

LAWCHA

The Labor and Working-Class History Association



NEWSLETTER
2022-23

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LAWCHA President Cindy Hahamovitch.
Photo by Jason Thrasher.

President's Perspective

Cindy Hahamovitch, University of Georgia

YOUR ELECTED AND UNELECTED LAWCHA LEADERS—all volunteers—are constantly looking for ways to recruit and connect members and bring labor and working-class history to an ever broader audience. Here are some of the recent highlights.

First, the big news: *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History* has a new editor, actually an editorial team. Leon Fink, the editor of the journal since its founding in 2004, is stepping down in July 2023. A joint journal and LAWCHA committee, chaired by Will Jones, launched an eleven-month process to choose a new editor. I am thrilled to announce that Julie Greene will lead the journal along with Shennette Garrett-Scott and Jessica Wilkerson, who will serve as Senior Associate Editors. The team brings intellectual vision, organizational ability, diverse fields and backgrounds, and deep institutional support. Thanks so much to the other applicants and to the search committee. And thanks, of course, to Leon for his many years of field-defining service to us all, and to Patrick Dixon, the managing editor, and the journal's many associate editors for their great work.

I'm also happy to report that Jessica Wilkerson, Manu Karuka, and their Conference Program Committee are finalizing a fantastic program for the upcoming 2023 LAWCHA conference—*Class in Everyday Life*—which will be in-person at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, from May 18–20. Naomi Williams, Lauren Braun-Strumfels, and Judy Woods are handling local arrangements. When you book your room, please

leave the rooms at the Rutgers University Inn for those paying a reduced membership fee. There are lots of other nearby choices.

Not all LAWCHA events take place at the biennial conference, however. The Program Committee, chaired by Joe McCartin, organizes events—in person and virtual—in between LAWCHA conferences. At the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians (OAH) in Boston, for example, there were six LAWCHA-organized sessions, including Will Jones's presidential address and the general meeting at which three members of the Harvard Graduate Student Union (UAW, Local 5118) talked about their campaign against sexual harassment. Check the program for the upcoming OAH for more LAWCHA sessions. LAWCHA also co-sponsored panels at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association and the Southern Historical Association. The Program Committee continues to organize online talks by the authors of new books and events that bring together academics and labor organizers. The most recent, put together by Toni Gilpin and Robert Woodrum, was about *Labor Organizing: Past and Present*. Global Affairs Committee members Annelise Orleck and Asli Vatansver organized an online conference that brought U.S. and European scholars together online to discuss precarity in higher education and graduate student organizing. You can find the recording on our website. If you have an idea for an event you'd like to organize, email Joe at jam6@georgetown.edu.

And there's more. Last spring Program Committee member Jermaine Thibodeaux put together a virtual graduate student

President's Perspective

meet-and-greet, at which attendees called for more online professional development events. That inspired the Graduate Student Affairs Committee, chaired by Sergio González, to organize an annual dissertation prospectus workshop and prize, which LAWCHA's Board enthusiastically endorsed. The first workshop for ten graduate students took place online in October and the first winner of the Alice Kessler-Harris Dissertation Prospectus Award will be announced soon.

Speaking of awards, see p. 14 in this newsletter for information about the winners of the Gutman, Montgomery, and Taft prizes. Congratulations to all of them!

LAWCHA and *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History* are also jointly funding a new, annual \$2,000 research grant, which will go to a contingent faculty scholar, independent scholar, or community college faculty member. If the recipient's research results in an article, *LABOR* will have first-right-of-refusal for publication. Thanks to Claire Goldstene, Aimee Loïselle, the Contingent Faculty Committee, and *LABOR* for their work on this.

You may have noticed that brief bios of members are popping up on LAWCHA's website, thanks to Executive Assistant Mac Marquis and web guru Ryan Poe. We're hoping graduate students, contingent and tenure-track faculty, senior and independent scholars, reporters, attorneys, and others will use this page to find speakers, panel mates, expert witnesses, and people to interview. Go to lawcha.org/membership/ to create yours (you can include your email address or leave it off). Can't find yourself in the listing? Your membership may have lapsed. If it has, you know what to do. If you don't think it has, email Mac at lawcha.office@gmail.com.

Mac has also been contacting missing members and searching for new ones. Our membership is up, thanks to his efforts, and we have new lifetime members too. Don't forget to tell colleagues, students, fellow union members, and K-12 teachers you know about LAWCHA. You might mention *LABORonline*, which features roundtables, opinion pieces, and summaries of new books, and *Teaching Labor's Story*, in which contributors unpack primary sources for classroom use. Both projects are always looking for contributors.

There have been other changes of leadership. John Enyeart stepped down as Communications Committee chair, after having spent two years promoting LAWCHA events of all kinds. Since Mac is handling PR, Kim Phillips-Fein, the Communication Committee's current chair, has transformed the committee into a press bureau. Committee members fielded a flurry of inquiries around the Starbucks' union elections. Greta de Jong, the able editor of this newsletter, will be stepping

down after this issue and handing over the job to Aldo Lauria Santiago. Thanks to them all.

Thanks also to Emma Amador, Greta de Jong, Eric Fure-Slocum, Sophia Lee, and Touré Reed, who recently rolled off the board, and to new board members: Janine Giordano Drake, Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, Kim Phillips-Fein, Aldo Lauria Santiago, and Colleen Woods.

Finally, I'd like to extend my special thanks to our busy Executive Committee members, Liesl Orenic (Treasurer), Erik Gellman (Secretary), Joe McCartin (Vice President), and our still hard-working "past" president, Will Jones, who may be busier now that he was as president. See you all in New Jersey!

LABOR

The official journal for LAWCHA

A subscription to *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History* is available through membership in LAWCHA.

