlike any other study. It is intersectional, theoretically sophisticated, interdisciplinary, and radical in its rehearsal of pro-work rehabilitation history and culture while also raising the “right not to work” as it emerges in performance and in life.

### **The Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing as Published Books of Poetry, Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, and other Genres**

The Tillie Olsen award for the best published book of creative writing as poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and/or other genres in 2024 goes to **Tim Z. Hernandez** for ***They Call You Back***, University of Arizona Press. The Committee writes:

- ★ I found myself really engrossed in this book, emotionally attached to the interviewed families, their history, and their lives. Hernandez does a beautiful job putting the pieces of the deportees’ lives together where he can and bringing the reader along on his investigative journey. These are vitally important stories, both

historically and in our current moment.

- ★ *They Call You Back* is very poetically written; a nonlinear interweaving of Tim Hernandez' own family stories with his search for the identities and families of those who died in the plane crash at Los Gatos canyon in 1948 that became the subject of Woody Guthrie's famous working-class song "Deportee." This is not the first book he has written about tracking down those who knew the deportees, whose names were famously not reported in news of the crash. He has written another book both because he has found more of those witnesses, but also because he is visited by ghosts, which can be read literally or figuratively; he speaks with those who knew the dead and tells their stories as they tell them to him. "It isn't my job to question the veracity of their story. It's only my job to document," he writes. By letting the story emerge piece by piece, out of order, he avoids the sensationalism some of it might otherwise have had. In a way, this is poetry. It is a weaving of words, a weaving of history, imagination, lived experience, empathy, witness, grief, testimony, songs, photographs, pain, and more pain. The book documents a significant event in working-class history, and insists on the undeniable humanity of working class people of all nations.
- ★ *They Call You Back* is the story about the telling of a story. How the telling shapes the storyteller. It is a second excavation. Not only does Hernandez exhume and salvage the dignity of the 28 farmworkers who were killed in a 1948 plane crash mid deportation, he investigates his own personal and professional journey as the descendent of farmworkers himself. In *They Call You Back*, Hernandez makes himself an open book. Providing fresh insight to an often unheralded and endangered subsection of the working class, journalists. A proper memoir for the times, this story chaser's story resonates in a moment where immigration and aviation make news. This work is *about* workers, a protest against the anonymity of labor in this country at a time when our historical contributions are under attack.

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

The John Russo & Sherry Linkon award for the best published article or essay for academic or general audiences in 2024 goes to **David Flood** for "**Fence Me In: Categorization, Whiteness, and Class Identity Politics in the United States**," [\*Current Anthropology\*](#) Volume 65, Number. 3, June 2024, University of Chicago Press. The Committee writes:

- ★ "Drawing from rich ethnographic research in a white working-class music scene in rural western North Carolina, near Asheville, David Flood reveals interracial class differences in attitudes and practices related to people categorizing themselves and

others, which he describes as “ideologies of categorization.” He does an excellent job of interrogating the intersection of whiteness and class, and in doing so, reveals a generally unreflective classism among white middle-class progressives. Based on a number of descriptive vignettes, he offers a timely and important critique of the anti-categorical stance and conviction typical of left-leaning middle-class whites. Moreover, he does a brilliant job of demonstrating how middle-class whites refuse categorization while they simultaneously utilize their cultural capital to gauge and judge the moral character of working-class whites. In “Fence Me In,” David Flood provides a significant and much-appreciated contribution to working-class studies.”

- ★ "This piece is, for me, a clear winner because it builds on existing critical literature, from several fields, about class but also offers an insightful, thought-provoking, and useful argument about how middle-class and working-class white people use discourses of categorization and why that matters. Flood thus offers a new way of thinking about how class works, and in the process, he also complicates some of the by-now familiar discourse in WCS about the cultural differences between the middle and working classes, with a clear emphasis on both the “practices of categorization,” as he puts it, and their political implications. In part because this piece engages with theories about how class works, it would be valuable for scholars across the varied disciplines of WC studies. I found the piece well-written and engaging... I also appreciated how Flood incorporates his own story and reflexivity about his subject position."
- ★ "Exploring the white, working-class music scene near Asheville, North Carolina, David Flood examines the intersections of race and class and contextualizes the current American political scene through exploring a very specific demographic. Drawing upon years of field research, Flood's article provides both primary and secondary sources to provide analysis of the class dynamics and complexity in this community, particularly in light of the recent American political climate. Flood's personal connection to the region adds even greater depth to his analysis and a unique perspective of an "insider." Flood's article may focus on a particular cultural group, yet its thesis provides larger commentary on class, race, and community. As such, "Fence Me In" is both specific yet universal, timely and timeless."

## Jake Ryan & Charles Sackrey Award: for Books by Writer(s) of Working-Class Origins that Speak to Issues of the Working-Class Experience in Academia

The Jake Ryan & Charles Sackrey award for the best book by a writer of working-class origins that speaks to issues of the working-class experience in academia in 2024 goes to **Teresa Crew** for ***The Intersections of a Working-Class Academic Identity: A Class Apart***, an Open-Access Book, Emerald Publishing, Leeds. The Committee writes:

- ★ Crew's timely and necessary contribution confronts the "non-entity" status often imposed on working-class academics, challenging the pervasive myth that social mobility erases class identity. In her analysis, she dismantles shallow definitions of class that suggest financial stability alone transforms one's fundamental cultural and social position within academia. The book excels particularly in its exploration of working-class cultural wealth and its unflinching examination of classism within academic institutions. Crew's chapters on these themes provide crucial insights into how working-class academics navigate, and often resist, the cultural expectations of higher education while maintaining connections to their roots.

