

Winners of the James Aronson Awards for Social Justice Journalism

[Department of Film & Media Studies](#)

Hunter College of the City University of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Public invited to awards event at the Lang Recital Hall, Hunter College, on Tuesday, April 19th, 2016

In the words of James Aronson *“I believe that there is in the United States a company of honest journalists of all ages, conscious of the potential power of an informed people . . .”*

This year’s Aronson Awards honor journalists who uncovered and investigated monumental injustices, including Flint’s leaded water crisis, the health risks in the \$1.5 billion e-cigarettes business, the secret world of parole boards, the true death toll of black and Latino men killed by police and the impact of workplace monitoring on the American workforce. Their stories have brought these issues to the national stage and given the public the information they need to demand change and social justice.

Winners will discuss their inspiration and the challenges of reporting these stories at a free **public presentation Tuesday, April 19 from 6:30-9 p.m.** at the Lang Recital Hall at Hunter College, 695 Park Avenue, New York City. The awards ceremony will be hosted by esteemed journalist Katti Gray.

The winners are:



Curt Guyette, Keynote, Award for Outstanding Pioneering Reporting
SCARY: FLINT’S LEADED WATER

Investigative reporter for the ACLU, stories in Deadline Detroit, Lifestyle and Metro Times

For original investigative reporting highlighting the racial, environmental and economic social justice issues in water contaminated with lead in Flint and Detroit, Michigan, a crisis created by Michigan’s emergency management system. Guyette collaborated with grassroots organizers, such as the Flint Democracy Defense League, on a massive citizen-led water-testing project to expose the contamination, fuel the outrage and restore democracy to Michigan’s poor, black and brown communities.

Raquel Rutledge, Gasping for Action, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Watchdog Report

Workers who roast and grind coffee or work in popcorn and flavoring companies are exposed to the lung-destroying chemical diacetyl. This chemical is also used in e-cigarettes, touted by the \$1.5 billion industry as a harm reduction aid. Despite the potential for serious and irreversible harm, the federal government has failed to regulate this chemical or alert workers. Rutledge’s alarming reports led the CDC to issue warnings about the dangers of diacetyl.

Esther Kaplan, *The Spy Who Fired Me*, *The Human Cost of Workplace Monitoring*, *Harpers*
Monitoring phone calls, Internet use, keystrokes and emails are increasingly part of how corporations “manage the labor force.” In a riveting story that links big data, technology and worker rights, Kaplan documents how in industry after industry, data collection is part of an expensive, high-tech effort to squeeze every last drop of productivity from workers. Companies are pushing employees to their mental, emotional, and physical limits, and taking control over their working and nonworking hours while compensating them as little as possible.

Beth Schwartzapfel, *Life Without Parole*, *The Marshall Project*

Schwartzapfel’s reporting takes us into the secret world of parole boards, revealing how politically-appointed board members make decisions without transparency or accountability. In many states, parole boards are more concerned with the appearance of being soft-on-crime than a true adjudication of the parole eligibility of the human beings they judge.

Jon Swaine, Oliver Laughland, Jamiles Lartey and Ciara McCarthy, *The Counted*
The Guardian US

The Counted is an unprecedented project by *The Guardian* to expose the extent of the deadly use of force by law enforcement in the United States. It counts how many people were killed by police and other law enforcement agencies in the United States throughout 2015 and 2016, reports their demographic information and describes how they died. Their database combines *Guardian* reporting with verified crowd-sourced information to build the most comprehensive record of fatalities that is now being used by the Department of Justice. *The Counted* is the most thorough public accounting of the scope of the deadly use of force by law enforcement in the U.S.

Kevin Sawyer, *Award for Exemplary Community Journalism*, *San Quentin News*

Sawyer writes for *San Quentin News*, an inmate-run publication with a monthly paper circulation of 13,500 that is also available on the web. Reporting for the incarcerated, Sawyer tells the stories of men who have been forgotten by society. His stories are wide-ranging and include the problems in transmitting funds from families to prisoners, the visit of Bay area teachers to explore solutions to the school-to-prison pipeline, and the preponderance of elected white prosecutors in the US who determine charges, plea bargains and sentencing recommendations for the nation’s disproportionately black and brown prisoners. His body of work for this underserved and often ignored population makes Sawyer a champion for human rights.

Cartooning with a Conscience: Khalil Bendib



With pen and ink mixed with a profound wit Khalil Bendib’s provocative cartoons comment on racial injustice, labor and class struggles, U.S. imperialism, environmental degradation, and the scapegoating of Muslims and Arabs. His cartoons are featured in over 1,700 small and mid-size newspapers across the country. The author of several collections of cartoons, Bendib’s work has been featured in *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and numerous other newspapers.

Undergraduate Award for Journalism

Ajhani Ayres, *Watching The Block: Three women look back – and ahead on Kelly Street, Hunts Point Express*

Ayres' story takes a deep look at the issue of urban housing through the lens of one family over four decades on Kelly Street in the Bronx. This universal story makes the case that what makes neighborhoods strong is the commitment from residents like these. That commitment, if supported, can bring even the most neglected blocks back to life.

Documentary short: Melissa Saucedo Gonzalez

Melissa Saucedo Gonzalez's moving documentary *BEFORE DAVID* uncovers a mental health issue rarely spoken about -- prenatal depression, and the difficulties experienced when confronting changes in one's body, lifestyle, identity and belief systems.

Documentary feature: Samantha Farinella

Samantha Farinella's documentary *HUNTING IN WARTIME* profiles Tlingit veterans from Hoonah, Alaska who fought during the Vietnam War. The veterans talk about surviving trauma, relating to Vietnamese civilians, readjusting to civilian life, and serving a government that systematically oppresses native people.

About the Aronson Awards - James Aronson was a longtime Hunter College professor and before that a founder and editor of the crusading news weekly, *The National Guardian*. Since 1990, the Aronson Awards have been coordinated by the Hunter College Department of Film & Media Studies.

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