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The Labor and Working-Class History Association

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2025

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President's Perspective

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Since our last newsletter our world has changed dramatically. The first 100 Days of the second administration of Donald Trump slammed into our world like a devastating hurricane. In its wake, we find enormous wreckage and staggering casualties. Making it all worse is the knowledge that the storm is scarcely subsiding. The damage is already extensive, and is likely to leave a generational impact.

The federal government and its workforce have been badly undermined. An estimated 100,000 federal workers have been induced to voluntarily leave their jobs. Some of those who refused their "Fork in the Road" offer have been subjected to capricious "RIFs," and many of those who remain on the job have been stripped of their union rights by executive order. Federal agencies that had once protected federal workers from the vicissitudes of "at-will" employment and protected their collective bargaining rights, the Merit System Protection Board and the Federal Labor Relations Authority, have been effectively decapitated.

Private sector workers' rights have also been rolled back. Trump issued an executive order ending a Biden Administration rule that had raised the minimum wage for private sector workers laboring on federal contracts. Workers in that status will see their minimum wage cut from $17.75/hr to $13.30/hr. At the same time, Trump has fired Biden appointee Gwynne Wilcox from her post on the NLRB, depriving it of a quorum.

Immigrants and people of color have been targeted. The U.S. asylum program has been effectively ended – for all but Afrikaners. Immigrants have been deported without due process. All talk of "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" has been made anathema.

Our campuses have been subjected to arbitrary cuts in federal aid and demands that they curtail free speech. Campus workers have been subjected to pay freezes and layoffs. Some faculty and students have faced discipline or suspension for their speech; many foreign students have had visas revoked.

Nor has the work of historians escaped the onslaught. The heads of both the Library of Congress and the National Archive have been fired, while the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) left her post at Trump's request. Grants by the NEH and the National Science Foundation that funded historical research have been canceled.

Amid all of this, the targets of Trump's attacks are struggling to devise an effective resistance. At this writing, protest rallies have been organized and lawsuits filed. Some actions – such as the protests that target Elon Musk – have been impactful: the value of Musk's Telsa has been cut by one-third since he and his "Department of Government Efficiency" launched their war on the civil service. Some lawsuits have led to temporary restraining orders that have at least postponed the implementation of Trump's plans. Nonetheless, the Trump juggernaut has yet to be reversed, while unions and their allies seem uncertain of how to step up resistance.

At this moment the work of LAWCHA's members has suddenly become more important than ever before. Although we face a singular threat today, we who study the history of working people and their movements are not unacquainted with moments such as this. Indeed, we are perhaps better prepared than most to understand this moment and to help envision an effective response to its challenges. This edition of the newsletter helps get such a conversation started. Many thanks to our newsletter editors, Michael Hillard, Jane Berger, Martha Guerrero Badillo, Patrick Dixon, and Colleen Woods for turning around this issue so quickly.

Letter from the Editors

We are delighted to share with you the second newsletter issue under new editorship. As we shared in our first issue, we are committed to reporting on and learning from labor activism within history and the academy. Because of the times, this includes bringing focus to the expanding attacks from the right on the profession, and academia per se, by reaching out to members to learn about what they are confronting – including attacks on curriculum, tenure, employment, scholarship, freedom of expression and speech, and now visa status – and the creative ways in which they are responding. Further, we are prioritizing the inclusion of contributions from current graduate students and highlighting how they are facing both enduring issues as workers and current challenges.

With this in mind, in "Meeting the Moment" we present three trenchant features that speak to the moment our profession and society faces, including the unfolding events of the early weeks of the Trump administration. Leading off is our first graduate student contribution by Yale University's Andrea Ho. In this piece, Ho traces the hard-fought wins of UNITE-HERE Local 33, envisioned by graduate student workers amidst dramatic budget cuts, institutional anti-unionism, and more recently, Trump's attack on universities, international students, and public funding for research. Besides reflecting on the stakes of organizing during a period of heightened precarity and uncertainty for graduate students, this piece provides a dynamic first-person account from the academic labor movement in a moment of crisis.

Patrick Dixon spoke to Donna Haverty-Stacke about the history of political repression in the US. Drawing upon her research in *Trotskyists on Trial* on the Smith Act of 1940 and its afterlife, Haverty-Stacke identifies ways in which the mid-twentieth century anti-communist crusades bear some resemblance to present day persecutions. Yet readers will also see distinct and clear differences between the application of law under the Roosevelt and Trump Justice Departments. How much, we're ultimately left to ask, can we draw from US history to understand the present predicament and when must we look elsewhere for international and comparative perspectives?

Finally, on February 25 LAWCHA hosted an online workshop titled "Working People Organizing Against Authoritarianism: Past and Present Perspectives." The panel featured noted scholars and activists Felicia Kornbluh, Will Jones, Nancy MacLean, and Paul Ortiz, whose observations are packed with lessons from both history and their own and others' strategies and activism on how to meet the moment.

Going forward, as our vision of the newsletter continues to take shape, we invite you, the membership, to engage with us to further shape the newsletter's content and mission. We encourage you to seek us out at the June meeting in Chicago, and of course you can contact newsletter coordinator Michael Hillard at any time with suggestions and feedback.

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Meeting the Moment

Organizing and the Crises of the University: Lessons from UNITE HERE–Local 33

Andrea Ho
Yale University

Andrea is a second-year PhD student in US history. She studies the carceral state, social movements, Native and Indigenous history, and labor in the mid to late twentieth century. She is also a Vice President of UNITE HERE-Local 33.

Between my first and second semester of graduate school, my pay increased nearly 20%, thanks to the first contract ratified by my graduate union, UNITE HERE-Local 33. My financial stability – and my ability to save for the future – seemingly changed overnight. I could now envision flying home to care for ill family members and covering unexpected costs, like the out-of-pocket medical bill that arrived just months later. I wasn't employed in the bargaining unit at the time the contract was ratified, but the university increased all PhD stipends in line with the new contractual pay rates. While I struggled to articulate what I wanted to be different before, in that moment, all became clear. Winning a contract was the difference between seeing a future where I could support myself and my family, and one where I could not.

Along with the pay raise came a new dental plan; important protections for job security, freedom of speech, international and immigrant workers, academic freedom, and health and safety; a process to request workplace accommodations; and a grievance procedure to address any violations of our new contract. Through conversations with my coworkers, I realized our contract had transformed their lives as much as it had mine. Friends who were planning to have children now had spousal and dependent healthcare insurance. Colleagues who were worried about the skyrocketing rate of rent in New Haven could afford to stay in their homes.

None of these changes, however, were the product of chance. They were only made possible by a three-decade long unionization campaign, one of the longest continuous union campaigns in the country. Local 33, formerly known the Graduate Employees and Student Organization (GESO), and before that, TA Solidarity, was founded in 1987 to address disparities in pay and position and the "unclear" nature of graduate work. Although some of the issues remain the same, as graduate workers still fight to be respected in their workplaces, we find ourselves in a new moment.

Now more than ever, I feel like I am fighting over the present and future of the academic workplace. In my second year of graduate school, the Trump administration has intensified its attacks against higher education, research funding, freedom of speech, and international and immigrant workers. The academy is no longer crumbling around us; it is being actively dismantled by an administration whose values could not be farther from my own. As university leaders scramble to respond, the academic labor movement is fighting to expand and build upon our wins. While some may offer concessions to protect their shrinking kingdoms, organizing my union has shown me that we can do more than defend what we have. The basic questions of organizing have never seemed more urgent: how do we fight? And how do we win?

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Numbers matter in organizing.

