

# LAWCHA

The Labor and Working-Class History Association



## NEWSLETTER WINTER 2026

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## President's Message

### Joseph A. McCartin

Georgetown University  
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As I write, there are many reasons to feel alarmed by developing events, for the past twelve months have been among the most shockingly eventful and tragic in U.S. history. Working people and the labor movement, whose history we study, and institutions of higher education, where many of us work, have experienced dramatic setbacks.

Immigrant workers have been targeted in a way not seen in the United States since the days of “Operation Wetback” more than 70 years ago. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have aggressively invaded and occupied immigrant communities, abducting people from job sites, schools, and even their homes and then deporting them. Unarmed, peaceful protestors who have attempted to stand with their vulnerable neighbors have been tear-gassed, zip-tied, and even shot and killed for allegedly resisting the orders of ICE agents.

Federal workers, whose rights to unionize and bargaining collectively were first recognized 64 years ago, thereby setting in motion a broad wave of unionization of state, county, and municipal workers across the country, were summarily stripped of their union rights by a president’s executive order in the largest single act of union-busting in American history.

Agencies set up to protect the rights of working people, such as the National Labor Relations Board and the Federal Labor Relations Authority, have been effectively decapitated, as board members were removed without cause in the midst of their Senate-confirmed terms of office and replaced with individuals determined to weaken those agencies. Hundreds of thousands of federal employees lost their jobs as civil service protections were simply overridden and employment decisions were outsourced to a nongovernmental entity called “DOGE,” led by one of the world’s richest men.

As was so often true in the past, Black workers, who constituted 19 percent of the federal workforce (compared with 14 percent in the overall workforce) when Donald Trump was sworn in one year ago, have suffered most from the war on federal workers. Some 36 percent of the workforce of the Department of Education was Black when Trump ordered its closure.

LGBTQIA people too have been targeted for rights-stripping. Transgender people have been banned from service in the military, references “gender” removed from federal policies, and specious investigations of “gender ideology” launched.

Nor have the institutions of higher education escaped this onslaught. Civil liberties and academic freedom have sharply eroded, as illustrated by the firing of our member Tom Alter by Texas State University over his exercises of his First Amendment rights. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiatives have been officially deemed as “reverse discrimination.” And universities have faced dramatic cuts to federal funding and barriers erected against their admission of foreign students, which have in turn triggered a sudden wave of austerity across higher ed.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court, which had already firmly established its status prior to 2025 as the most pro-employer and anti-worker court of the last century, has proven utterly ineffectual in either resisting the abuse of executive branch power or defending civil liberties.

**Newsletter Editors** Martha Guerrero Badillo, Jane Berger, Patrick Dixon, Michael Hillard, Colleen Woods

**Newsletter Layout** Alexander Bowen

**Cover Photo** LAWCHA member Tom Alter addresses a rally protesting his firing by the Texas State University. Photo courtesy of the Texas State Employees Union.

What's more, those who now control the federal government are attempting to rewrite – and to literally whitewash – U.S. history. They are seeking to erase from the American narrative precisely those people, groups, and movements whose stories we and our mentors worked hard over the past six decades to recover and incorporate into that narrative. That benighted crusade will likely reach a crescendo in coming months as the nation's semiquincentennial approaches.

Despite these ample causes for alarm, there is also good reason to believe that the year ahead will see these massive assaults blunted and forced into retreat. The spread of No Kings marches, ICE protests, student activism and more underline the unpopularity of the agenda that has been imposed on the United States over the past twelve months.

Amidst this coalescing opposition, LAWCHA and its members are playing vital roles in meeting this moment. Here are a few of the things to take note of:

- This spring, **Labor Spring**, a rolling national teach-in that LAWCHA helped launch in 2023, will enter its fourth year. Labor Spring has seen students, faculty, community members, workers, and unions come together on or adjacent to more than 100 campuses around the country to hold educational events, speakers, and rallies in support of workers' rights. This year a focus of those events will be the defense of democracy and immigrant rights. To find out more go to this link: <https://lwp.georgetown.edu/labor-spring>
- In coming months LAWCHA will be partnering with multiple organizations, including the AAUP and the Zinn Education Project, and regional labor history societies to push back against the rewriting of history through a project called **Peoples250**. This project will use short-form video on platforms like Tik-Tok to create a popular history counter-narrative to the sanitized history being promoted as part of the official semi-quincentennial celebration. To find out how you, your students, union members, and the general public can participate, email: [peopleshistory250@gmail.com](mailto:peopleshistory250@gmail.com)
- Our journal, **LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History**, having just won an award from Council of Editors of Learned Journals for its exciting re-design, is poised to initiate new endeavors that will broaden its reach, including a podcast. Stay tuned for details.
- LAWCHA is prepared to welcome a **new cohort of leaders**. In March, one of our most eminent founding members, Eileen Boris, will take up the LAWCHA presidency; the battle-tested scholar-teacher-activist Paul Ortiz will assume the office of vice president, working with Eileen and then following her into the presidency in 2028; and one of our most experienced and talented organizers, Emily Labarbera-Twarog, will replace the outgoing Erik Gellman as LAWCHA's secretary. At the same time, we have an incredibly strong slate of eight candidates running for our five open board seats. (For details, see article on p. 20 of this newsletter.) LAWCHA's future is clearly in good hands.