The labor question—who will do the work and under what economic and political terms?—beckons today with renewed global urgency. Offering both historical research and commentary, *LABOR* provides a scaffolding for understanding the roots of continuing social dilemmas. While still engaging social movements and institutions based on industrial work—classic sites of inquiry in our field—*LABOR* gives equal attention to other critical contexts, including slavery, unpaid and domestic labor, agricultural work, the informal sector, and the professions. The interaction of workers with the state, institutions of civil society, and sources of cultural formation also constitute important arenas of discussion. We look not only to historians but also to other scholars, journalists, labor educators, poets, and writer activists for submissions.

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LAWCHA AT OAH 2022

IN EVEN YEARS LAWCHA holds its annual membership meeting at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians (OAH) and sponsors various panels relating to labor and working-class history. Here are some highlights of the panels and other events involving LAWCHA members at the OAH conference held in Boston in April 2022.

LAWCHA President's Address

Our outgoing president, Will Jones, faced a unique challenge when he ascended the podium to give his presidential address on the afternoon of Friday, April 1, 2022 at the Sheraton Boston. The crowd of labor historians was buzzing with the news that the Amazon Labor Union had won its election at the JFK8 Fulfillment Center on Staten Island just an hour earlier. With labor history being made in the present, could anyone turn our collective attention back to the past?

Will, of course, was up to the challenge. He began by asking us to consider a series of crises in cities around the nation after World War I that resulted from “tremendous hostility toward African Americans and a growing reliance on their labor.” From Los Angeles to Washington, DC, elected leaders struggled to secure Black labor in essential municipal services, even as they systematically underpaid and degraded Black workers. Nowhere was this paradox more visible than during the 1919 Chicago Race Riots, in which deadly attacks on Black Chicagoans shut down the city because street sweepers, garbage collectors, asphalt plant workers, and nearly all the clerks and janitors in City Hall could not, or dared not, report for work.

This combination of contempt and reliance, Will noted, is all too familiar over two years into the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite effusive cheers for “heroes” early on, those workers classed as “essential”—from home health aides and medical assistants to warehouse workers and janitors—have been increasingly treated as expendable as months passed. Across a century, Will noted, a tension has persisted between the demand for essential services and the devaluing of essential workers.

What explains this tension? Shouldn't consistent demand for these services generate better jobs, or at least conditions favorable for collective action to improve this work? Economists, Will explained, point to the abundance of employees who might work in jobs with low barriers to entry and low marginal value, as well as the erosion of union power and labor regulations. Historians, however, should turn our attention to the political and ideological imperatives that shaped essen-

tial public work as it developed in the early twentieth century. “It is the essential nature of these jobs,” Will argued, “that has made it so critical, in the view of many, to reduce the wages and protections of the workers who fill them.”

This view emerged as municipal employment expanded rapidly in the first two decades of the twentieth century under the banner of “municipal housekeeping.” As governments took over “household” responsibilities to provide care and maintain social reproduction, advocates for these embryonic welfare states promoted the idea that this work would be done out of obligation, rather than for wages and benefits. Municipal housekeeping, as an ideology, legitimated the provision of essential government services but rationalized the low wages for women and men who did the work in “the public household.”

These ideas, Will showed, reflected longstanding ideas about domestic work as well as the division of labor across a newly consolidated American empire. They informed President Franklin D. Roosevelt's approach to public employment as a necessary site of expansion and employment, but one to be developed beyond the reaches of private-sector labor law and organizing. And they were expertly diagnosed, challenged, and refashioned by civil rights organizers, who used the language of the “public household” to build campaigns and unions that asserted the fundamental dignity of all people and their labor while linking the need for better services and better jobs in early examples of what we now call “bargaining for the common good.” Today, as Will noted, in closing, our largest unions are public sector unions, led by and representing women and people of color. They have been the object of ferocious backlash in the first two decades of our own century, but they have also been the site of some of the most creative organizing and coalition building.

As the pandemic has made clear, the paradox of essential services provided by expendable workers is deeply entrenched in our systems of public work and collective care. However, it is also clear that such systems are deeply flawed, and that essential workers have essential knowledge about the care we need. These realizations contain political possibilities that working people might yet seize upon to build a society that truly cares for people.

—Nick Juravich

Annual Membership Meeting

At the annual membership meeting held on April 1, incoming president Cindy Hahamovitch began by expressing gratitude for all the officers and board members and noted that LAWCHA also depends on committees to sustain its activities. Special thanks were given to Peter Cole and Keona Ervin for planning the 2021 conference for Chicago and then converting it to an online format; David “Mac” Marquis for chairing the virtual Book Talks that have kept members connected; Will Jones for his calm, wise presence as president; and Leon Fink for his years of editorial service at *LABOR*.

New initiatives are launching for graduate students, and LAWCHA is looking to welcome more scholars who study the nineteenth century and earlier, including historians of slavery. Cindy also announced that members have been in conversation with people hoping to establish May as Labor History Month. Next, she introduced leaders from the UAW 5118 Harvard Graduate Student Union who are plaintiffs in a lawsuit regarding sexual harassment. Amulya Mandava, Margaret Czerwienski, and Erik Baker described their tactics for building a campaign and fostering coalitions with faculty.

Vice president Joe McCartin then announced this year’s recipients of LAWCHA prizes (*see p. 13-14*) and chaired the open portion of the meeting. Randi Storch and Cecelia Bucki encouraged members to contribute to the Teaching Labor’s Story project. It develops peer-reviewed pieces published on a website for educators. Sergio González suggested creating a dissertation proposal workshop based on the Southern Labor Studies Association model. Naomi R Williams and Lauren Braun-Strumfels will coordinate the 2023 LAWCHA conference in New Jersey, held at Rutgers University and Raritan Valley Community College as part of the association’s commitment to facilitating scholarly relationships and participation beyond large institutions. Aimee Loiselle shared appreciation from Scholars for a New Deal for Higher Ed (SFNDHE) for the rapid planning of the opening plenary “College for All and Higher Ed Labor” at LAWCHA’s 2021 conference. It helped generate two more summits with support from many LAWCHA members and led to the formation of Higher Ed Labor United (HELU). Paul Ortiz and Lauren announced a proposal from the Contingent and Community College Faculty Committees. It outlines systemic ways to promote research and publication by contingent, community college, and independent scholars, who have much to offer. As the number of tenure lines declines, historians must find ways to sustain their fields with a

growing number of contingent faculty who often lack job stability, access to funds, or scholarly networks to conduct, present, peer-review, and publish research.

