

## **Presentation of 2012 Stanford M. Lyman Distinguished Book Award**

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The books nominated for the MSSA's **Stanford M. Lyman Distinguished Book Award** are outstanding contributions to their respective areas of inquiry. The Lyman Book Award Committee is most pleased to have the opportunity to read and to assess the merit of each. Briefly these submissions cover the areas of: environmental sociology and more specifically the impact of hazardous and toxic waste on world-wide communities; an historical, cultural, sociological analysis of "magna" or Japanese comics; an ethnography of a religious cult that tests theory in the sociology of religion; and one that utilizes Weber's work on bureaucracy and Knottnerus's Structural Ritualization Theory to focus on a topic that is becoming of increasingly import to the elderly and infirm.

Taken in name alphabetical order the entries include:

### **Francis O. Adeola: HAZARDOUS WASTES, INDUSTRIAL DISASTERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RISKS: LOCAL AND GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL STRUGGLES.**

The author reviews what is becoming an increasing large literature on hazardous and toxic waste in terms of their risk as a social problem and as a cultural by-product of technological progress. There are several foci in this book, a book that is rich in a review of an extensive literature. Included is a discussion of the adverse effects resulting from exposure to hazardous and toxic waste, and extensive discussions of the classifications of hazardous wastes, as well as the characteristics of and the consequences resulting from exposure to each type for humans and the environment. Brief selective case studies published over several decades are used to further demonstrate the deleterious effects of a problem that is only too conveniently overlooked by business, government and the body politic.

There are many other issues discussed, such as legislative imperatives that are passed as a result of disasters, but the primary focus is on issues that pertain to social inequality, the quest for environmental justice and the numerous endangerments that led to the evolution of and often forceful advocates of environmental social movements.

### **Kinko Ito: A SOCIOLOGY OF JAPANESE LADIES' COMICS: IMAGES OF THE LIFE, LOVES, AND SEXUAL FANTASIES OF ADULT JAPANESE WOMEN**

Since the early 1990s, our colleague, Kinko Ito, has been examining "magna" or comic art – "caricatures, cartoons, graphic novels, comics, and illustrations that appear in newspapers, magazines, textbooks, manuals, political manifestos, and advertisements." While magna have been a part of Japanese culture since ancient times, for the past 25 years this medium has been increasing in popularity across the globe.

This book provides a detailed history of Japanese women's literature from the Heian Period (794 – 1185) to the present with a particular focus on the rapid growth and influence of magna on Japanese society in general and women's literature in particular since the 1980s.

**Gordon Shepard and Gary Shepard: TALKING WITH THE CHILDREN OF GOD: PROPHECY AND TRANSFORMATION IN A RADICAL RELIGIOUS GROUP**

During the course of this 17 year study the authors engaged in field research to learn how a cult established during the religious awakening of the 1960s and 1970s survived after the 1984 death of the Family's charismatic founder. This is ethnographic research at its finest. Replete with extensive interview narratives the authors build on the work of sociology of religion analysts Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge. But the authors also accept the challenge posed by Dr. Stark who critically stated that his earlier work did not adequately account for (and I quote p. 4)

.... The most significant revelations that have inaugurated major religious movements historically”.

The challenge posed by Stark is to explore the social dynamics involved in the post- evolution and survival of a religious cult in modern society. This book offers a process focused exploration into how what is now a small albeit world-wide religious cult survives in societies encumbered by crisis and uncertainty, are becoming increasingly secular, and in which established religion is hostile to cult movements. Shepard and Shepard accept Stark's challenge to test a set of theoretical propositions to explain (p. 4) "... how revelations occur that come to be accepted as the word of God by a community of believers." Through this process the authors take the reader into the inner workings of a religious cult, thereby making a major contribution to the sociology of religion while also enhancing our understanding of social movements

**Jason S. Ulsperger and J. David Knottnerus: ELDER CARE CATASTROPHE: RITUALS OF ABUSE IN NURSING HOMES AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT**

Some of the best sociological research begins with an insiders' observations and the belief that perhaps we can do better. This book integrates previous qualitative findings reported over several decades, and contributes to what is becoming a significant issue in sociological literature.

This is a study of everyday rituals; a study that is focused on social-psychological abuse and neglect of the elderly who, through their own doing or by well-meaning relatives, entrust their lives to the staff of for profit and nonprofit nursing homes. In reading this material I am reminded of my similar observations of assisted-living staff while visiting an old friend and colleague, and long-time member of the MSSA. I am also reminded of another long-time friend who recently suggested to me that he might be better off leaving his two-story house staffed by four employees and moving into an assisted living facility.

One observes the workings of Max Weber's bureaucratic rituals in motion and learns how emphasis on such bureaucratic rules and regulations can lead to social and physical constraints, emotional neglect, and dehumanization. Precise in clearly defining the numerous variables they believe are involved in nursing home practices, the authors present a rather sobering set of insights into a growing industry.

But Ulsperger and Knottnerus offer a ray of hope. Building on the issues raised by social advocates dedicated to improving nursing home conditions, the authors posit a series of suggestions for how nursing home practitioners can change their methods, thereby improving the quality of life for elderly residents. In this context, I am personally haunted by what may be one of the authors' most stinging observations. And this is the revelation that nursing home institutions are not only bound by bureaucratic rules, regulations, and time constraints placed upon often non-caring staff members but, because of such conditions, the worse affect upon these elderly residents is the debilitating loss of their individual *social history*.