In the lead up to any successful action or card campaign, organizers run their numbers again. And again. Successfully challenging the bosses or the elites requires majorities. Yale University, like most institutions of higher education, does not move easily. Graduate workers neither control Yale's purse strings nor sit on the boards of the corporation.

During my first semester of graduate school, I was asked to bring several cohort mates to an important contract bargaining update. When I walked into the room, I was stunned to find it packed with hundreds of people—nearly 250 in person and another 150 online. In response to the university's disappointing offer on our financial package, my union had mobilized hundreds of grad workers in under a week.

In the meeting, my colleagues spoke passionately about how a solid dental plan and a contract that kept up with the cost of living would improve their lives. My peers were shocked to learn that other grad unions had already secured similar wins. They were incensed—how were we, as graduate students, supposed to focus on our work without decent healthcare?

But the meeting wasn't just about sharing updates. It was our turn to write short testimonies about how much we needed good pay, healthcare, and dental. The bargaining committee later shared hundreds of testimonies in negotiations with the university. That moment shifted the dynamics at the bargaining table—graduate workers had come together in large numbers to show that we were powerful and that we were organized. *Numbers mattered.*

That meeting sparked a new sense of empowerment in me – it was powerful to watch other people realize that they deserved better. And it was powerful to come together collectively and demand for more. Now, when I bring people to actions, I think about what difference it would make for them to walk away not just feeling empowered, but with a transformed sense of what is politically possible.

Two months later, 99.4% of grad workers voted yes to ratify a contract that reflected not just better pay and respect for our work, but a fundamentally different relationship with

our employer. Changing Yale involved determining what graduate workers wanted in a contract and what they wanted to be different about their lives. To shift the balance of power at elite institutions, members must see the union not just as a service, but as a collective project they are building together.

Academic worker unions are at their best when they reduce the isolation and social norms around individual academic production. Our contract secures the foundation for a different kind of fight – one in which people understand the academy's relationship to our material conditions. Most of all, organizing makes legible our dependence on other kinds of workers.

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UNITE HERE represents many food service workers in higher education, but Local 33 is the only graduate worker unit in our union. At Yale, graduate workers joined UNITE HERE Locals 34 and 35, which represent clerical and technical workers, and facilities, maintenance, and dining workers respectively. Together, we represent about 8,000 workers and do every kind of campus work imaginable. Another sibling local, Local 217, represents hospitality and food service workers across Connecticut.

Local 33 also works closely with New Haven Rising (NHR), a community organization dedicated to fighting for racial and economic justice across the city. None of the current Local 33 members were part of the decision many decades ago to join other Yale workers, but we benefit tremendously from that legacy of solidarity. Locals 34 and 35 built the union standard that formed the basis for our contract. Last fall, Local 33 showed up in force to a Local 217 picket line at a downtown New Haven hotel where the university often houses our members during recruitment events.

We won our union because many people—91%—decided to win. The decision of workers at Yale to organize together across job classifications and with the broader New Haven community has allowed us to build power outside the university.

Led by NHR, our labor-community coalition won a $52 million increase in Yale's voluntary contribution to New Haven in 2022. Locals 34 and 35 have also won significant local hiring agreements in their contracts.

There's more to do. New Haven's median household income is $48,973 compared to $83,572 statewide. The racial disparities are even more dramatic. In New Haven, the median household income for white families is $67,000/year, while for Black and Latinx families, it just over half of that at $39,000/year. A few blocks separate a neighborhood where the average life expectancy is 82.8 years and one where it is only 71.1 years. This 11.7-year gap reflects long-standing disparities in access to healthcare, education, and income — disparities that have persisted even as the value of Yale's tax-exempt properties has ballooned to $4.2 billion.

Yale's distinctive model of industrial unionism—rare in higher education—has taught graduate workers like me how to stand in solidarity with the working people of New Haven. NHR and our sibling locals ask us to show up for their members, attend rallies, or community events, or participate in local door-knocking campaigns. Following through on those asks is how graduate workers make good on our commitment to building working class power beyond the university's walls.

In my first two years of graduate school, I have attended more actions, rallies, and picket lines than I have attended traditional academic social events. I have found more in common with New Haven residents organizing for a better world than with university administrators who use the term "the Yale community" to reinforce the town/gown divide. These are the kinds of coalitions that we need to meet the moment. To change the university, the academic labor movement needs to organize all kinds of workers whose jobs make the university run. From service workers to research staff, and graduate workers to adjuncts: the university does not work unless we do. We need more people to take on bigger challenges. This is not the moment to shy away from organizing more academic workers. This is the moment to prove that we can.

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Before graduate school, my theory of change was grounded in an abstract belief in people power. But I had no clue how to build that power or see myself as someone capable of fostering solidarity across difference. Now, I relate daily to people whose work differs from mine. I don't work in a lab, but I do know what it's like to be a precarious international worker.

As a leader of my union, I've also learned how to build consensus with people who both share my political views and diverge from me in unexpected ways. The least democratic thing anyone can do is declare—on their own—what the union should or shouldn't be doing. New members might find this task difficult; in graduate school, we are taught to be specialists in producing knowledge. We train for years to become authorities in our subject matter. But in our union, we must shed the assumption of singular authority and become part of a collective. We learn to trust each other, not on a shared basis of expertise, but on a commitment to action. New organizers often struggle with this the most – how can I do something when I don't know enough? Not knowing can be paralyzing.

Organizing forces you to do something that scares you, to relate to strangers, and realize that building consensus takes work. Your voice matters as much as anyone else's, but it is also true that people need to be convinced to share a common position. In doing so, you must be open to being changed. We often talk about "transformative organizing" — what does it mean to be transformed by your organizer, by your coworkers, and by collective struggle? Organizing that is transformative rather than transactional takes being vulnerable. It takes accepting that people may not listen to you and that you might be changed by the people around you.

I've experienced this transformation myself. Organizing has reshaped how I understand power. I've learned how to build power and how to wield it — without taking solidarity for granted. My theory of change has been tested and strengthened, and along with it, my political endurance.

Organizing a graduate union is more than winning a set of demands; it's about transforming the people involved. And when's people view of themselves and what is possible shifts, the kinds of political action we can take expands significantly.

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When people ask why I organize my union, I have been trained to talk about my material stakes. Though these stakes are very real, ultimately, I organize because I like myself more when I do. I used to see myself as fearful and anxious — a people-pleaser afraid to upset anyone. But organizing helps me work through those problems. It shows me that I can navigate conflict with coworkers and even bosses – and that conflict is productive and strengthens relationships. It's no secret that academic workplaces are riddled with interpersonal tensions or gossiping behind closed doors. The skills I practice as an organizer help me navigate the academy and beyond.

Indeed, I often walk away from organizing conversations with a better understanding of myself, the world, or usually both. Organizing has transformed my vision of academic life and my role in it. It helped me imagine that the academic labor market doesn't have to operate on a model of scarcity, where the few good jobs are given to the most "deserving" candidates.

This is not to deny the material conditions we all face. The American Historical Association's 2023 Academic Job Report shows a sharp decline in tenure and tenure-track (TT) positions, alongside significant growth in non-tenure-track (NTT) jobs. In fact, 2023 saw both the lowest number of TT listings on record (excepting the pandemic years) and the highest number of NTT postings since 2016-2017.

The organizer and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs reminds us to constantly sharpen our analyses by being in touch with what's happening on the ground. "Everything and everyone contain contradictions," she writes, "so that what was progressive at one stage can become reactionary at another." Boggs calls this process "thinking and acting dialectically." Academic labor organizers know this as the task of talking to our coworkers and being honest about the monumental challenge before us. We can imagine a better future without losing sight of the effort it takes to get us there.

