

Hyatt and Employee Dignity

Posted on December 16, 2011 by Rosemary Feurer

The Hyatt Regency in Santa Clara, California recently posted sexually suggestive photos of housekeepers, and fired a woman who objected, as well as her sister. Several LAWCHA members are taking action against the hotel.

Eileen Boris, Nancy MacLean, Jennifer Klein, Monisha Das Gupta, Sarah Haley, Virginia Parks, Shana Redmond, and Shannon Gleeson authored and signed the following statement:

A Call on Hyatt to Uphold the Dignity of Women

As Women's and Gender Studies faculty, we were outraged to find out that Hyatt had posted sexually suggestive photos of housekeepers, and fired a woman who objected and her sister.

We're taking action. [We call on other faculty and students to do the same.](#)

Dear Colleagues,

In late September, the Hyatt Regency in Santa Clara, California, fired two women housekeepers, sisters Marta and Lorena Reyes. These middle aged mothers, active members of the workers organizing committee, found themselves featured on a digitally-created collage of bikini-clad "Hyatt Housekeepers" that management placed on a company bulletin board ostensibly for "Housekeeping Appreciation Week." Humiliated by their depiction, Marta and Lorena removed their images from this display. Soon they were fired for taking a longer lunch to compensate for missed breaks. The sisters fought back by filing a formal complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, but hotel general manager, Peter Rice, has denied that the firing has anything to do with Marta and Lorena objecting to their depiction on the collage by removing their images. In subsequent sexual harassment trainings, management went on to flatly deny that it had objectified women's bodies or engaged in any damaging act. (Reyes sisters portrait photograph by David Bacon.)

We are faculty in the field of women's and gender studies. We urge faculty and students in higher education to join us in standing in solidarity with Marta and Lorena Reyes. The

sexualization of housekeepers by Hyatt management is an appalling expression of power that has no place at work. It has tangible physical as well as psychological impacts. It belongs to a long list of well-documented abusive and unsafe practices that Hyatt housekeepers, many of them women of color, all over the country endure. According to a study published in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine of 50 hotels at five companies, Hyatt housekeepers had the highest injury rate among all housekeepers studied when compared by hotel company. Hyatt has chosen to use its power to humiliate and bully rather than lead the industry in respecting the dignity of women's labor and their right to a safe workplace.

Please sign this petition to strengthen the voices of these working women by delivering a loud and clear message to Hyatt that we will not tolerate corporations that humiliate and abuse their workers.

Hyatt housekeepers are part of our communities, the family members of our students, and workers who make our stay at hotels comfortable when we attend professional conferences. Thus we are joining the campaign to boycott Hyatt until they meet the following demands:

1. reinstate Marta and Lorena immediately, with back pay,
2. issue an apology to Marta and Lorena, as well as all the women who were subjected to and/or had to witness the objectification of women's bodies, and
3. respond to Hyatt workers' demands across North America that the corporation correct the unsafe, hazardous, and demeaning conditions facing them at work.

Eileen Boris

Hull Professor and Chair, Department of Feminist Studies

Professor of History and Black Studies

University of California, Santa Barbara

Monisha Das Gupta

Associate Professor

Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies

University of Hawaii, Honolulu

Sarah Haley

Assistant Professor

Women's Studies and Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles

Shannon Gleeson
Ford Postdoctoral Fellow, Santa Clara University (2011-12)
Assistant Professor Latin American and Latino Studies
University of California, Santa Cruz
Jennifer Klein
Professor of History
Yale University

Nancy MacLean
Professor of History
Duke University

Virginia Parks
Associate Professor
School of Social Service Administration
University of Chicago

Shana Redmond
Assistant Professor
American Studies and Ethnicity
University of Southern California

To sign their petition, navigate to the petition website, [A Call on Hyatt to Uphold the Dignity of Women](#).

Author



[Rosemary Feurer](#)

Rosemary Feurer is Professor of History at Northern Illinois University. She is the author of *Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900-1950*, among other books and essays. She is working on *The Illinois Mine Wars, 1860-1940* and a new biography of Mary Harris "Mother" Jones.

