



PRESS RELEASE

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SCHOLARS HONORED FOR 2020 BOOKS OF THE YEAR

The American Journalism Historians Association has selected Mike Conway of Indiana University as winner of the 2020 Book of the Year Award for “Contested Ground: ‘The Tunnel’ and the Struggle over Television News in Cold War America.”

The American Journalism Historians Association Book of the Year Award recognizes the best book in journalism history or mass media history published during the previous calendar year. For the 2020 award, the book must have been granted a first-time copyright in 2019.

Conway will be formally recognized as part of a Book Award panel presentation at the 39th Annual AJHA National Convention, which will take place virtually Oct. 2-3.

Joining Conway will be three scholars whose books received honorable mention: Kimberley Mangun of the University of Utah, author of “Editor Emory O. Jackson, the Birmingham World, and the Fight for Civil Rights in Alabama, 1940-1975,” and Michael S. Sweeney and Natascha Toft Roelsgaard of Ohio University, authors of “Journalism and the Russo-Japanese War: The End of the Golden Age of Combat Correspondence.”

Conway’s book examines a network television documentary on a Berlin Wall tunnel escape that brought condemnation from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Conway notes that ‘The Tunnel’ controversy and the rise of television news reveal a critical juncture in American journalism and media history as the Cold War entered one of its most dangerous periods.

Conway said the AJHA Book Award is very special to him because AJHA is his favorite academic organization.

“The scholars of AJHA have been encouraging and supporting my work since I was a graduate student,” he said. “It means the world to me to be honored by this group.”

Mangun began studying Jackson and the Birmingham World in 2009, when AJHA held its annual convention in Birmingham. A subsequent research trip there was partially funded by AJHA’s Joseph McKerns Research Grant.

Mangun said that Jackson was a force to be reckoned with. With words and typewriter, he advocated suffrage, equal educational opportunities, freedom to recreate and enjoy entertainment, and opportunities to live in a neighborhood of one’s own choosing. But Jackson also decried police violence and documented dozens of shootings of Black men by White officers.

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“In my book, I aimed to document some of the civil-rights work that Jackson did during his long career with the World,” Mangun said. “Equally important, I sought to illustrate the relevance of his advocacy to current events and #BlackLivesMatter.”

Mangun thanked AJHA and her peers for recognizing her scholarship and for paying tribute, too, to the advocacy of Emory Jackson.

Sweeney said the Book Award means the world to him because it honors more than two decades of research—including time at the Italian national archives in Rome—about a subject close to his heart: the role of the press in wartime. Additionally, it honors “one of the best Ph.D. students one could ever hope to mentor,” his co-author Roelsgaard.

“When a mountain of research brings the recognition of your peers, it’s an affirmation of faith in history and in historians,” Sweeney said. “So, Natascha Toft Roelsgaard and I thank AJHA for this award.”

Sweeney said that more than any other bit of scholarship, this book expresses who he is and what he believes. Belligerents in the First World War deliberately copied and expanded Japan’s techniques of manipulating the truth, and propagandists have refined those methods, war after war.

“More than a century later, we still live in this crazy world where facts are doubted and lies embraced in the public sphere,” he said.

To receive access information for the Book Award panel and all AJHA virtual conference programming, register for the conference at ajhaonline.org. Registration is free.

Founded in 1981, the American Journalism Historians Association seeks to advance education and research in mass communication history. Members work to raise historical standards and ensure that all scholars and students recognize the vast importance of media history and apply this knowledge to the advancement of society. For more information on AJHA, visit <http://www.ajhaonline.org>.

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