Organizing keeps my pessimism surrounding intellectual work at bay because every day I talk to grad workers who share my vision of a better world. If I came to grad school, in part, to get an academic job, then the best investment in my future is to organize with my grad union. Organizing is what makes those academic jobs worth having – who wants a job without decent pay, job security, healthcare benefits, paid time off, and family and dependent support?

Why do I organize, then? I organize for myself. I organize for my friends and coworkers, who remind me that higher education can be a place of political and social transformation. While some view organizing only as collective struggle, there is nothing wrong with admitting that organizing is selfish. Abstracting oneself from the political project only disconnects oneself from the urgency of this fight. Another Local 33 organizer once told me that ideology was a poor substitute for personal stakes. At the time, I didn't know what he meant. But now, it's clear to me that we all must have our own reasons for staying in this fight. As Mie Inouye writes, "unless people … feel the stakes of their participation viscerally, they won't stick around through the inevitable setbacks and frustrations involved in organizing." It is our job as organizers to know our reasons and to help others be in touch with theirs.

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Trump's attack on universities and public funding for research is shocking and inexcusable, but austerity has ruled higher education for decades. Even Yale University, with a $41 billion endowment, isn't exempt from austerity measures. With the Trump administration training its gaze on slashing federal funding, we all stand to suffer from deeper cuts to education and research. To fight back against austerity politics, we need to organize our coworkers around the idea that these cuts are not inevitable. The choices we make can change the university's priorities. It is up to us whether they are willing to spend their wealth on workers' salaries or keep it tied up in private equity funds and commercial real estate.

Davarian Baldwin writes that defunding public universities has pushed them to take on a host of "entrepreneurial projects" including "leveraging tax-free real estate, public-private partnerships, capturing intellectual property, and more." For example, universities have let private corporations build their laboratories on "non-profit campus owned land," effectively creating tax shelters for lucrative companies—often in the middle of chronically underfunded Black and brown neighborhoods surrounding these campuses.

For academic workers to fight back in era of accelerated austerity politics, we must take seriously the task of winning the "discursive struggle" around funding at the university. Austerity politics seeks to limit the imagined possibility of alternative choices. The language of austerity will be wielded by universities to claim that their hands are tied. Saving area studies departments, or any other departments that might study "race" or "gender," will be framed as too costly. But we must insist on presenting another choice to university administrators. And we must build the power necessary to make them take these demands seriously.

Michael Denning, in writing about Antonio Gramsci's legacy to politics, insists that organizing is "an act of hegemony, of leading and winning consent." The day-to-day work of academic labor organizers is to build consensus over the crisis we are facing and what our next steps should be. Taking certain cultural and political consensus for granted, is what Stuart Hall believes led to the failure of the left in his generation. Hall's advice is clear – "in modern societies, hegemony must be constructed, contested, and won on many different sites."

In Local 33, we take the question of building consensus and raising political consciousness seriously. We have built an organizing program around collecting testimonies about the impact of cuts to federal funding. Every day, grad workers talk to each other about the work we do, creating a shared analysis about how these cuts and the concurrent attack on international scholars hurt ourselves and the future of our fields. We visit each other in labs, offices, graduate lounges, and every other place where graduate workers study and work. Through our visits, we engage with those who may feel too scared or isolated to act.

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Much like political parties cannot take the working class's interests for granted, we cannot take for granted that graduate workers will act together, even if it is in our interest to do so. The pressure to see one's interests as individual in a system of real and manufactured scarcity runs through every aspect of academic life. To challenge that logic takes moving people from a place of fear and complacency to one of action.

Even with a union and a contract, that kind of action is not guaranteed.

Last Fall, a large Yale department announced a plan to reduce the number of Local 33 jobs and slash the pay for many graduate teaching positions, offering only vague references to a tight budget. The planned cuts would have violated our contract and taken tens of thousands of dollars from graduate workers' pockets. This department depends on the essential teaching labor of graduate students. For many, these union jobs are the difference between financial stability and falling behind on tuition, loans, or rent.

After the cuts were announced, I led a team of member-organizers in having nearly a hundred one-on-one conversations with their coworkers about the cuts and the kind of action people were willing to take. Six days later, 100 grad workers, joined by union members across campus, held a delegation to tell the department's leadership how the proposed changes would negatively impact the lives of graduate teachers and the quality of instruction.

Two weeks later, close to 100 grad workers again held an "Employee Participation Meeting" (EPM) to discuss workplace issues directly with management. Shortly after, all the cuts were reversed. The proposed cuts would have violated our contract's job classification, pay, and job security language, but our organizing led to their swift reversal.

As graduate workers in this department have explained to me, the industry most of them will enter after Yale is rife with issues of overwork, underpayment, and a toxically competitive atmosphere. It's also marked by a notoriously low union density; only a few firms in their profession have won a union and settled a contract. The actions we take on as graduate workers directly affect what we are willing to fight for in our future jobs. Be it higher education or elsewhere, we are fighting to win the discursive and material struggle around austerity politics. In the last few months, I have seen a cultural and political shift in what graduate workers in this department imagine is possible. They can challenge the university and win. They can have a say over their jobs and their futures. They will know how to organize their coworkers to take collective action at Yale and beyond.

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Nothing about graduate union organizing has gotten easier since that win last fall. Another Local 33 organizer asked me this semester: "what is the bigger vision we are bringing to people in this moment?" It is now a question we constantly ask each other. The answer keeps evolving, but returning to the question pushes us to forge a collective political vision that both responds to the Trump administration's attacks and incorporates the past and future of the academic labor movement. Gabriel Winant wrote that like Yale, Local 33 has a claim on our future. While the university will "surely reproduce itself in the future as it has done over preceding decades and centuries," Local 33 too will continue forwards.

I usually respond to this question by saying, "we must be proactive, not just reactive." We cannot wait for Trump to seize federal funding; we must organize our coworkers into action before those cuts are enacted. Alyssa Battistoni writes that "organizing is the day-to-day work of politics – what Ella Baker called "spadework," the hard labor that prepares the ground for dramatic action."

A strong contract like ours doesn't exempt us from the hard labor of spadework. As an international graduate worker, I've seen firsthand how crucial our protections are. Our contract says that the university will not allow immigration enforcement agents to enter non-public areas where graduate employees work or access a graduate worker's personal records without a judicial warrant. If such consent is legally required, the university will notify the union that access was granted. So far, Yale has signaled that it will uphold these contract provisions in good faith—but even an excellent contract isn't enough. Graduate workers have faced SEVIS record cancellations, detainment, and deportation for everything from DUIs to protesting the genocide in Gaza. As I navigate a more pervasive sense of fear and paranoia on my campus, I return to the question again: what is the bigger vision in this moment?

The problems with the academy have been laid bare over the course of decades. For me, the role of an academic organizer isn't to save the academy – it's to build the power to remake it. My vision of academic life involves imagining a democratic university, one where its workers have a say in how its run and how it spends its money. If grad workers, faculty, clerical, and maintenance staff had real decision-making power, the university would have a radically different commitment to its surrounding neighborhoods. Higher education might be a source of genuine public good, rather than a profit seeking institution built on the exploitation of its most precarious workers.

A vision of the democratic university is only the beginning. Graduate unions, in collaboration with other workers and community members across the country, must decide for themselves how to act in this moment. Success comes when members are invested in the vision and play a role in co-creating it.