As we look ahead toward our imminent leadership transition, I would like to thank outgoing board members Natanya Duncan, Crystal M. Moten, David "Mac" Marquis, Verónica Martinez-Matsuda, and Samir Sonti for their loyal service to this organization. And I'd like to thank outgoing officers, immediate past president Cindy Hahamovitch and secretary Erik Gellman for the time they have invested in LAWCHA during their long terms as officers. It's been a privilege to serve alongside these folks as LAWCHA's president during these past two tumultuous years. I hope to see many of you at our membership meeting at the OAH in Philadelphia on April 17. In the meantime, I wish you all well in your teaching, scholarship, and activism in service to our shared ideals.

Together,  
Joe McCartin

# Letter from the Editors

We present this issue at a difficult moment. As President Joe McCartin ably summarizes, we are part of a broad constellation of immigrants, citizens, workers, communities of color, LGBTQIA people, students and academic practitioners, and members of civil society united in resisting an unrelenting assault mounted by an unholy alliance between an authoritarian president and right-wing oligarchs. And as we go to print, we're inspired by the exceptionally organized and effective resistance to Minneapolis' military occupation, which has sadly served up new martyrs whose names we know – Renee Good and Alex Pretti. We are equally inspired by our sibling Tom Alter's resistance to his unjust firing.

Even at such a dark moment, we can take heart in the many ways we continue to do the work of resistance and struggle. To that end, we have three important features. Tom Alter updates his on ongoing effort to, as he puts it, "keep the pressure on Texas State and continue the fight for democratic rights." The Cornell Graduate Cornell Graduate Students United (UE Local 300) depicts its principled struggle against the Trump administration's attack on immigrant students, academic freedom, and first amendment rights to protest for right as well as Cornell leadership's complicity in this attack. And Karsonya "Kaye" Whitehead, president of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, reports on the current assault on Black history and efforts to defend it and contest that assault. In addition, Karen Miller unpacks the political economy, class, gender and racial contradictions of the community college experienced by its students, workers, and faculty.

LAWCHA members are reminded that elections for officers and Board members are currently underway, with a voting deadline of February 9; please see the accompanying item with candidate biographies. This issue also includes reports and updates on the 2025 Chicago Meeting; the forthcoming OAH (2026) and 2027 LAWCHA meetings; *LABOR's* receipt of a prestigious award; the People's 250 project; and 2026 Labor Spring.

We again thank Alexander Bowen for doing the layout for this issue.

