

# UNNATURAL CAUSES

...is inequality making us sick?

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## TOP SCIENCE COMMUNICATIONS HONOR GOES TO *UNNATURAL CAUSES*

### Documentary Series Changing the Way Americans Think About Health

**San Francisco** - *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*, the groundbreaking documentary series exploring the root causes of America's alarming class and racial inequities in health, was named the winner of the 2009 TV / Radio / Film Award for science communication by the National Academies September 30. The prestigious prize is the latest of many won by the four-hour series produced by California Newsreel with Vital Pictures.

While Congress debates health care reform, *Unnatural Causes* asks what makes Americans healthy – or sick – in the first place, and offers new remedies for an ailing society. *Unnatural Causes* demonstrates how health is shaped by far more than health care, bad habits, or unlucky genes. Instead, it circles in on a slow killer in plain view: the class and racial inequities in the rest of our lives – in the jobs we do, the wealth we enjoy, the neighborhoods we live in, the schools we attend - can get under our skin as surely as germs and viruses. They kill more Americans in a day than do global pandemics in a year. Socio-economic status, race and zip code are even stronger predictors of health and life expectancy than smoking.

The National Academies is the umbrella name for the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine, and National Research Council. They provide policy advice to the federal government under a congressional charter first passed and signed by President Lincoln in 1863.

The National Academies judges committee was chaired by Donald Kennedy, past president of Stanford University and editor-in-chief emeritus of *Science*. *Unnatural Causes* was singled out for “putting a human face on one of the most complex issues in public health.”

The three other 2009 winners are: Neil Shubin for best book, *Your Inner Fish: A Journey Into the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body* (Pantheon Books); Mark Johnson for newspaper / magazine reporting for “The Good Cell” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel); and NPR News for Online / Internet site for *Climate Connections*.

Produced by California Newsreel with Vital Pictures • Presented by the National Minority Consortia of public television



*Unnatural Causes* has won praise from pundits around the country along with a duPont-Columbia Award, the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust Excellence in Journalism Award, the Council on Foundations Henry Hampton Award and other honors. More than 15,000 community dialogues, policy forums, trainings, and town hall meetings built around screenings of *Unnatural Causes* which have been reframing the way we think about health have been convened since the series' initial Spring 2008 PBS broadcast.

*Unnatural Causes* is being re-broadcast in October by many PBS stations (check local listings). DVDs are available from California Newsreel at [www.newsreel.org](http://www.newsreel.org).

*Unnatural Causes* was produced by San Francisco's California Newsreel ([www.newsreel.org](http://www.newsreel.org)), the country's oldest non-profit documentary production and distribution center, now in its 41<sup>st</sup> year, in association with Vital Pictures of Boston ([www.vitalpix.com](http://www.vitalpix.com)). It was presented on PBS by the National Minority Consortia of public television. More information on the series, including video clips and resources on health equity, can be found on the companion website at [www.unnaturalcauses.org](http://www.unnaturalcauses.org).

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**For more information on *Unnatural Causes***, visit [www.unnaturalcauses.org](http://www.unnaturalcauses.org) .

**For the National Academies' press release**, visit:

[www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=093009](http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=093009)

**To purchase DVDs:** [www.newsreel.org](http://www.newsreel.org)

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