—Aimee Loiselle



Ileen DeVault awarding the Taft Prize to Stephanie Hinnershitz at LAWCHA’s Annual Membership Meeting. Photo by Cindy Hahamovitch.

Intimate Labors

The panel “Producing Intimate Labors: Domesticity, Inequality, and Racial Capitalism” explored histories of domestic and care work in the United States from the 19th to the 20th century. Each presenter critically engaged analyses of race, class, and gender to uncover the place of such work in cultural, economic, and political contexts. Justine Modica opened the panel with a discussion of the creation and regulation of au pair programs in the last three decades of the 20th century. Modica used the example of the au pair program to highlight key aspects of the history of child care labor in the United States, arguing that it initially provided a loophole for families looking for low-cost in-home childcare but who increasingly faced restrictions on undocumented migrant labor. Many host families vehemently resisted attempts by the government to regulate working conditions and pay for au pairs, arguing that they were not laborers but beneficiaries of a cultural exchange program. Noel Voltz of Case Western Reserve University continued the discussion with an analysis of free women of color’s intimate labors in antebellum Louisiana. Voltz focused on two state supreme court cases that illustrated the nebulous position of women of African descent deemed “housekeepers” by white men. Despite their liminal legal status within Louisiana’s Civil Code, the women Voltz studies fought to claim compensation for and recognition of their work. Eileen Boris concluded the

presentations by looking at histories of migrant domestic workers in the decades following World War II, focusing first on African American migrants from the southern United States to the north and then women from the Caribbean and Central and South America. Boris analyzed efforts by activist organizations and governmental agencies to regulate domestic labor despite considerable setbacks and challenges due to popular conceptions of what domestic work was and who performed it.

—Alexandra Finley

Scholarly Work and the Work of Scholarship

The panel on “Scholarly Work and the Work of Scholarship in an Age of Contingency” asked us as labor historians to consider a straightforward, yet thorny, question: How does our employment status affect our scholarly work? And how can we, as labor historians, work towards greater solidarity within the context of the current crisis of contingency that Will Jones, in his presidential address (see above), emphasized is threatening all our abilities to do our jobs? Panelists Lauren Braun-Strumfels, Aimee Loiselle, Will Jones, and Benjamin Irwin discussed the personal, institutional, and structural barriers that stymie our academic labor and offered direction for action no matter the position from which we do the work of scholarship. Panelists noted how shrinking numbers of tenure-track faculty have compromised the peer review pipeline since it is based on a model of voluntary scholarly labor that *Journal of American History* editor Irwin underlined is now unsustainable.

Braun-Strumfels outlined how the scarcity mindset in academia impacts our wellbeing and mental health, and she encouraged fellow historians to begin to consciously reject it with shifts like adopting a “committee of No” to consider requests to perform academic labor; to begin to recognize and stop “shoulding” ourselves; to embrace rest as a natural part of our writing cycle; and to define and act from our own academic value-set when working within institutions that do not love us back. As labor historians, we can look to alliance-based ways to rebuild academia into spaces that welcome, uplift, and cultivate the whole, authentic self; that discourage a culture of overwork; and encourage collaboration and mutual support. Loiselle encouraged historians to get involved in budget activism and to make demands of institutions and funders based on a larger vision for the budget, rather than responding reactively. Fighting for better conditions for adjuncts, refraining from celebrating tenure as a meritocracy, and working to create pipelines to circulate contingent researchers’ work are more steps Loiselle sug-

gested to achieve greater solidarity. (N.B.: Look for the call to share work-in-progress for graduate students and independent/contingent/community college faculty following from a recent resolution adopted by the LAWCHA board.) Jones focused on how we need to train historians who can, in the words of Irwin, craft “creative and collaborative survival strategies.”

The panelists concluded with a call to action: the field is primarily made up of contingent labor, and LAWCHA must reflect the field to survive and thrive in a world where labor historians are more essential than ever.

—Lauren Braun-Strumfels

Into the Fields

The roundtable “Into the Fields: Histories of Farmwork Across Generations” met a packed room in Boston. Participants Cindy Hahamovitch, Matt Garcia, Bernadette Pérez, Lori Flores, Mireya Loza, and Verónica Martínez-Matsuda discussed how histories of farm work and farmworkers have changed over time, as well as the trends and directions they are observing in the present field. The literature on farmworker communities has developed from local community studies or microhistories of strikes to more complex transnational examinations of farmworker demographics, tensions and alliances, and solutions to worker problems that are not necessarily union-based. It has also gone beyond sanctifying “untouchable” figures such as self-sacrificing braceros or Cesar Chavez to complicating and documenting the fuller humanity of workers as flawed, heterogeneous, and defiant people. Labor historians have also been more willing to be influenced by, and dialogue with, scholarship in other disciplines such as geography, sociology, anthropology, and journalism.

At the beginning of the roundtable, both Martínez-Matsuda and Loza pointed out how present scholarship in food studies, proletarian struggle, and urbanity and rurality owe a debt to the longstanding work of farmworker historians who often relied on ethnic studies frameworks. The bulk of the session focused on worker strategies for success, which today go beyond the United Farm Workers to non-union advocacy organizations like the Farm Labor Organizing Committee in North Carolina, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida, and Migrant Justice in Vermont. This is not only because the diverse (citizen, guestworker, undocumented) workforce lacks faith in the state as an arbiter of justice, as Garcia stated, but that workers have a range of needs that farmworker legislation does not have the proper teeth to ensure and enforce (especially if one is a non-citizen in constant fear of deportation and blacklisting). Loza, Flores, and others emphasized the dangers of proposed legislation like the Farmworker Mod-

ernization Act that purports guestworker programs to be the best solution yet offer a miniscule prospect of real belonging and security to farmworkers in American society. Continuing discourse about migrant workers more than happy to come north temporarily and earn dollars obscures—as Pérez and Hahamovitch articulated—the varied forms of intergenerational violence still done to farmworkers that include wage theft, sexual harassment, the use of trafficked and child labor, and the division of families across borders for years.