The Editors,

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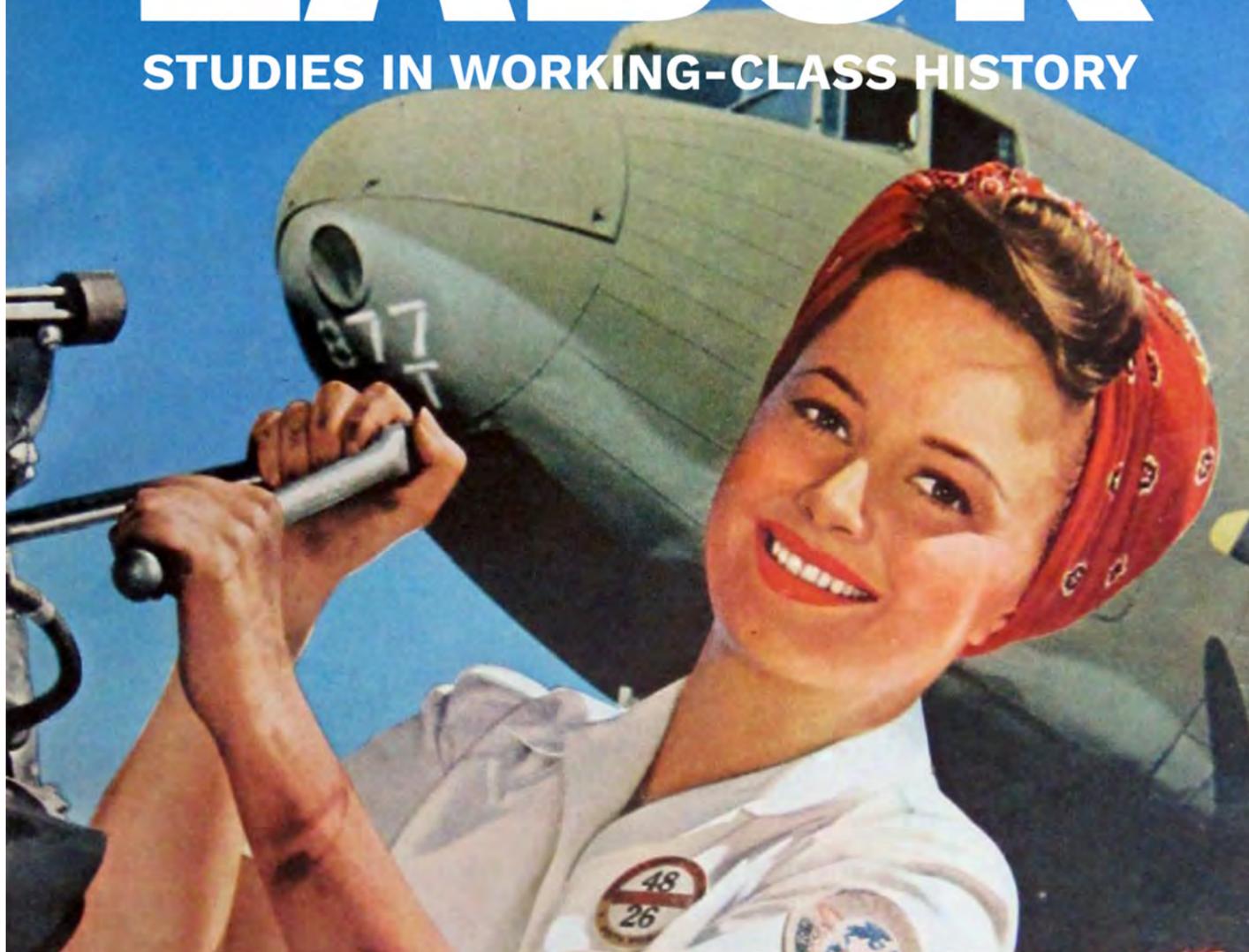
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Coming Spring 2026

# LABOR

STUDIES IN WORKING-CLASS HISTORY



Jennifer Frost and Kathy Feeley

### “Of Inestimable Value to All of Us”

Olivia de Havilland, the Studio Contract, and the Screen Actors Guild, 1943–1945

OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND  
BY PAUL HESSE

Gavin Moulton

### Saints and Steelworkers

Building a Catholic Worker Church in a Depression Mill Town, 1935–1939

Silvana A. Palermo

### Working-Class Fatherhood

Masculinity, Railroad Work, and the Social Question in Argentina’s Early Twentieth-Century Illustrated Magazines

### UP FOR DEBATE

### What Universities Can Be

Strategizing amid the Crisis in Higher Education  
Jessie Wilkerson, Davarian Baldwin, Karma R. Chávez, Eric Fure-Slocum, Claire Goldstone, Anne Langendorfer, Jennifer Mittelstadt, Donna Murch and Annelise Orleck

# Update on My Defense Campaign

Tom Alter

Below is a statement we invited from our LAWCHA sibling, Tom Alter, undating us on the campaign to overturn his unjust firing from Texas State University. We urge you to read Tom’s account and support his cause at [defendtomalter.org](http://defendtomalter.org).



The fight for free speech, democratic rights, and academic freedom against an ever-growing fascist current continues through my defense case. This is despite the Texas State University System Boards of Regents on November 20, 2025, in a unanimous decision upholding Texas State President Kelly Damphousse’s decision to fire me without due process from my tenured associate professor of history position. The Board’s decision came without any public debate, faculty input, discussion, presentation of evidence, or hearing. This decision was expected as all of the regents were appointed by Texas Governor Greg Abbott. Governor Abbott has publicly declared he is “targeting” professors over “leftist ideologies.” His definition of “leftist ideologies” ranges from socialists to centrist Democrats.

Damphousse fired me due to a presentation I gave during an online socialism conference. I made this presentation on my own time, in my personal capacity, online from my home office on a Sunday morning. In none of the conference promotional material was I identified as a Texas State employee and in introducing myself at the beginning of my presentation I did so as a member of the Texas State Employees Union (TSEU) which represents employees of the state of Texas and as a member of Socialist Horizon. Unknown to conference attendees, a self-described fascist recorded my talk for her YouTube channel. Besides recording my conference presentation, she also recorded the break period in-between conference sessions. During the break period a conference participant asked me what it is like working at Texas State. Believing the conference was not being recorded and definitely not during the break period, I answered. This fascist edited the break period conversation and made it look like it was part of my conference presentation. She then posted the doctored version on social media and began a campaign the next day for my firing claiming that in my capacity as a Texas State professor I was calling for the overthrow of the US government. On the surface this is all ludicrous. Using my Constitutional protected free speech, I asked a rhetorical question about overthrowing the government and criticized it in the same vein as many have before. Yet this fascist found an eager and willing audience in the form of Texas State President Damphousse.