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In a moment of institutional crisis, the academic labor movement functions as a crucial counterweight against the neoliberal restructuring of the academy. That's why we must talk to our coworkers more, not less. The conflicts will not be any less fraught, but they will be more important. To organize our way out of the crisis, we must be up for being in conflict with each other. We won't win without a larger academic labor movement—that is, more people organizing. We must push ourselves and our coworkers to make a different choice. It may not seem consequential on the day-to-day, but if more academic workers are choosing to stand up and stand with each other, rather than keep our heads down and compete for the last scraps, then what we can achieve changes dramatically. What is at stake is nothing less than the present and future of academic life. Labor organizers often ask: what does it take? This semester, I have asked: what will it take to get thousands of graduate workers, university employees, and community members into the streets of New Haven? What will it take for our employer not to capitulate in the face of right-wing attacks? What will it take to protect our friends, our colleagues, our research, and our futures? The answers are not simple. But I know that it takes learning how to relate to each other, trust each other, and face our fears on an unprecedented scale and pace. As every organizer knows, part of the answer is always to organize harder. As unsatisfying as it is, it is also the only reliable blueprint for winning. The horizon might seem distant but strive towards it we must.

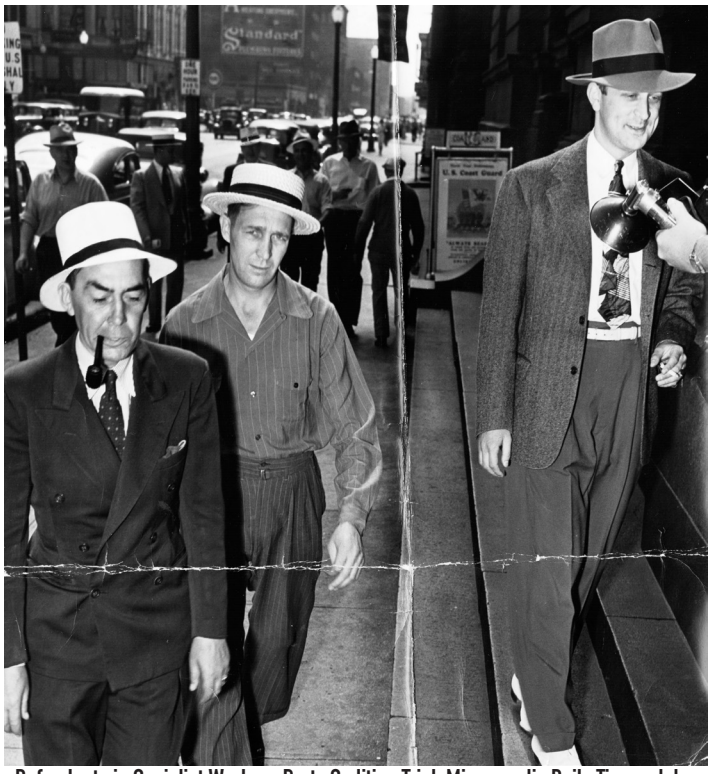
An Interview with Dorothy Haverty-Stacke

Old Red Scare, New Red Scare

Interview with Patrick Dixon

PD: In recent months there have been many discussions concerning the rapidly changing parameters of state power and the way in which it is exercised in the United States. Some use terms like "McCarthyism" and others refer to "political prisoners," a term which has also been appropriated by the right in reference to January 6 participants. While I can see why the comparisons with McCarthyism and Red Scares of the past are being made, I'm uncertain of their utility as framework for historical analysis. When thinking about this subject I have found your research to be instructive and hope you might be able to share with us some reflections on what parallels exist between the twentieth century and today.

In your 2016 book *Trotskyists on Trial*, you explored the 1941 prosecution of members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) under the Smith Act of 1940 which made it a crime to advocate the violent overthrow of the United States government. While the SWP members were effective regional organizers in the Twin Cities area and had led Teamsters Local 544 in a significant strike in 1934, it seems difficult to imagine a counter-narrative in which they built an effective revolutionary movement leading to the downfall of the US government. If this is the case, why were they prosecuted? Was it more about framing the parameters of political debate or protecting businesses from radical union organizers? Or some other reason?



Defendants in Socialist Workers Party Sedition Trial. Minneapolis Daily Times, July 21, 1941. Image courtesy of Hennepin County Library.

Under the Smith Act, the government did not need to nor did it seek to prove that the defendants' speech resulted in imminent lawless action (i.e. that their movement had or could lead to the downfall of the US government). Just the mere alleged advocacy of violent overthrow was sufficient to prosecute in 1941. That is what made this peacetime sedition law so dangerous and this case ultimately about the prosecution of political ideas. The Trotskyists (and some of their civil libertarian and organized labor supporters) saw this danger both for free speech and union organizing, and made the case for a more protective application of the clear and present danger test (i.e., that speech had to be connected to an overt illegal act to be criminalized). But such a standard had not yet been devised or upheld by the courts. The Department of Justice proceeded on the face of the existing statute and in response to the case presented to it by the FBI, which had been surveilling Local 544 in the years before the indictment. The Trotskyists understood the prosecution as an attempt to crush their radical union organizing, an attempt that had been coordinated by disgruntled rank-and-file Teamsters and the FBI agents they cooperated with, Daniel Tobin (president of the IBT, who had reached out directly to FDR demanding action against the Trotskyists) and the attorney general. In the context of President Roosevelt's wartime emergency declaration (made in May 1940) and his authorization of the FBI to investigate domestic communist activity, the SWP had become a target because of its opposition to the war and because of some of its members' positions at the helm of a union at the center of the nation's domestic transportation network. By 1941, in the context of the little red scare, anxieties over fifth column sabotage to the nation's defense efforts were running high. From the Roosevelt administration's perspective, the priority was preventing any obstacle to wartime production (and that included the domestic transportation needed to support that production). The Smith Act allowed the Justice Department to target the Trotskyists for their opposition to the war and their radical union organizing by connecting both to their Marxist critique of capitalism, which was presented at the trial as inherently advocating the violent overthrow of the government. The parallels to today might be seen in the government's targeting of people for their political speech, especially the positions they take on the administration's foreign policy, as well as the president's attempts to declare states of emergency to then trigger draconian statutes to justify silencing critics through arrests, detentions, and in the case of immigrants, deportation proceedings.

PD: In singling out members of the SWP, a group that didn't necessarily attract a great measure of public sympathy and support, did the 1941 case have the effect upon political dialog that prosecutors had intended? What factors mitigated against a more effective opposition to political persecution?

One could say that, yes, for at least two decades the 1941 case influenced the political dialog in a way that the prosecution intended when it came to the debate over how to balance civil liberties and national security in times of emergency. Supporters of the Smith Act not only included ardent anticommunists, like Representative Howard Smith who sponsored the law, but also self-professed civil libertarians, like Attorney General Francis Biddle, who came to believe that the US was in what he called "a curious twilight zone" because of the war in Europe that justified the government's taking "steps [to protect itself] which would not be considered in ordinary times." This understanding of the constitutionality of the Smith Act was one that was implicit in the prosecution's argument at trial and that sustained the Smith Act on appeal to the Circuit Court in 1943. It was also echoed in the Supreme Court's upholding of the conviction of the leadership of the Communist Party, USA in the Dennis case in 1951 during the Second Red Scare; Chief Justice Fred Vinson argued that showing a clear and present danger "cannot mean that before the Government can act, it must wait until the putsch is about to be executed" to protect itself. This interpretation sustained a very broad application of the Smith Act. Indeed, this was the very thing opponents of this sedition law decried at the time of its first use against the Trotskyists. Edward Prichard, special assistant to Biddle, had warned that the law would solidify the foundation of a new domestic security state that would threaten everyone's liberty. Prichard's warning was prescient: the Smith Act provided statutory authority for the FBI's investigation of alleged subversives (that Hoover ultimately expanded into COINTELPRO) and the "punishment of mere political advocacy" in subsequent prosecutions. The SWP fought as hard as it could against its indictment and conviction, appealing all the way to the Supreme Court (which refused to hear the case). It gained some support, most notably from the ACLU and some corners of the organized labor movement, but the CPUSA's influence in many unions limited the effectiveness of this opposition. The CP refused to condemn the prosecution of the Trotskyists (indeed, it celebrated it at the time, in part, because it had shifted its position to support the war after the Nazi's invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941). This sectarian divide on the left weakened the creation of a robust labor-left coalition against the federal government's assault on free speech.