As far as trends participants look forward to in farmworker history, Garcia hopes for more studies of immigrant farmer and land ownership programs, and Hahamovitch is excited methodologically by scholarship that is “truly transnational” in ways earlier scholarship was not. Martinez-Matsuda advocates for more scholarship that employs a disability studies lens; Flores anticipates more studies about drink (wine, beer, cider) workers in American agriculture; Loza called for more birds-eye examinations of migrant workers in national food systems to connect “foodie” and labor literature, and Pérez awaits more intellectual histories that connect early twentieth century labor movements, activists, and ideas with their contemporary counterparts.

—Lori Flores



Cindy Hahamovitch, Matt Garcia, Bernadette Pérez, Lori Flores, Mireya Loza, and Verónica Martinez-Matsuda at the LAWCHA-sponsored OAH panel “Into the Fields.” Photo by Mike Innis-Jimenez.

Refugee Workers

The panel “Refugee Workers: Global South Migrations and Labor in the 1970s and 1980s” united three emerging scholars—Victoria Do, Gerson Rosales, and Alexander Stephens—whose research illustrates exciting new directions in the fields of labor and immigration history.

Do shared her work on the experience of Vietnamese refugees in the Iowa meatpacking industry during the 1980s. Do’s study finds that the relationship between the corporation Iowa Beef Processors (IBP) and Iowa’s anti-welfare policies “led refugees into the exploitative labor practices.” Through

a combination of government documents, interviews, and newspaper sources, Do demonstrates that the state made little effort to regulate “the grip” of this expanding industry and instead relied on a rhetoric of “good immigrants” who wished to find freedom through labor to fuel the local economy.

Rosales revealed a different story of the 1980s—one of resiliency against the backdrop of asylee and refugee denial. Rosales’ research examines the Central American Refugee Committee (CRECE) in San Francisco to show that neither forced migration nor U.S. immigration policies “convert refugees simply into victims, passive individuals at the mercy of sympathetic governments or NGOs” for “Central American refugees were social actors that labored to live resilient, productive, and dignified lives amid their displacement and forced exile.” This paper, grounded in oral history interviews conducted by Rosales as well as community and organizational documents, illuminates how local stories show us a history beyond policy and reveal complex stories of survival and power.

Stephens, whose work makes an important contribution to knowledge of the Mariel Boatlift of 1980, challenged the audience to do more than fight stereotypes with counter narratives of “good immigrants” and to confront questions of criminality with an intention of understanding. What Stephens finds, through a combination of state records and oral histories, is that exploitative workplaces and insufficient labor opportunities resulted in criminal offenses by some people who arrived during this period. Throughout his presentation, Stephens emphasized that if historians dig deeper into the history of Mariel, it is possible to expose the failures of state-based policies (such as inadequate and poorly funded resettlement measures) in order to combat uncontextualized statistics used by politicians to restrict immigration to the United States.

Together, Do, Rosales, and Stephens highlighted the varied experiences of refugees and asylees from the West Coast to the southeast, questioned who the state recognizes and who it ignores, and analyzed the ways labor informs exploitation and survival. As one attendee stated at the end of the session, “if this is the new direction of labor history, the field is in good hands.”

—Sarah McNamara

Working on Best Practices for the Faculty Majority

Dorothee Schneider
University of Illinois

Lance Thurner
Rutgers University

THE ADJUNCTIFICATION OF THE HUMANITIES has now been in process for several decades and our disciplines have been permanently altered by this transformation. In order to meet the challenges we face, our associations need to move beyond handwringing and instead proactively advocate for the future of our disciplines and foster the internal cultural changes our professions require to sustain our goals of scholarship, teaching, and public outreach.

The Organization of American Historians (OAH) has embraced contingent faculty as a core constituency and a growing part of its membership. One way it supported contingent historians was to draft a set of standards that institutions and departments should be held to when they rely on non-tenure track labor. Initially, these standards were codified in 2011 in collaboration with peers in the American Historical Association (AHA). This joint “Standards for Part-Time, Adjunct and Contingent Faculty” was endorsed by the executive bodies of both the AHA and the OAH. As labor conditions continued to change, these were updated in 2014 (*see oah.org/insights/archive/standards-for-part-time-adjunct-and-contingent-faculty/*).

By 2020, however, it was obvious that this statement needed another update. Contingent faculty were now the majority of academic historians and adjunctification was no longer a crisis to reverse but a reality to confront. A new generation of contingent faculty were almost completely unaware that the Standards existed and new concerns and realities had emerged that this statement did not address. The unionization of adjunct faculty was making good progress across the United States, but at the same time the autonomy of departments in the hiring and placement of adjunct faculty had diminished in many institutions. Intellectual property and academic freedom rights had also been curtailed for faculty in many institutions, a shift that hits contingent faculty particularly hard.

In the Committee on Part-Time, Adjunct, and Contingent Employment (CPACE) of the OAH, we began this overhaul by launching a survey of non-tenure track OAH members (roughly 2,000 in total). Across academia, there is a serious dearth of data regarding adjuncthood, and we gained invaluable insights from the 188 members who replied. Non-tenure track historians are diverse, with varying backgrounds, ambitions, employment conditions, professional activities, and

scholarly priorities. Not surprisingly, the major concerns had not changed from a decade ago: low pay, irregular and insecure employment, exclusion from faculty governance, disrespect and a lack of recognition as faculty, and the absence of promotion ladders and professional support.