While Damphousse's violation of tenure and due process was swift, so too was the response of Texas State students and supporters of democratic rights to my illegal termination. I was fired on a Wednesday night and the next morning Texas State students were out protesting my firing and did so for five school days straight, with other actions ongoing. My union, the TSEU, had an organizer at my home the next day, the Texas American Association of University Professors (AAUP) provided me with a lawyer, and networks of democratic rights activists went into action across the world. Sparked by LAWCHA, academics began networking as well putting out statements and calls for financial support. A Committee to Defend Tom Alter was formed as a non-partisan committee to defend free speech. Rallies held in San Marcos and Austin featured speakers from the Communication Workers of America, the Texas AFL-CIO, Texas AAUP-AFT, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Young Democratic Socialists of America, and elected officials at the local, county, and state levels, reflecting widespread community support. In response to the campaign against my illegal firing union membership at Texas State in both the AAUP and TSEU chapters has more than doubled.

With representation from the Texas AAUP, I filed a lawsuit against Damphousse and Texas State, charging them with violating my Constitutional rights to free speech, right to assemble and due process, as well as violating Texas State policy and state law. A District Judge ordered my reinstatement and for Texas State to hold a due process hearing. The hearing Texas State held could hardly be called due process. It consisted of a meeting between me, Damphousse, the Provost and our respective lawyers. This is like having a hearing where the judge and prosecutor are one and the same. As expected, Damphousse upheld his earlier firing of me.

My second firing resulted in more protests from students and community members. A national email campaign directed at the Texas State Board of Regents demanded that I be reinstated. This effort sparked six thousand emails to Board of Regents members, with LAWCHA members playing a large role in promoting the campaign. While the email campaign once again drew national attention to the case, Abbott's appointees upheld Damphousse's gross violations of the Constitution and academic freedom.

My firing was not an isolated incident on campus. Texas State has subsequently forced out and fired additional students, faculty and staff for opposing racism and sexism, while defending the racism and sexism of Turning Point USA.

This fight is far from over. My lawsuit is ongoing and we look forward to our day in court in the months ahead. During this period of growing authoritarianism, I was fired for being a unionist and a socialist. What did I say in my talk? I called for defending transgender people, opposing ICE, and for people to join the picket lines of hotel workers in Houston who were then on strike against Hilton. These are popular actions and hence why far-right politicians and their puppets in university administrations have turned to more authoritarian and undemocratic measures. The struggle for transgender rights continues to grow, communities across the US are rising up against ICE, the Houston hotel workers won their strike, and the nurses' strike in New York City is widely supported.

To keep the pressure on Texas State and continue the fight for democratic rights everywhere, in February I am embarking on nationwide speaking tour. On this tour I am linking up with other academics under fire for their Palestinian activism, local anti-ICE activists, and trade unionists, with many of the stops supported by unions. The tour kicks off with ten days in California, and continues in Pittsburgh, Ohio and Chicago, with more events in the works. To follow the tour and make financial contributions to keep me and my family going visit [www.defendtomalter.org](http://www.defendtomalter.org). Through love and solidarity we will win.

## Amid Crackdown on Democracy and Academic Freedom, Graduate Workers' Unions Fight Back



*This essay is authored by Cornell Graduate Students United, UE Local 300's Executive Board*

In September 2025, the National Right-to-Work Foundation – a [far-right, billionaire-funded, segregationist, anti-labor](#) organization – [testified](#) against CGSU-UE (Cornell Graduate Students United, UE Local 300), the union representing over 3,000 graduate teaching and research assistants at Cornell University, in front of Congress. Using our fight against unjust suspensions of workers who attended pro-Palestine protests, they charged our union with antisemitism and argued that graduate workers should not have [bargaining rights](#). Weeks later, the Senate [launched](#) an investigation into Stanford University and Stanford's graduate workers' union, SGWU-UE, citing SGWU-UE's support for abortion and trans healthcare rights as evidence that Stanford grads' dues fund "radical left ideology." We see these attacks for what they are: attempts to remove all obstacles in the way of the far right's authoritarian anti-worker agenda.