PD: Why did the federal judiciary initially deem prosecutions under the Smith Act to be permissible before ultimately weakening its scope in the late 1950s?

The federal judiciary initially deemed the prosecutions permissible because of their interpretation of the clear and present danger test (first articulated by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in the 1919 Schenck case) as a legitimate limitation on First Amendment free speech rights. They held security above liberty in the cases that came before them under this law, as can be seen in Vinson's argument in Dennis. Much of this position had to do with the context, first, of the emergency of World War II and, then, the threat of the Cold War. It would not be until 1957, in *Yates v. US*, and then in 1969, in *Bradenburg v. Ohio*, that the Supreme Court would shift to a more speech-protective application of the clear and present danger test, applying the "incitement to future action" standard in *Yates*, and requiring the connection of speech to "imminent lawless action" in *Brandenburg*. In part, this shift was due to a change in the makeup of the Court, but it may also have been due to the easing of the sense of crisis that had been at a fever pitch during the height of the Second Red Scare. As a result of the *Yates* and *Brandenburg* decisions, it became much more challenging to successfully prosecute people under the Smith Act and certainly near impossible to do so for "mere political advocacy."

PD: By the 1960s there appears to have been a shift in public opinion and a broader belief that deviant political views, however unpopular they may be, should not be criminalized. Other notable related changes in public expression take place like the decline of the Hays Code. Does this represent a triumph of liberalism or does state oppression of free speech still continue to exist but in new and original ways?

Yes, in a way these changes do represent a triumph of liberalism insofar as notions of tolerance and the importance of the free exchange of ideas to democracy have been upheld and recognized. Central to the speech-protective interpretation of Holmes' clear and present danger test was the language in his dissent in the Abrams case, in which he argued for the vitality of the "marketplace of ideas" to a functioning democracy. But state oppression of free speech has continued to exist. Until recent legal challenges against it, there was the NYPD's direct attempt to quash dissent by "kettling" BLM protestors in 2020, for example. In a reminder that the Smith Act (while having had its sedition titles defanged in Yates and Brandenburg), remains on books, a federal judge recently allowed the Trump administration to move ahead with its plans to invoke the legacy of the 1940 law's other titles by requiring all immigrants to be fingerprinted and registered with the federal government. The current executive order is based on a later law (the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952) but the idea of registering immigrants—who were seen as potential spies and saboteurs—was also at the center of the Smith Act, which was officially titled the Alien Registration Act. In 1940, Zechariah Chafee described the law as a "loaded revolver" and we may be seeing the implications of this warning again today as it (and the 1952 law) are picked up by the Trump administration and aimed at those it deems enemies of the state.

"Working People Organizing Against Authoritarianism: Past and Present Perspectives"

LAWCHA Virtual Panel – February 27, 2025

Dr. Crystal Moten coordinated the February 27, 2025 panel. Dr. Moten is the Curator of Collectionsand Exhibitions at the Obama Presidential Center Museum in Chicago, IL.

Jane Berger, a LAWCHA newsletter committee member, summarized Felicia Kornbluh's remarks from the panel. The other three panelists contributed written accounts of their remarks.

Will Jones

Will Jones is a Professor and the Associate Chair of History at the University of Minnesota and a former President of LAWCHA. He edits the "Up For Debate" section of LAWCHA's journal, Labor: Studies in Working Class History and is a co-editor of the Working Class in American History series at the University of Illinois Press. He is also President of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). He draws on that work to share come observations.

First, we should not be romantic about working-class resistance to authoritarianism. We have a long and deep history of working-class authoritarianism in the United States and other parts of the world. It's important that we look at other places, such as European fascism, but we have models of both resistance to and embrace of authoritarianism here in our own history. I was reminded of this looking at the "Negro work" records in the YMCA archives at the University of Minnesota. In the 1940s, Black activist Channing Tobias wrote about the new system of "Jim Crow" being implemented in South Africa. We often refer now to "American Apartheid," but we should remember that at the time many saw it as an American export to South Africa.

At the same time, we need to be clear that authoritarianism has had a devastating impact on working people and their communities, both economically and politically, and even those communities that supported it. And for this reason, working people, when organized, have been among the most powerful advocates for democratization. One example is the civil rights movement, which is often remembered as a middle-class movement but gained its power from working-class organizations. These included grassroots civil rights organizations, women's organizations and labor unions that could articulate and mobilize to realize the concerns of working people. In 1945, A. Philip Randolph gave the commencement address to Morehouse College, where Martin Luther King, Jr., was a freshman. He urged the elite graduates to create a "mental climate of service to the masses," to "establish organic contact with the people in the shacks and hovels – there resides the power, they may be poor in property, but they are rich in spirit." That is a message that animated a movement that we don't often recognize and that remains critical today.

The history of working-class resistance in the public sector is particularly relevant with the current administration's push to fire, intimidate and disempower government workers. We have a large and growing new literature on this, including Jane Berger's *A New Working Class: The Legacies of Public Sector Employment in the Civil Rights Movement*, Eric Yellin and Frederick Gooding's *Public Workers in Service of America: A Reader*, and Marc Bayard's forthcoming volume on labor leader William Lucy. We can see from this history the double-edged impact of attacks on public workers. Government is a critical place of employment, particularly where strong protections for unions have transformed some of the most difficult and lowest paid work in our society into relatively stable, family supporting jobs. But government workers also serve working class communities, and thus attacks on their jobs and the services they provide hit their own families and neighbors the hardest. And as in the past, Trump's cuts have the most devastating impact on Black and brown workers who rely most heavily on government for both jobs and services they have been denied in the private sector. As seen in recent protests and lawsuits against federal budget cuts, public employees and their unions are often on the front lines of defending their jobs and the services that we all rely upon.

Finally, as faculty, researchers and students, we should remember that many of these lessons apply to us as well. We are public employees, and we need to embrace our status as both vulnerable and essential

workers – and organize our own workplaces. We have seen in the recent budget cuts that even private universities are dependent upon public funds for almost everything they do. Based on my work with the AAUP, I note that it is particularly critical that faculty organizations expand their base of support beyond the humanities where we have historically been stronger, and to ally with other organizations and unions on campus and across the country. It is essential that faculty organize under the models that are available to us, whether that is formal collective bargaining or advocacy. We need to be clear that we cannot rely upon administrators to defend us, our students or our colleges and universities. They have different interests and different understandings of the problem, and faculty need to take responsibility for defending academic freedom and the core values of our institutions, but also our own economic and political interests.

Felicia Kornbluh

Panelist Felicia Kornbluh is a professor and the director of Jewish Studies at the University of Vermont. She is also a former president of her local of United Academics, the union of the faculty at the University of Vermont that is affiliated with both the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the American Federation of Teachers.