Using insights gained from the survey, CPACE members rewrote the Standards with an eye to the practical and useful. The new draft, called “Best Practices” by our Committee, emphasizes the same core points as the 2014 edition, such as fair pay, access to benefits, and support for professional development. It also emphasizes the intellectual property rights of contingent faculty, participation in institutional decision-making, and the need to develop promotional and career trajectories—priorities that reflect our position as the majority of academic historians.

Accompanying the updated Best Practices, CPACE also wrote a “Bill of Rights for the Contingent Faculty Majority,” modeled after similar efforts by groups such as the New Faculty Majority and several unions. This two-page document is formatted as a handout for faculty to inform colleagues about the rights that should exist for all of us in higher education, including those precariously employed. All historians are entitled to fair pay, job security, intellectual autonomy, and the resources we require to excel professionally. As many survey respondents noted, much of this comes down to respect: respect as colleagues, as researchers, as educators, as intellectuals. More than job security, respect for our labor would mean pathways of career advancement and mobility: adjuncthood should not be purgatory, but part of viable and fulfilling careers. We hope that the Bill of Rights, which contains a right to unionize in the workplace, will be used to organize contingent faculty members in the broadest sense. We hope too that it will inspire our tenure-track colleagues to take action to mend the rifts that neoliberalization has torn within our scholarly community.

We are now in the final phase of editing these texts in response to feedback from constituents and will present them to the OAH Executive Council for approval in October. Once approved, we are planning a series of roll out events on social media and at the Annual Meeting of the OAH in April 2023. We also hope that the endorsement of these documents by the OAH leadership will reignite cooperation with other scholarly and professional societies for joint activism by the contingent majority.

Wearing All the Hats: ACADEMIC LABOR IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES



Nashville State Community College, White Bridge Campus, Weld Building. Photo by Nashville State Community College. CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

Aaron Miller
Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana–Columbus

DESPITE WORKING IN a profession that values egalitarianism, it is no secret that there has been a divide between tenure-track historians teaching at 4-year institutions and historians working at community colleges.

In the twelve years since I started teaching at a community college, I have heard some amazing misconceptions about teaching at a 2-year institution. I once attended a lecture where a tenured colleague from a 4-year institution asked a group of community college faculty why our teaching assistants were not doing our grading. Other academics have assumed we teach two or three classes per term. (I currently teach four classes as well as serve as the humanities department chair.) Faculty at some other community colleges teach six or seven courses per semester. This is on top of community service, committee assignments, advising, administrative duties, and the ubiquitous “other duties as assigned.”

There is also a misconception that historians at community colleges are not active scholars or researchers. Despite the challenge of finding enough time, community college faculty are indeed active in their field. After all, like all historians, we love the discipline. Many are also active scholars in pedagogy or projects that focus on the challenges facing community college students’ path to a degree. Given the large number of classes we teach as well as our place in our community, our perspective is critical to the profession. All

historians must work together to advocate for the discipline and its critical role in our society.

The divide has to end. Historians, regardless of institution or place in the professional cosmos, are facing an existential crisis. Colleges have slashed the budgets of history departments or eliminated them outright. These cuts are often the result of political pressure or a desire to focus on STEM fields. We have been a target in the culture wars, often facing charges of political bias or pushing an agenda in our classrooms.

Community college historians face additional professional obstacles. Many of us work at institutions without tenure or multi-year contracts. As previously mentioned, the workload and lack of funding can be daunting.

Many of the faculty at community colleges are contingent or part time. Some contingent faculty are so-called “roads scholars,” meaning they are driving from college to college to make ends meet—stringing enough classes together to pay the bills.

An historian can feel isolated working at a community college. The history departments are often small. In my case, I’m the only full-time historian on campus. That makes it difficult to make professional connections, assemble panels for conferences, and receive meaningful feedback on my work.

Students as well as faculty at community colleges face daunting challenges. I am amazed at the obstacles that our students overcome. Despite the relative lower cost of community college, many struggle to make ends meet. They will work full time jobs, or multiple jobs, including third shift to

support themselves and their families. Getting time off from work to attend class can be difficult.

Our students also must juggle family life while pursuing their education. Some are single parents while others are taking care of their own parents. Many of our students cope with disabilities or major health issues.

It is mind boggling to me that some of our students receive little support from people who should be in their corner. Some have been told that they will be cut off financially if they pursue their education. Others have been told that they “aren’t smart enough” and will fail. The mother of one of my students informed them, as they were dropping them off to campus for the first day of class, that if they pursued their education, they would be permanently shunned from their family. Some families use their children as a source of income. They fear their child will get a good job and move away. The service area of my institution includes some rural communities that have struggled with drug addiction, lack of economic opportunities, and poverty.

There are also students who live with constant uncertainty around the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and other immigration policies. I’ve had DACA students attend class with a packed suitcase—ready to go at a moments’ notice—their lives tossed about by the political whims of our time.

The OAH’s Committee on Community Colleges has done a lot to include community college historians and represent their concerns to the profession. It has worked to increase the participation of community college faculty in the OAH and worked to address problems such as the lack of time and funding for professional development. The committee has organized academic panels, providing a needed opportunity for community college faculty to showcase their research.

At the OAH conference in Boston last spring, the committee sponsored a panel where participants discussed how much, despite the challenges outlined above, we love our work. I am humbled to play a very small role in the educational journey of my students. Community college historians love history and want to share that passion with others. We know that education transforms the lives of our students. Thus we feel like we are on the front lines of promoting justice and equity in our society. It is one thing to analyze the problems of our society in the abstract or as an academic exercise—but we feel as though we are walking the walk, so to speak. While we may not always feel valued by our current culture, or by some college administrators, or maybe not even by our profession, we receive an outpouring of appreciation from our students. We love being in the front of the classroom—because when we are there, we know we are making a difference.