Since Trump's inauguration, the far right's efforts to reshape academia in its image have been relentless. They began with dramatic federal funding cuts, resulting in [many universities capitulating](#) to outrageous conditions for restored funding. They've included crackdowns on academic freedom that led to students and workers across the country, including at Cornell, being [abducted, detained, or deported](#) – or else [self-deporting](#) to avoid detention. They have also taken the form of attacks on unions, which represent the interests of the workers who make our universities run. Amid these attacks on higher education, our universities faced a choice. Would they defend higher education as a cornerstone of democratic society; protect the research integrity of our institutions; and protect the rights of vulnerable students and workers? Or would they instead betray their values of academic freedom and inclusiveness and readily submit to the Trump administration's authoritarian agenda?

Faced with this choice, few university administrators thus far have stood up to the Trump administration's attacks. On the contrary, many have cut destructive deals with the federal government that have undermined our institutions' research integrity and jeopardized the rights and safety of vulnerable students and workers. Our own institution, Cornell University, made a deal with the Trump administration in November 2025. One might assume that Cornell agreed to the deal because of its financial challenges; in fact, Cornell [announced mass layoffs and austerity measures](#) earlier that year. Yet after the deal was announced, Cornell's President, Michael Kotlikoff, stated: "we did not agree to this settlement because of our financial issues and the settlement itself does not resolve those financial issues." This leads us to conclude that the Cornell administration signed this deal because they agree with the federal administration's far-right agenda. The deal guarantees the federal administration unrestricted oversight to everything that happens at Cornell. This means everything, from graduate workers' research topics to conversations with our coworkers, can now be scrutinized and evaluated for its compliance with Trump's agenda. By signing the deal with Trump, Cornell signed a blank check for continued extortion from the federal government. We cannot maintain our independence while surrendering to the federal government's blackmail.

In making the deal, the Cornell administration was faced with a choice, and it chose to side with the Trump administration. Universities across the country, [like MIT](#), have rejected Trump's deals. Meanwhile, Cornell has demonstrated that they are willing to pay and continue to support the far-right agenda, abandoning both vital research topics and minority grads in the process. In fact, the Trump administration lawyer who signed the deal has a history of [denying racism](#), [hateful speech against the LGBT community \(especially the trans community\)](#), and [frivolous lawsuits against COVID precautions](#). Cornell has now officially "affirm[ed] its commitment" to complying with a [document](#) that denies the existence of and mandates discrimination against trans people and bans recognizing the achievements of people of color in academia.

It is no coincidence that higher education unions have been one of the Trump administration's main targets: we are a powerful obstacle against its authoritarian agenda. Higher education unions now [represent](#) the fastest-growing sector of organized labor in the country, and we have leveraged our union power to repeatedly call on university administrators to resist the federal government's extortion tactics. Our own union formed in November 2023, following a landslide election in which 96% of graduate workers at Cornell voted in favor of unionizing. As organizations representing the interests of the people who make our institutions thrive, we have a responsibility to hold university administrators – who are beholden to [billionaire donors](#) and trustees – accountable for defending the values of democracy and academic freedom.

As institutions of higher education have been faced with the choice between capitulating to authoritarianism or fighting back, CGSU-UE and higher education unions across the country have consistently called on our institutions to side with their workers and stand in solidarity with workers around the world, speaking up about the most pressing issues of our lifetime. Earlier this year, UE's Higher Education Conference Board – a coalition representing all graduate worker unions affiliated with UE (the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America) – called on university administrators to stand up to the federal government through the [Mutual Academic Defense Compact](#). Later, UE locals [organized a campaign](#) directed to DHS (Department of Homeland Security) in support of non-citizen students and workers. Following Trump's announcement in October 2025 asking universities to sign the "[Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education](#)," we [acted again](#) to demand firm actions from our university administrators to reject the deal. Following the actions of higher education unions in the US, our union approved via referendum a [statement](#) in solidarity with the Palestinian Liberation Struggle. With this statement, we are committing to concrete actions that stop our complicity with the genocide of the Palestinian people.

[We keep hearing](#) that academic institutions are facing unprecedented challenges, but threats to democracy and attacks on the rights of the most vulnerable populations are not the exception in history; they are the rule. We represent the collective power of Cornell graduate workers, and that is why the far right is targeting us; because CGSU-UE is committed to being the voice speaking out on behalf of the integrity of higher education. Authoritarian actions only reflect the size of their fears. Our track record speaks for itself: we are the ones protecting higher education, with actions.

