The James Aronson Awards for Social Justice Journalism

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Aronson Winners Reveal Passion in Accepting 24th Annual Awards for Social Justice Journalism and Cartooning with a Conscience

NEW YORK, NY, May 5, 2014 – David Carr stepped to the microphone at the 24th annual James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism award ceremony on April 28th with an air of humility. He said he was incredulous at his selection for the Career Achievement award. He did not think that he – a media reporter for the New York Times – was an obvious choice.

Indeed, his fellow winners at the 24th annual event were shoe-leather journalists working more explicitly on social justice issues -- Andrea Elliott for her New York Times series about homeless children in New York City, “Invisible Child”; Chris Hamby for his Pulitzer Prize-winning series for the Center on Public Integrity on West Virginia coal miners with black lung disease; Ted Genoways for his expose on In Earth of the living conditions faced by residents near major oil refineries in Port Arthur, Texas, the proposed terminus of the Keystone XL pipeline; and Terrence McCoy for his Miami New Times investigation of an 85-year-old American billionaire who has personally funded some of the more contested anti-Palestinian efforts in Israel.

But Carr soon understood why he was selected. “It wasn’t but 20 years ago that I was living on welfare, raising two daughters, and just emerging from addiction,” he said to a packed auditorium at the Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College. People were ready to dismiss him as a lost cause, he continued, a homeless drug addict and a scourge on society. “But you never really know who someone is, or who they were, or who they’ll become,” he said. Today Carr covers the media in a way that illustrates, in his own words, how "history has demonstrated that left to their own devices, companies will gouge the rich, leave out the poor, cherry-pick markets and focus solely on their profits."

The audience was rapt. Beginning with a keynote address by the co-editor of the new book Gay Propaganda: Russian Love Stories, Joseph Huff-Hannon, a former Aronson winner, the ceremony moved at a swift and intellectually stimulating clip, the winners speaking with great passion about their work. Chris Hamby choked up describing one of his subjects, a 45-year-old man with black lung whose life is effectively over, and who has been denied benefits thanks to sneaky lawyering and questionable medical research at Johns Hopkins that Hamby’s winning article described. (Hopkins subsequently closed the unit.)

Clay Bennett of the Chattooga Times Free Press brought comic relief in his acceptance of the Grambs Aronson Award for Cartooning with a Conscience. The two student award winners, Angely Mercado (for undergraduate print journalism in the Hunts Point Express) and Alexander
Mallis (for short news/documentary film), seemed to confirm the optimism voiced by several winners that there is a bright future for investigative social justice journalism.

**About the Aronson Awards**

The [James Aronson Awards for Social Justice Journalism](https://www.hunter.cuny.edu/filmmedia/awards), and the Grambs Aronson Award for Cartooning with a Conscience, are bestowed by an independent committee of journalists, media professionals, scholars and activists working under the aegis of the Hunter College department of Film and Media Studies. They honor the late James Aronson, a co-founder of The National Guardian who taught journalism at Hunter, and his late wife, a visual artist.

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