Class in Everyday Life: Theory and Praxis

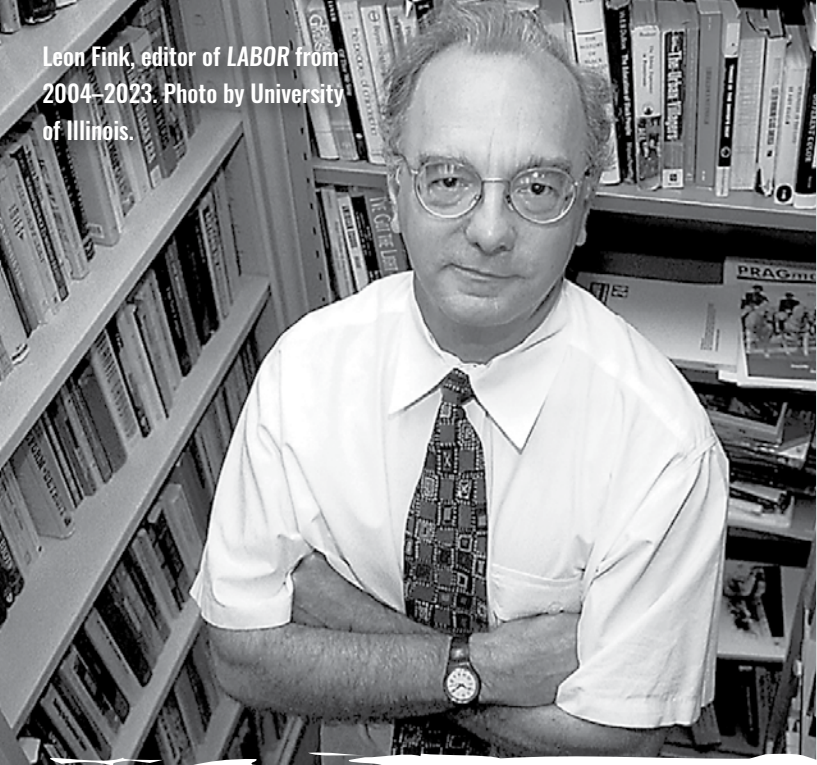
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One of the entrances to Rutgers University.
Library of Congress. Photo by Carol Highsmith.



Two Decades of *LABOR* History: An Interview with Leon Fink (Excerpt)

Max Krochmal
University of New Orleans

IN JULY 2023 LEON FINK WILL STEP DOWN as the editor for LAWCHA's journal LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History after two decades of outstanding service. In an interview with Max Krochmal, he discussed the origins of the journal, the goals of its founders, some of the challenges it faced, and his hopes for its future. This is an excerpt from that interview. The full version is available at LABORonline (www.LAWCHA.org/laboronline).

Max Krochmal: How was the larger field of labor history changing in this moment, and since? How did *LABOR* respond?

Leon Fink: All the editors had been trained in the “new” labor history, including myself. We had all come of age professionally by 2004. I was already a young full professor and so were many of my peers, at that stage of our careers. We had entered a moment of transition in the field at the same time as the journal's transition from *Labor History* to *LABOR*. We were already concerned with what was happening to the field of labor history, both intellectually and politically, and we were challenged by a number of factors, including the weakness of the organized labor movement itself and, therefore, with the question of “who were the allies that we could depend on?”; “what did it mean to write for and about a social movement based on workers, even if we widen the definition?”—essentially, “how much of a there, was there?” And that also meant, professionally, “would there be jobs for so-called labor historians and for how long, or was the air effectively going out of our field?” These are issues that have continued to concern all those of us in the field, but they were there from the beginning of *LABOR*. On the other hand, labor historians were making a huge impact on other sub-fields such as African American history and women's and gender history and were effectively

inserting class into the larger field of U.S. history. We had always been a rebellious subdiscipline, but by the end of the twentieth century, we were building new institutions, *LAWCHA* and *LABOR*. We had come into our own.

Intellectually, we worked hard to broaden the scope of *LABOR*, ultimately going global in reach and trying to expand especially in regard to issues of coercive forms of labor, outside the free labor paradigm that had defined the field. We engaged with slavery and with more marginalized sectors and systems of labor, and we attempted to deal with new kinds of work and issues that are outside the framework of trade unionism because they're outside collective bargaining. Soon, many of these changes were represented within our pages. A great recent example is the special issue guest edited by Christopher Phelps on “Class and Consent,” that is, on sexual harassment at the workplace [vol. 19, no. 1, March 2022]. None of the articles included in the issue would have been published in the old *Labor History* under the old regime, so that represents a dramatic transformation of what constitutes the field of, at least, academic labor history.

At the same time, we've never lost touch with some of the original impulses in the field, and you can see that in the very last issue that we published in May 2022. There's a tribute to Richard Trumka, the head of the AFL-CIO who died. There's an article on Pearl McGill and women pearl-button workers, one on the United Steelworkers' role in building the private welfare state, and finally one on Jewish labor organizations and popular art and antiracist education during World War II. All of the articles are basically within a union framework, so the old paradigms remain virtually the entire subject matter. Far from being excluded, they continued to

pop up because people who are working in this area still look to our pages for a prime outlet for their work.

On a more worrisome note, we have to acknowledge that the supply has dwindled a bit, the quantity of submissions has really dropped from the from the late 1990s when we received as many as 50 submissions a year, and then in the ought's (2000's), we were seeing 30 to 40, and more recently, it's more like 20, so that's not the best sign. That's an issue which all of us associated will have to take up.

Krochmal: Is this because we've been too effective in injecting our work into the broader field of U.S. history? Are we victims of our own success?