# Community Colleges: Sites of Contradiction?

**Karen R. Miller**

*Professor of History, LaGuardia Community College and CUNY Graduate Center*

More than once, I have been invited to reflect on the distinctiveness of community colleges and community college teaching. I always find this provocation interesting because of what I imagine is embedded inside of it: a sense that the experience that I share with my students is shaped more than anything else by the community collegeness of it. "Community college" here is shorthand for an institution that sits on the lowest rung of prestige on the academic totem pole, something that its faculty, students, and administrators all know. It is chronically underfunded, it educates students who are struggling financially and academically, it employs a small number of full-time faculty who are burdened with heavy teaching loads--often five or more classes per term--and have little or no access to funding for research or conference travel, and its classes are mostly taught by underpaid adjuncts who are paid piece rates for classes and receive zero benefits. Of course, community colleges are far more diverse than all of this. I, for example, teach at an institution that is part of a far larger university, the City University of New York, and because of this have a lower teaching load than most, at four classes per term, and access to some research support. Some full-time community college faculty at CUNY even teach in masters and PhD programs. In addition, many, if not a majority of BA-granting institutions, including small liberal arts colleges and publicly funded universities, face the same challenges that are invoked by the label "community college."

Rather than positioning community colleges, in general, as distinctive places, it is useful to focus in tightly on the specific material conditions that I face at a CUNY community college as a lens for examining the shape of the institutions and classrooms that offer lower-cost higher education to mostly working-class and poor students of color in New York City. This short essay considers these materialities, starting from what brought me to LaGuardia and thinking through where CUNY community colleges came from, a very local story with broader implications for understanding the political economy of community colleges.

I went to graduate school at the University of Michigan and got my degree in 2003. I got a postdoc in Oregon but couldn't face the idea of spending two years teaching a full load of global history and then not knowing what would

happen next. Instead, I moved to New York, picked up some adjuncting through a friend, and got a job as a union organizer. I thought I'd stay on the job market a little longer but wanted to be somewhere I would want to live if it all came to naught.

I was working full time and teaching two three-hour survey classes on Saturdays. I spent my days organizing adjuncts at Pace University, reading the things I had assigned as I waited for faculty to come out of their classrooms, and writing lectures at night. Teaching at Hunter College was different from Michigan. My lefty politics had had a mostly friendly reception in Ann Arbor. While I did encounter a handful of students at Michigan who understood that they needed to align themselves with Carnegie at Homestead because he represented their class interests, they were in the minority. Most sided with the locked-out workers. Many because they self-consciously aligned themselves with labor, and some because their sentimentality and the foreignness of the 1890s meant that they could not understand the contemporary implications of their position. At Hunter, a far more affordable institution, I met almost no conservatives. Students in my classes at Michigan wrote grammatically correct sentences, some of which were smart, others of which were vapid. Hunter students as a whole had more sentence-level errors. Some of their papers were smart, and some were vapid. Michigan students were majority white. Students of color were the majority at Hunter. Michigan students, as a group, had far, far more access to wealth. At Michigan, when I started with 25 students, 25 students gave me papers at the end of the term. Maybe one or two got extensions. I may have even handed out an incomplete. At Hunter, a majority of students came from low-income households. My classes each had 55 students, and about 7 didn't finish the term.

The next semester, I kept my Hunter gig, picked up a class at Bronx Community College (BCC), and got an organizing job with the Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents faculty at CUNY. At BCC I taught World History. There was a required textbook, which I didn't love. And a set of already-designed assignments and tests I had to use. This time I started out with 20 students. A third disappeared by the end of the term. Clearly, these numbers are an index of access to a range of forms of security.

I ended up getting a full-time, tenure track job at LaGuardia Community College that fall and still, twenty-two years later cannot believe my luck. What made me competitive, I found out later, was that I had taught at BCC. My new colleagues were convinced that only people who had experience teaching at community colleges should be considered for a full-time job. This was an advantage for me, but it is a misplaced impulse and one that I do not share. I had gotten the job at Bronx Community College somewhat randomly; it did not make me a better or worse professor. Community college classrooms, like all classrooms, have students with a broad mix of prior knowledge, interest, and training in reading and writing. I'm a big fan of what education scholars are calling "universal design," an approach to teaching that respects this diversity and works to engage different kinds of students both simultaneously and consecutively. Applicants for faculty positions who come to us with community college teaching experience are products of their historical and geographical circumstances; they are not necessarily better teachers or better scholars.

I started at LaGuardia in the fall of 2004, and it was exhausting. I had a bonkers schedule of four classes: three that met on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, starting at 8 am, and an evening class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I had been teaching three classes with a full-time job the previous term and had 130 students. Now it was four classes, no additional job, and about 100 students. But there was something so different about being in the classroom now that it was my full-time job. I was surprised that my relationship to the institution shifted my relationship to teaching so much. Suddenly, things that had been low stakes were high stakes: that student who loved to roll her eyes at me was a different kind of problem.