Kornbluh urged panel attendees to resist authoritarianism by organizing on campuses and making their voices heard beyond the academy. She noted that college and university campuses are critical sites of resistance that are under assault by the current administration and need to be fiercely defended. She urged faculty to join the AAUP. In addition, she encouraged attendees to make their voices heard in the media. While professors are sometimes more comfortable working within the peer-reviewed universe, she proposed that academics branch out and try to get their voices heard in the mainstream media and on social media. She also suggested that attendees use different forms of media to communicate with large audiences. She has a Substack account called "History Teaches" to which she makes regular contributions that connects history to current events, and she is also exploring ways of utilizing video to deliver academic and historical arguments to popular audiences. Of particular import, she argued, is describing the impacts of the policies of the current administration on working peoples. Also vital is providing alternatives to the far-right social media sites that target white men.

When communicating about contemporary politics to various audiences, Kornbluh advised attendees to avoid glossing over the contributions of Democrats to the neoliberal world order that is currently angering many voters. The leadership of Democrats in facilitating both the North American Free Trade Agreement and welfare reform during the 1990s is worthy of scrutiny and critique, she noted. Legitimate critiques of Democrats should not be sacrificed in the service of forging solidarity, she explained.

Kornbluh also called attention to the concerns of minoritized groups whose rights are particularly vulnerable to the current administration's attacks. Conservative district attorneys have Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in their sites. The success of the conservative effort to have the section declared unconstitutional would deal a tremendous blow to disability rights, she argued. In addition, the rights of members of LGBTQ communities, especially trans folks, are being eroded by a conservative backlash. Moreover, critiques of the government of Israel are being mischaracterized as antisemitism and used to silence critics, particularly international students, she added. Kornbluh urged members of minoritized groups to unite, seek common cause and anticipate that their concerns might eventually be abandoned by institutional partners.

Nancy MacLean

MacLean is a historian at Duke University and past LAWCHA president.

The late great union organizer Jane McAlevey taught that "organizing is not an art of telling people what to do, but of listening for what they cannot abide." We are going to need to hone that skill in the months ahead, because the Trump administration is doing so much on so many fronts that people of conscience cannot abide. The question is which horror will be most salient in moving any particular individual into action to build the power to block the billionaire bulldozer.

After all, we are faced with an openly fascistic president working with the wealthiest, least qualified, cabinet in history and the world's richest man as an unelected co-president to roll back the 20th century for working people and all Americans who have looked to government to address problems and restrain corporate domination. On the campaign trail, Donald Trump lied about the by-then toxic Project 2025; he claimed he knew nothing of it and would never carry it out. Now he and his team are implementing its provisions with

breakneck speed—and contempt for the Constitution.

These people are not just opponents on the issues. They have become morally depraved by their excessive wealth. Examples: proposing to turn the site of an ongoing genocide (Gaza) into a luxury resort. Firing devoted federal employees by email and almost daily insulting them and their vital work. Separating immigrant children from their hardworking parents while proposing $5 million "gold cards" to lure ultra-rich foreigners to the U.S. And openly, aggressively, restoring racial segregation and discrimination, as shown by the military brass firings and hiring of unqualified white men to replace distinguished women and African American male leaders.

In short, Trump is ruling like the authoritarian bullies today's right so admires, above all, Hungary's dictator, Viktor Orbán, whom 47 and his Project 2025 backers have praised as their model.

It's eerie how directly my research and writing over the years speak to this authoritarian surge. *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* was a study of America's first mass fascist movement—the KKK of the 1920s. As I wrote last year in the preface to the thirtieth anniversary edition, MAGA's ideology and tactics in many ways mirror those of the second Klan. MAGA, too, enlists reactionary populism, white supremacy, Christian nationalism, and exploitation of parental fears about changes in gender and sexuality to build a mass following for a deadly reactionary agenda.

Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace traced the struggle to open good jobs to all on the part of first African Americans, then Mexican Americans, and women of all groups. It also revealed movement conservatives' opposition to every single measure to produce greater fairness in employment, from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through the development of affirmative action, to the more recent (and toothless) diversity, equity and inclusion policies now demonized by the right. The current attackers often enlist the same deceitful rhetoric as their forebears, who also denied that discrimination against those long denied full citizenship existed, much less constituted a program worthy of action.

Lastly, my most recent book, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*, updated with a new preface in 2023, began with the attempt of segregationists (abetted by neoliberal economists) to privatize the South's public schools after *Brown v. Board* – a project the right is advancing nationally now. Through that research, I discovered how the campaign against public education led these Mont Pelerin Society economists to partner with Charles Koch (who joined the society in the early 1970s) and work with the now literally hundreds of organizations he and his allied hundreds of ultra-rich donors have jointly funded to rig our legal system and politics in favor of unaccountable corporations and multi-billionaires.

Most recently, and contrary to the fiction accepted by gullible media that Koch and Trump are at sharp odds, I shared with the *Guardian* an investment prospectus from Koch's Americans for Prosperity that showed how this group is investing tens of millions in a multi-prong effort to pass Trump's top legislative priorities: gutting regulation and providing more tax cuts for billionaires, to be paid for by cutting Medicaid (among other crucial lifesavers), a program on which 1 in every 4 Americans relies for health care. The Americans for Prosperity investment prospectus also praised "as a real opportunity" for AfP investors the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) run by Elon Musk, rightly dubbed by others Dangerous Oligarchs Grabbing Everything.

Together these histories—and those shared by the other panelists in this forum--help explain both the deep roots and the accelerating impact of the right's embrace of authoritarian oligarchy, and why predatory capitalists like Koch, Musk, and Peter Thiel have made alliances with Christian nationalists and turned to fascist tactics of stoking division and hatred and deploying disinformation and intimidation to get the votes needed to advance total corporate domination.

As historians, we have much to contribute to the desperately needed public understanding of what is happening and who it serves and who and what it will harm, permanently, if not stopped soon. Above all, we need to find ways to reach those who didn't vote in 2024, or voted in frustration with a broken system, with patient explanation of how the oligarchs' administration is hurting them and their families and communities.

Now that the initial shock and paralysis have ebbed, promising signs of the potential for effective organizing, thankfully, are appearing at the end of 47's first one hundred days and helping drive down his approval ratings to the worst in eighty years.

I'll just point to a few elements I'm most familiar with and that people can sign up with. From inauguration day forward, Democracy2025 has led in litigation against the authoritarians' violation of the Constitution and the rule of law, working with a vast range of partners and an inspiring success rate. But its attorneys know that the law is only a braking mechanism to slow down the onslaught; organizing massive numbers in disruptive protests—and ultimately work stoppages—will be needed to defeat tyranny.

For those of us in higher education, the AAUP is leading the action in litigating, lobbying, research and communications and organizing. The National Day of Action had participation from 88 chapters, an amazing feat. I was recently in Texas, which has the fastest growing state AAUP in the country, with 75 chapters and impressive leadership. The national AAUP is now home to a Mellon-funded Center for the Defense of Academic Freedom (full disclosure: in which I am one of 15 fellows). We have been churning out helpful resources for the fight, including Action Reports; an engaging newsletter and podcast series; and an Executive Power Watch, which tracks and concisely explains the Trump executive orders aimed at higher education and what you can do about them. Some us also work with the African American Policy Forum, led by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and the Freedom to Learn Coalition that AAPF has helped build.

The many nationwide protests are also boosting confidence and courage, changing the media narrative, and prompting some Democratic elected officials and other "leaders" to stand up and fight back. Starting with the pop-up protests at Tesla dealerships that helped make Elon Musk a rightly despised figure, many other mobilizations followed, including national days of action like the over 1,000 May Day Strong protests. And as federal workers fight back, some other labor activists, convened by the rightly revered strategist Bill Fletcher, have organized Standing for Democracy, "a coalition of labor unions, labor scholars, community organizations and individuals committed to defending democracy and workers' rights in the face of growing anti-democratic forces."