Fink: In a recent *Journal of American History*, there was a piece called, "Household Accounts: Black Domestic Workers in Southern White Spaces during the Great Depression," which was an imaginative use of white archives to cast light on the lives of Black domestics in the 1930s. It's outside the traditional "workers as agents" viewpoint but it also suggests that the larger public, at least the academic public, remains interested in labor history, especially to the extent that it's connected to questions of African American history or slavery or post-slavery or Jim Crow, etc. Another example of the imaginative margins is a paper that Lara Vapnek gave at our DC Labor History Seminar on lactation and the workplace and that's a remarkably novel topic, but one that seems obvious in retrospect, as an important one. So we have to acknowledge that the framework of labor history has been altered and the boundaries have been altered.

Krochmal: So in other words, you and the other editors have taken the "new" labor history and made it "new new," broadening it in all these ways without losing track of the originals—it's a "both-and" situation. You've made it more intersectional and more centered on workers' whole beings, not just their workplace experiences and not just their unions. And, as a result, the journal *LABOR* and labor historians have had this tremendous impact on the field of U.S. history, so that so much of the work being presented, say, at the OAH, is taking class seriously and interfacing with work that we have done in our field. But this represents an interesting contradiction for institutions like LAWCHA or *LABOR*. How do we create a home for up-and-coming academics when we've become so central that we're no longer looked to as a radical alternative and, on the flip side, how do we rebrand or pitch ourselves to scholars who don't come from union households or communities and don't really even know what labor unions are, but who are working on social histories that incorporate class in

ways that are very recognizable to us—how do we get those folks in our front door?

Fink: It's a bit of a challenge for a group that has long prided itself on being rebels, to some extent. I think we maybe have need to recognize the sell-by date on how novel or distinctive our position about class is. Maybe a lesson for us is to further engage a wider set of subject matter, not just politics but also issues of climate or the military, topics that have not been the bread and butter of labor history. Certainly, imperialism as a whole is a popular frame now, but it has labor angles too. I think we should welcome people doing any almost any topic so long as they themselves find a connection to the themes of inequality of power and how people might come together, and examples of collective movement building. I think we have to stay attuned to the main themes in the world around us and see how we can adapt to those themes, and how our historical antennae can help deepen our understanding of those things. The classic question is, "What is the elephant in the room?" Going back some years the elephant in the room was that we weren't dealing with race; in other years the elephant in the room was gender and sexuality. What's the elephant in the room today? What are we not dealing with? I think that's our challenge and therefore needs to guide us, rather than expecting people to follow some older script about what labor history is.

In fact, speaking of elephants in the room, we have an upcoming issue of *LABOR* with an actual elephant on the cover. The cover article will be about circus workers, so we feature a picture of an elephant in the ring. Finally, we found the elephant in the room!

Krochmal: Looking ahead to the future, what are some new areas of inquiry in the field that we could imagine?

Fink: We need a forum or focus on rethinking work, that is what do we mean by work? One self-criticism of the field is that we don't have that many pieces that describe the actual relations at the workplace. There may be particular grievances that we seize on, but there's very little about how work itself has changed within an occupational group, or the impact of distance work. People talk about platform capitalism, but the actual nature of work, how it's changed, does work have different meanings for people?—these are questions we need to ask. Is work less meaningful for a lot of people than it used to be? Is it no longer a central source of their identity and fulfillment? I don't know, but I would like to see some rebalancing in this area. It will fall to other hands to figure out how to make it a reality.

Prizes & Awards

Distinguished Service Award: **LIZ FAUE**

Shelton Stromquist
University of Iowa

LAWCHA gives its Distinguished Service Award periodically to individuals who have made a distinctive contribution to the study of working-class people.

LIZ FAUE has been a powerful, creative voice and organizational pioneer in the field of labor and working-class history. As a critic of male hegemony in public life and trade union politics, she helped redefine the central narratives of labor history in ways that position women's activism and alternative forms of unionism within a powerful labor history counter narrative. She played a crucial role in reshaping the field of labor history, both through her leadership of the North American Labor History Conference (NALHC) and by facilitating a fledgling LAWCHA in its early days. Her work made the field more inclusive and connected it in significant ways to the labor movement and its social movement allies.

From its founding in 1979, NALHC helped build and sustain the field of labor history. Faue served as conference coordinator from 1991–2003, and she played a key role in the conference before and after that period, expanding its program and encouraging wider participation. NALHC welcomed academics, trade union and community activists, and educators as participants,

accessible to labor scholars regardless of rank or status. Faue also reached out to international scholars, for whom NALHC was often their first North American conference.

Faue was present at the founding of LAWCHA and helped nurture the organization in its infancy as co-interim coordinator in 1997–98 and organizing committee member from 1997–99. As NALHC coordinator she hosted joint annual meetings and board meetings of LAWCHA. She served on LAWCHA's first board of directors from 1999 to 2002 and on the Gutman Prize committee from 2007 to 2009.

Faue's work as a labor historian examines gender and labor politics, trade union history, and working-class life. Her probing scholarship has reshaped our understanding of the gendered currents of working-class organizations and culture, linking the contemporary crisis of the labor movement to its marginalization of women and minorities. In her powerful first book, *Community of Suffering & Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915–1945* (1991),



Liz Faue. Photo by Carol Acitelli.

she argued that male dominated labor movements and labor theory “failed to acknowledge the connection between community and workplace.” In *Writing the Wrongs: Eva Valesh and the Rise of Labor Journalism* (2002), Faue continued her effort to highlight women's voices in her affirmation of the work of labor journalist Eva Valesh. Her recent synthesis of the broad sweep of U.S. labor history in *Rethinking the American Labor Movement* (2017) put gender and race at its center. Faue observed, “In the great wave of scholarship that emerged in the 1970s as the new labor history, women have been identified chiefly as women's historians and their research on women workers largely ignored in the master narrative of labor and working-class history.” In contrast, she offered a book that “employs gender analysis and speaks to women workers.”

In her books, her numerous influential articles, and her work in labor history's public sphere, Faue has consistently been an advocate for an intellectually robust and inclusive community of labor historians.