LaGuardia is different than BCC. It has far fewer African American and African-descended students, and a far larger Latino population.<sup>1</sup> I now have control over my syllabi and can do whatever I want in my classes. The building I taught in was in better shape than the one at BCC and by 2009, my department moved into a fully renovated floor of a repurposed warehouse a few blocks down from where I was initially (keep this in mind).

These institutions' histories are interlocked, not just because they are both part of CUNY, but because they both sit inside of New York City. And New York is a city that is forever managing crises, working to contain dissent, and being restructured by a powerful capital class and a city bureaucracy friendly to elite interests.<sup>2</sup> One of things that powered Zohran Mamdani's recent mayoral victory was how explicitly he talked about these dynamics, even if it remains to be seen whether he can break through the entrenched power system that characterizes all places, New York City among them. While each place is the product of a different era of city-funded urban management, their shared histories can help us understand how CUNY community

colleges operate as institutions both within and outside of their walls.

Bronx Community College was founded in 1957, the same year that the Soviets sent Sputnik into space and US elites suffered a collective anxiety attack about the nation's lack of scientific knowledge. In a richly symbolic move, a couple of years later, it held its first classes in the former Bronx Science High School, which was moving to its own brand-new building. Its liberal promoters cast BCC as an opportunity for Bronx residents who were not already being served by Hunter College's northern campus (now Lehman) to benefit from the massive postwar expansion of higher education.<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, these two-year institutions were being built as New York elites were pushing for a transition from a city organized around manufacturing, dominated by the needs of industrial capital, to one that would come to be organized around what Robert Fitch has called FIRE (Finance, Industry, and Real Estate). While these plans were hatched as early as the 1920s, African American and Puerto Rican migration soared after WWII, demonstrating the continuing need for workers in a still-industrial postwar city that was, at the same time, being abandoned by its white residents as a result of a massively federally subsidized wave of white suburbanization.<sup>4</sup>

New York University, meanwhile, had built what is now the campus of Bronx Community College starting in 1894 as a bucolic site for many of its undergraduate programs, chasing its targeted students as they moved uptown. Eighty years later, in 1973, NYU was facing bankruptcy as much of that well-heeled white population had stepped into the suburbs. White flight undermined the institution's ability to attract students to the Bronx. But NYU was an anchor of New York City's newly powerful FIRE sector, a symbol of its erudite aspirations, and a partner in the kind of real estate development that pro-growth capitalists favored. Thus, as NYU moved its Bronx-based undergraduate programs back downtown, the city bought out its uptown campus in a classic case of public bailouts of poorly timed investments.<sup>5</sup>

And what to do with this surplus land in the Bronx? The borough had, since the 1950s, become home to populations that were themselves becoming increasingly surplus. While in 1953, the city had 1.1 million industrial jobs, by 1973, that number was down to 668,000. And the best paying of those jobs had already left. It wasn't just land in the Bronx that had been rendered surplus.<sup>6</sup> Working-class migrants of color were left with declining incomes and property values, landlords eager to abandon them, and a city and federal government that was beginning to aggressively contract its administrative capacity vis-a-vis support for social reproduction.

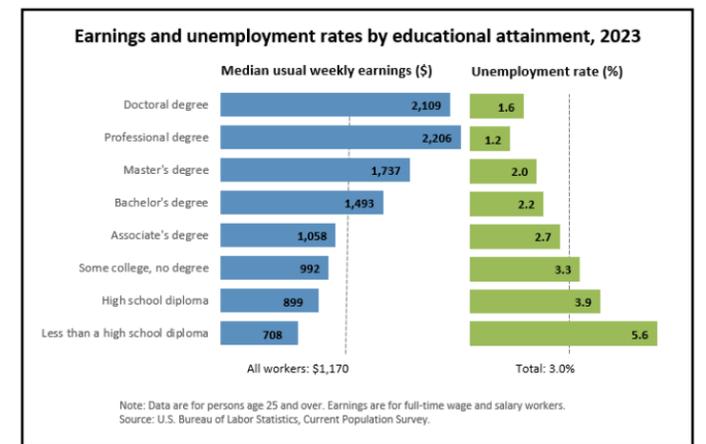
Geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore has shown that this timing coincides with the rise of mass incarceration, which

she identifies as a state strategy for managing a series of capitalist crises—those that produced surplus land and workers that could then be organized by public institutions whose capacity had grown substantially over the previous decades, but which had been rendered available for other projects due to cuts to social spending.<sup>7</sup> This was also the era of urban rebellions.