Paul Ortiz

Ortiz is a professor of labor history at Cornell University. He has served as president and a council member of the United Faculty of Florida UF-FEA/NEA/AFT/AFL-CIO. He also a decorated veteran and a seasoned activist.

I am honored and grateful to be able to participate on this panel with colleagues who I count as friends, comrades, and intellectual role models. It is also exciting to be a part of LAWCHA, an academic association that practices with equal passion the traditions of solidarity and scholarly rigor. I urge all watching this event to become members of the Labor and Working-Class History Association!

By way of introduction, I am currently a professor of labor history at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Between 2008-2024, I was director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program and a history professor at the University of Florida. I served as president of the United Faculty of Florida, UF (FEA-AFL-CIO) during the height of the COVID pandemic. Our union used our contract to defend academic freedom which included the right of our students to study any subject they chose even if it did not meet the approval of those MAGA precursors Governors Scott and DeSantis.

The lesson faculty in Florida learned during the past decade is that to challenge authoritarianism you must unionize, and you must have each other's backs. "Each other" includes other faculty, untenured instructors, graduate students, and the surrounding communities that have sustained our institutions during good times and bad. The United Faculty of Florida realized that it was a waste of time to ask our administrators, the boards of trustees or state legislatures to defend the integrity of higher education. It is up to us to do that. Writ large, we have long passed the point when we can rely on the existing institutions of this nation to keep us safe from harm. Those institutions have failed grievously. Ultimately, *solidarity* is the most effective tool to save higher education and democracy. Look: many of us study mutual aid, strikes and community organizing in various historical times and places; let us now put these lessons to work!

As a sergeant in US Special Forces in Central America in the 1980s, I contributed to many of the same types of anti-democratic tactics that Donald Trump is using against our republic. We have lapsed into fascism because of our country's propensity to support endless wars in the 21st century. War leads to the weakening of the rule of law, and the degradation of democratic institutions. Did we have the hubris to imagine that there would be no domestic costs of our wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Gaza? In his book *Blowback*, Chalmers Johnson aptly warned his readers of *The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*. These costs include debased political institutions, toxic masculinity, and a demobilized and cynical citizenry. The chickens have come home to roost—with a vengeance. To paraphrase the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., if we want to defeat injustices at home we must end our support for wars abroad.

The USA will not survive this crisis unless the people mobilize and revitalize the practice of "an injury to one is an injury to all." The good news is that people and groups across the country are getting reorganized for a long struggle. I have spent the last few months in intense discussions, workshops, and teach-ins with Latinx, African American, military veterans and labor organizations with a focus on the crises of fascism

and our nation's calamitous support of Israel's war against Palestinians in Gaza. This genocidal war has strangled academic freedom on our campuses even as it has strengthened MAGA and the military industrial complex. During the American Historical Association's annual meeting in New York City, I testified on behalf of the membership "Resolution to Oppose Scholasticide in Gaza," crafted by the Historians for Peace and Democracy. While the resolution passed by a vote of 428-88, during our business meeting, the AHA council vetoed the resolution. So much for democracy.

The following day, I led an all-day Latinx history workshop with a working-class Latino organization in Harlem whose organizers told me that their members live in neighborhoods that have been subjected to extortionate rents, police violence and federal surveillance for decades. I also spent a day with the Black and Latino caucus of the Massachusetts State Legislature at the Kennedy School to discuss issues including building coalitions among hard-pressed working-class Haitian, African, Mexican, and other communities who are living in a state of siege, especially in rural Massachusetts. The Black and Latino legislators chose *An African American and Latinx History of the United States* as a common read for their annual retreat to get ready for the tumultuous times ahead.

In these grounding sessions we began with a passage in the book's epilogue where I write, "Inequality in American life today is not an accident. It is not the result of abstract market forces nor is it the consequence of the now-discredited 'culture of poverty' thesis. From the outset, inequality was enforced with the whip, the gun and the United States Constitution." If my experiences in the labor movement and a lifetime of studying history has taught me anything it is that *this nation was not built for us. But our ancestors in struggle stubbornly persisted and created freedom movements based on self-help, solidarity, and mutual aid that allowed them to leave the country a much better place than they found it*. This is why I conclude, "Those interested in the origins of democratic traditions in this country must look to Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa as often as they look to Europe. In eras when fascism, eugenics and Apartheid dominated the nations of Europe and the Global North, it was often ideas from the Global South—as well as the immigrants who brought those ideas to the United States—that rejuvenated US political culture." These are the ideas that MAGA seeks to crush.

I reference African American and Latinx history as a reminder that Donald Trump is no aberration in US politics. Despite efforts to position himself as an "outsider," President Trump is the consummate insider of a nation built on racial capitalism. This is the historical reality that Stephen Miller and other reactionaries are trying to cover up via "Anti-Woke" legislation. They seek to spread the toxic brew of American forgetfulness, innocence and exceptionalism that only serves the ruling class status quo. Native American, African American, Asian American, Latinx and working-class scholarship serves as a reminder that if we manage to win today's political battles we cannot afford to go back to the way things were before Election Day, 2024. The only answer to fascism is democracy and accurate history!

Immigrant workers are still rejuvenating US political culture. I recently finished an essay for the Labor Studies Journal titled "Latino Workers, the 2024 Presidential Election and the Future of the Labor Movement." Working in tandem with Cornell students well-versed in the TikTok social media app, I found that in the immediate wake of the Presidential Election the Latino working-class has engaged in a wide array of anti-MAGA protest activities including hunger strikes, boycotts, rallies, teach-ins and "stay at home actions" that culminated in a December 18th *Day of Action and Solidarity* timed to coincide with the United Nations' "International Migrants Day."

A subsequent national "Day Without Immigrants" protest was held on February 5th. Latino workers, their families and supporters carried signs at marches held across the country that read, "Our Parents Fought for Us, Now We Will Fight For Them," "Stop Exploitation of Undocumented Workers," "No More Detentions, No More Deportations, '"Abolish ICE, [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement"]' and other political slogans. Strikes by Latino workers and demonstrations were held in over 100 cities. Grassroots participation was so widespread that businesses in Denver, St. Louis, Chicago and other locations shuttered in solidarity with the protests.

Latinx workers, many of them undocumented, have been the leaders of the movement against fascism thus far. Let's unite with them and build on working-class self-activity. We must also democratize our own institutions if we are to save democracy. As academics, our perception of powerlessness is rooted in our precarity. Let's stop being isolated and victimized. Join together and go on the offensive against tyranny!

LAWCHA at OAH 2025 in Chicago

Eileen Boris
University of California at Santa Barbara

During LAWCHA conference years, we offer a few sessions co-sponsored and on our own at the Organization of American Historians. This year in Chicago was no exception. We put onto the program three regular sessions and a book forum and we cosponsored others, including a panel celebrating the work of past President Nancy MacLean (Duke) and a roundtable on the new collection of the writings of leader of our field and past OAH President, the late David Montgomery: *A David Montgomery Reader: Essays on Capitalism and Worker Resistance*, co-edited by Sheldon Stromquist (University of Iowa) and James R. Barret (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign).