Taft Prize

For a Just and Better World: Engendering Anarchism in the Mexican Borderlands, 1900–1938

by Sonia Hernández, University of Illinois Press

Japanese American Incarceration: The Camps and Coerced Labor During World War II

by Stephanie Hinnershitz, University of Pennsylvania Press

TWO BEAUTIFULLY AND IMAGINATIVELY WRITTEN BOOKS were named as equal co-winners of this year's Taft Award. *For a Just and Better World*, by Sonia Hernández, anchors anarcho-syndicalism in the Gulf of Mexico as a powerful way to understand transnational political and labor networks. Hernández's framing of women's lives brings to the fore the importance of gender rights in the period, as well as issues of race, ethnicity and nationalism. Her impressive research on both sides of the Mexican border provides a model for how to present transnational scholarship.

Stephanie Hinnershitz's *Japanese American Incarceration* presents a true labor history of the prison camps set up for Japanese Americans during World War II. Mining both legal and historical archives in innovative ways, Hinnershitz provides a fascinating comparison of the camps to prison labor and the most thorough labor history of the camps to date. Along the way, she sheds new theoretical and historical light on other groups and times when coerced labor was entrenched.

Prize Committee: Ileen DeVault (Chair), Dennis Deslippe, Veronica Martinez-Matsuda, Paul Ortiz, and Kimberley Phillips Boehm

David Montgomery Award

A New Working Class: The Legacies of Public-Sector Employment in the Civil Rights Movement

by Jane Berger, University of Pennsylvania Press

A *NEW WORKING CLASS* chronicles the struggles of Baltimore's lowest-paid municipal workers to remake their city into a haven of Black working-class strength in the 1960s and 1970s. Jane Berger tells the inspiring—and timely—story of African American women and men who conceived of their unions as vehicles to challenge racism and efforts by elites to destroy the last vestiges of the New Deal and the War on Poverty. This work

dramatically expands our understanding of the importance of social movements and civil rights unionism as counterweights to neoliberalism and austerity politics. Berger explains how government and business leaders' promotion of privatization, mass incarceration, and enhanced police budgets fueled racial and wealth inequalities that formed the basis for the emergence of Black Lives Matter decades later.

Honorable Mention

The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America

by Gabriel Winant, Harvard University Press

WINANT CHRONICLES THE TRANSITION from high wage jobs of mostly male steelworkers to the low wage jobs of mostly female laborers in the care economy. *The Next Shift* blends uplifting tales of solidarity with despicable instances of workplace and residential segregation. Winant expertly blends feminist, queer, and Marxist theories with social his-

tory methods to provide an account that echoes the gripping narratives of everyday workers that drove the "New Labor History" of generations past while providing a nuanced and detailed understanding of the neoliberal economy we live in today.

Prize Committee: Paul Ortiz (Chair), John Enyeart, and Stacey Smith

Herbert G. Gutman Prize

Exiles and Fugitives: Labor, Mobility, and Power in French Colonial Louisiana, 1699–1769

by Yevan Terrien, University of Pittsburgh

Advisor: Markus Rediker

YEVAN TERRIEN'S DISSERTATION "Exiles and Fugitives" examines the French colonization of the lower Mississippi Valley in the 18th century and the lives of the unfree workers—the enslaved, but also soldiers, convicts, indentured servants, and those of indigenous descent—who so often sought to defy or escape the authority of imperial officials and employers. Terrien offers an insightful exploration of how a powerful empire operated on the ground, relying on improvisation, accommodation, and negotiation with many

of those subalterns it sought to recruit, transport, and exploit. Throughout this work, Terrien offers a close reading of judicial and administrative records to reveal how runaways cooperated with multiple elements of a geographically dispersed population to provide otherwise powerless individuals with the tools of collective negotiation. As Terrien puts it, fugitives "petitioned with their feet" to assert customary rights and negotiate the degree of unfreedom under which they were forced to work and live.

Prize Committee: Nelson Lichtenstein (Chair), Priscilla Murolo, and Touré Reed

Best Article Prize, *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History*

The Paradox of Automation: QWERTY and the Neuter Keyboard

by Jason Resnikoff

LABOR, vol. 18, no. 4 (December 2021)

IN "THE PARADOX OF AUTOMATION," Jason Resnikoff conducts us through the downright quirky late-20th century adaptations of the QWERTY keyboard. Mixing the history of technology with gender analysis and cultural history, he captures the ways that the breathless trope of "automation" served to inveigle predominantly male mid-level managers

(not to mention privileged professionals like university professors!) into the self-help world of word processing while eliminating legions of female secretaries and clerical workers. Resnikoff invokes no nostalgia for quaint office culture but rather queries how and why a radical transformation of white-collar workways went down so easily.

Prize Committee: *LABOR* Editorial Committee

LABORONLINE

LABORonline features commentary on a host of issues, contemporary and historical, as well as "instant" dialogue and debate among readers and authors. Find us at LAWCHA.org/laboronline.

Recent posts

- Ellen Bravo and Larry Miller, *Standing Up: Tales of Struggle a Novel Resource for Labor Leaders*
- Tom Alter, *The Role of Independent Working-Class Political Action*
- Chad Pearson, *A Refreshing Return to Agrarian Class Struggle Scholarship*
- Theresa Case, *An Ambitious and Provocative New History*

Labor History Bibliography, 2021

Compiled by Rosemary Feuerer, Northern Illinois University

This list is categorized at laborhistorylinks.org/booklist.html. If we have neglected to list a book, please let us know.

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- Baker, Andrew D. *To Poison a Nation: The Murder of Robert Charles and the Rise of Jim Crow Policing in America*. The New Press, 2021.
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Haverty-Stacke, Donna. *The Fierce Life of Grace Holmes Carlson: Catholic, Socialist, Feminist.* New York University Press, 2020.

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“Oliver Coleman, drummer, paying his dues at Musicians’ Hall, the headquarters of local 208 of the musicians’ union.” Chicago, IL, April 1942. Library of Congress. Photo by Russell Lee.

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