As our judges noted, this work serves as both a useful guide and an important entry point into the evolving debates about class location in academia. By addressing the intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, and class, Crew demonstrates how these identities compound the challenges faced by working-class academics.

*The Intersections of a Working-Class Academic Identity* reminds us that working-class academics remain "strangers in paradise," navigating institutions that were not designed with them in mind. Crew's work is essential reading for scholars, students, and institutions seeking to understand the real consequences of class dynamics in higher education and the persistent barriers that working-class academics face. Crew includes the perspectives of adjunct faculty as well, exploring the relationships between class background and the growing numbers of contingent faculty in academia.

This book stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of class analysis in academia and the importance of amplifying working-class voices in scholarly discourse. Crew has created an impressive interrogation of working-class academic identity that will undoubtedly inspire future scholarship and advocacy.

## Studs Terkel Award for Media and Journalism

The Studs Terkel Award for the best single published article or series, broadcast media, multimedia, and film in media and journalism goes to **Gretchen Purser and Franklin Thompson** for "**Raise the Roof: Building Tenant Power in Syracuse**," documentary film, 51 mins. Written and directed by Gretchen Purser, filmed and produced by Franklin Thompson, August Fifth Studios. The Committee writes:

- ★ *Raise the Roof: Building Tenant Power in Syracuse* brings viewers directly into the movement for housing justice, and offers an intimate look at the formation and impact of tenant unions. This timely and significant documentary excels in using the medium of film not just to inform, but to foster emotional and intellectual engagement with the

issues at hand. What sets this work apart is its accessibility: it speaks to a broad audience while still serving as a practical educational tool for tenants seeking to understand collective organizing and the function of tenant unions. The combination of a strong sociological foundation with compelling multimedia storytelling is both commendable and inspiring. It's a powerful example of academic knowledge being mobilized in service of community empowerment and social change.

- ★ The story has many different facets– rebuilding, resilience and the constitution of community power. The documentary spotlights the struggle for tenants' rights and integrates the material into a smooth running and inspiring narrative. It places tenant rights among the urgent priorities of the civil rights movement.
- ★ *Raise the Roof: Building Tenant Power in Syracuse* is a thoughtful documentary that exposes the harsh realities that the community is facing, navigating a broken housing system. Through honest interviews and engaging visuals, the documentary sheds light on renters' exploitation while offering educational tools to the audience that are up against, often, indifferent landlords and ineffective regulations. In addition to the impact on local communities, *Raise the Roof* contributes meaningfully to the working-class studies by centering working-class communities' lived experiences in the film. By doing so, the documentary provides valuable insight into the intersections of class, housing, and policy, making it a vital resource for scholars, students, and activists committed to understanding and addressing inequality.

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## Gratitude

Thank you to everyone who participated in the WCSA Awards this year. There were many standout submissions and the judges had their work cut out for them. If your nomination was not awarded, we hope you'll submit again. Truly, each year is different. And all, please let your colleagues and community know about WCSA's Awards. Encourage them to apply when they produce something fabulous that illuminates our emergent and ongoing field.

These awards will be celebrated at an awards ceremony at our upcoming conference in Sydney/Gadigal, Australia, Dec. 2-5, 2025. We hope many of you get to join us there or

participate in the Zoom track. Thanks again to the winners, to those of us who get to read and watch the bounty, and to the judges.

In Solidarity,

Jen Vernon, WCSA immediate past president  
Sierra College, Nisenan and Miwok lands, California

## A Special Thanks to All the Judges:

1. Julie Assouly, Université d'Artois, Arras, France
2. Hakim Bellamy, University of New Mexico, New Mexico, US
3. Jeffrey Cabusao, Bryant University, Rhode Island, US
4. Renny Christopher, Washington State University, Vancouver; Washington, US
5. Owen Clayton, University of Lincoln, Lincoln, England
6. Jackie Gabriel, Western Colorado University, Colorado, US
7. Veena Hampapur, UCLA Labor Center, Los Angeles, California, US
8. Lisa Kirby, Texas Center for Working-Class Studies, Collin College, Texas, US
9. Maria Diosa Labiste, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
10. Sherry Linkon, Georgetown University, Washington DC, US
11. Cherie Madigan, Heartland Community College, Illinois, US
12. Jack Metzgar, Roosevelt University, emeritus, Illinois, US
13. Miranda Mosier-Puentes, Portland State University, Oregon, US
14. Asia Muhammad, Robeson Community College, North Carolina, US
15. Jamie Owen Daniel, American Association of University Professors, retired, Illinois, US
16. David Roediger, University of Kansas, Kansas, US
17. Claude Taylor, Middlesex College, New York, US
18. Tracy Vargas, University of North Carolina, Pembroke; North Carolina, US
19. Mallorie Watts, Ohio Wesleyan University, Ohio, US