Perhaps the highlight for LAWCHA was our invited participation in the OAH's new Book Talk Theater in the Exhibit Hall. Under the title, "New Directions in Labor and Working-Class History," we featured four first books recently published by the University of Illinois Press in their series The Working-Class in American History. Naomi R Williams (Rutgers University), presented on her class and community study, *A Blueprint for Worker Solidarity: Class Politics and Community in Wisconsin*, which charts worker solidarity across sector and race in Racine, Wisconsin throughout the 20th century and the fight against deindustrialization. Nick Juravich, (University of Massachusetts, Boston), traced the rise and fall of teacher aides in *Para Power: How Paraprofessional Labor Changed Education*, which recasts the battles for community control and leadership within the American Federation of Teachers in New York City by highlighting the role of Black and Puerto Rican women in their neighborhoods. Debbie J. Goldman, former Research Director and Telecommunications Policy Director with the Communications Workers of America, discussed *Disconnected: Call Center Workers Fight for Good Jobs in the Digital Age*, illuminating the ways that technological change and managerial control shaped unionization. And Andrea Ringer (Tennessee State University) expanded our understanding of work and workers through *Circus World: Roustabouts, Animals, and the Work of Putting on the Big Show*, in which performers, human and non-human, experienced precarity more than fame as they toured in one of the most popular entertainments of the past. Nelson Lichtenstein (UC Santa Barbara) moderated as one of the series' editors. An exciting coda to this session came at the OAH Awards ceremony when Debbie Goldman received the David Montgomery Prize for the best book in Labor History!

Other LAWCHA sessions included "Care and Capitalism in the Twentieth Century: Unexpected Histories," chaired by Kirsten Swinth (Fordham University) with comments by Joan Flores-Villalobos (University of Southern California). The panel featured myself (UC Santa Barbara) on "Regulating Women's Labors: Between Family and Market," which considered the rise of part-time work as the post-WWII solution to balancing family labor and income earning in the US and through UN agencies; Deborah Dinner (Cornell University School of Law) on "Insuring Care in the Twentieth Century," which addressed the problem of insuring care work as a risk, hazard, or labor with value through looking at private-public benefit plans in the 20th century; and Cinnamon Williams (University of Florida) on "Home Is Where the Work Is: The Third World Women's Alliance, the Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers, and the Learned Labor of Homemaking," which documented how Black feminists sought to teach other Black women the skills of homemaking as a form of labor, rather than care, during the 1970s and 1980s, providing an alternative reading of Black women's domestic work. Unfortunately another of our solicited sessions was at the same time: "Understanding the Crisis in Higher Education: Views from the Perspectives of Budget, Debt, and Labor Activism in the U.S.," organized and chaired by Jennifer Mittelstadt (Rutgers University) and featuring Rachel Ida Buff (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), Ian Gavigan (Higher Ed Labor United and University of Pennsylvania), Elizabeth Shermer (Loyola University Chicago), and Asheesh Siddique (University of Massachusetts-Amherst). The panel offered new ways of understanding the crisis in colleges and universities, and ideas for how to resist through analysis of budgets, student debt, labor organizing, and corporate governance—and what to do to counter the growing attacks on higher education. We further added to the conference with a session chaired and organized by Seth Rockman (Brown University) on "Labor Movement Ideology and State Intervention in the Pre-Lochner Era." This panel looked at demand on the "state" by the emerging labor movement in the nineteenth-century. With commentary by Jeffrey Sklansky (University of Illinois at Chicago), Francis Russo (University of Pennsylvania) on "The Uncommon Jacksonian, The 'Female Tom Paine,' Frances Wright and the Ambiguities of Labor Reform, 1820-1840"; Sean Griffin (Cooper Union), "Fighting for Government Intervention and Transcending the Liberal State: Labor Reform before the Civil War"; and Isobel Plowright (Vasser College) on "The International Workingmen's Association and the Struggle for the Eight-Hour Day in the United States, 1864-1876."

Also Read "Business and Labor Historians: Friends till the End: A Report on BHC 2025"
By Chad Pearson and Michael Hillard

Find the report at Labor Online –
https://lawcha.org/2025/03/23/business-and-labor-historians-friends/

LAWCHA's 2025 Awards

LAWCHA is proud to announce these winners of its major awards and prizes, most of which will be conferred at the conference in Chicago.

THE ALICE KESSLER-HARRIS DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS AWARD for outstanding dissertation prospectus has been awarded to **Issay Matsumoto** a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at the University of Southern California for a prospectus entitled "Aloha, Incorporated: Trans-Pacific Capitalism and the Rise of Tourism in Hawai'i."

THE 2025 LAWCHA/LABOR RESEARCH GRANT FOR CONTINGENT and COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY and INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS (CCFIS) has been awarded to **Aaron Jesch** of Washington State University, Vancouver, for "Written on the Wobbly: Working-Class Tattoos and the Industrial Workers of the World."

THE HERBERT G. GUTMAN PRIZE FOR OUTSTANDING DISSERTATION has been awarded to **Eugene Charles Fanning**, "'Empire of the Everglades': Industrial Agriculture, Migrant Workers, and the Nature of the Modern Food System." Dr. Fanning completed the work at the University of Maryland under the direction of Julie Greene.

THE DAVID MONTGOMERY AWARD for the best book on a topic in American labor and working-class history was awarded to **Debbie J. Goldman** for *Disconnected: Call Center Workers Fight for Good Jobs in the Digital Age* (University of Illinois Press, 2024). Debbie received her award at the Organization of American Historians meeting, but will be recognized at the conference. She is the former research director and telecommunications policy director with the Communications Workers of America.

THE PHILIP TAFT LABOR HISTORY BOOK AWARD for outstanding book in U.S. labor history winner will be announced at the conference in Chicago.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO LABOR AND WORKING-CLASS HISTORY AWARD
At the closing banquet of the conference LAWCHA will award two revered figures in our field:
Thavolia Glymph, Peabody Family Distinguished Professor of History at Duke University and the 140th president of the American Historical Association, and **Michael Honey**, emeritus Fred and Dorothy Haley Professor of Humanities at the University of Washington, Tacoma.

LAWCHA

The Labor and Working-Class History Association

Conference Preview: Plenary Session Schedule

The theme of our 2025 conference is *Making Work Matter: Solidarity and Action Across Space and Time*. The theme will be elaborated over the course of three plenary sessions, one on each day of the conference. The first will use the history of our host city, Chicago, to explore shifting forms of solidarity and fragmentation, organization and action across time. The second will examine how history can help us both make sense of and respond to our present crisis. And the closing panel will look at what activists are doing in Chicago to respond to the demands of this moment. The plenaries are as follows.

Opening Plenary: "Solidarity & Work in Chicago: Past & Present"
Thursday, June 12, 5:15pm - 6:45pm
Max Palevsky Theater, Ida Noyes Hall, U. Chicago
This plenary will examine moments of solidarity and coalition-building among working-class people in our host city's past.

- Gordon Mantler, George Washington University
- Juan Mora-Torres, DePaul University
- Lilia Fernández, University of Illinois Chicago
- Crystal Moten, Obama Presidential Center, Moderator

Day Two Plenary: "Historians Respond to the Current Political Moment"
Friday, June 13, 4:45 - 6:15 pm
Max Palevsky Theater, Ida Noyes Hall
This plenary features scholars who will address how the past may help us think about and respond to the various crises we are facing in the current moment.

- Elizabeth Todd Breland, University of Illinois at Chicago
- Katie Batza, University Kansas
- Bethany Morton, Dartmouth College
- Emily E. LB. Twarog, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Closing Plenary: "Making Work Matter: Solidarity & Action across Space and Time"
Saturday June 14, 4:45pm - 6:15pm
Max Palevsky Theater, Ida Noyes Hall
Local activists will discuss the work they do and address what solidarity and action look like today in Chicago.

- Alonzo Waheed, Equity and Transformation
- Jimmy Soto, Illinois Prison Project
- Stanley Howard, Illinois Prison Project
- Karla Altmeyer, Healing to Action
- Juan Gonzalez, *Democracy Now!* & Great Cities Institute, University of Illinois Chicago, Moderator