This was also a time when community college growth was exploding. By 1963, CUNY had opened three more community college campuses in Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, Queensborough Community College, Kingsborough Community College, and the Borough of Manhattan Community College. In 1968, in response to a strong Latino social movement, the University opened Hostos Community College, a bilingual campus in the Bronx. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1965, community colleges had fewer than 1 million students nationally. By 1970, there were 2.2 million and in 1980 4.3 million. From the Great Depression into the 1950s, community colleges had mainly focused on job training, with the idea that skilled jobs—those that required "training" rather than a liberal arts education—were crucial for economic expansion. By the mid 1960s, however, that sensibility had begun to shift. By then, university administrators were offering liberal arts at community colleges, angling to educate working-class students for the emerging "knowledge economy."<sup>8</sup>

Community colleges are sites of contradiction. They promise upward mobility in a country where economic hierarchies are intense and have ossified since the early 1970s. Poverty remains a symptom of racial capitalism, and everyone simply cannot be educated out of it until we vanquish capitalism. Community colleges, Alex Trillo shows in an ethnography of LaGuardia, produce educational and internship opportunities that can help plug students into jobs, but often at the lower end of that contemporary knowledge economy.<sup>9</sup>

Half of LaGuardia Community College sits in a set of buildings that are the result of a similar kind of city bailout as we saw in the Bronx. Originally founded in 1970, LaGuardia was the last community college to be opened during the era of the expansion of higher ed. (Guttman, which was founded in 2012 is the most recent CUNY community college to be opened). In the late 1980s, Lazard Realty, an arm of the investment bank where Felix Rohatyn was a partner, developed several buildings alongside LaGuardia, hoping that the city's downtown would start bleeding into Western Queens. Rohatyn was a key architect of New York City's 1975 restructuring after Gerald Ford refused to bail the city out of bankruptcy. The New York Post famously and succinctly summarized this decision, "Ford to City, Drop Dead." It was Rohatyn who insisted that CUNY had to end free tuition, not so much because it would save money, Doug Henwood explains, "but for



its shock value." While Long Island City development did eventually come in the late 2010s, back in 1987, the stock market had crashed, and Lazard Realty's hopes were dashed.<sup>10</sup> The city came in to rescue the firm and LaGuardia expanded into two new buildings, one of which is home to my office.

Ultimately, what has been different about all of my teaching experiences were the resources that my students and I have had access to. And by resources, I mean a broad array of things like privilege, support, time, respect, security, stability, safety nets, funding, esteem, social approbation, a debt-free life, more than a living wage, a functional subway system... Using our tools as historians to understand the contradictions that shape our experiences in the classroom from the outside in should be all of our responsibilities.

<sup>1</sup> LaGuardia Community College Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, *LaGuardia Community College The City University of New York 2025 Institutional Profile* (August 2025), <https://www.laguardia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/institutional-profile-2025.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Stein, *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State* (Verso, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> "How the College Started," *Bronx Community College, CUNY Website*, accessed January 26, 2026, <https://www.bcc.cuny.edu/about-bcc/history-architecture/>.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (Verso, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> "Closing a Campus," *The College on a Hill: A History of New York University's Bronx Campus as Told through Its Architecture*, accessed January 26, 2026, <https://www.nyu-universityheights.com/legacy-2/>.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Hudson, "Rate of Job Loss Fell Here in '73," *New York Times*, December 20, 1973.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Henry T. Kasper, "The Changing Role of Community College," *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, Winter 2002-2003.

<sup>9</sup> Alex Trillo, "Somewhere Between Wall Street and El Barrio: Community College as a Second Chance for Second-Generation Latino Students," in *Becoming New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the New Second Generation: Ethnographies of the New Second Generation*, ed. Philip Kasnitz et al. (Russell Sage Foundation, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Doug Henwood, "Explaining What Goes on in the World: In Memory of Bob Fitch," *LBO News from Doug Henwood*, May 12, 2012, <https://lbo-news.com/2012/05/22/explaining-what-exists-in-memory-of-bob-fitch/>.

# An Interview with Kaye Wise Whitehead



*A LAWCHA interview with the President of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History from December 8, 2025*

**DR. JANE BERGER:** You hosted an event with Color of Change that highlighted some of the efforts your organization is making to defend Black history in this moment of attack. In what ways are the study and public commemoration of Black history vulnerable?

**DR. KAYE WISE WHITEHEAD:** As the president of ASALH, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Carter G. Woodson's organization, our mission is to preserve, promote, and protect Black history. Dr. Carter G. Woodson and his colleagues launched ASALH when we were at the nadir of Black history in 1915. It was a time of extreme overt racism; Jim Crow, lynchings, and the rise and solidification of the mass industrial prison complex. It was during that moment, at the Chicago State Fair on September 9, 1915 that Dr. Woodson along with Jesse E. Moorland, George Cleveland Hall, James E. Stamps, and William B. Hartgrove decided to found the Association for the Study of African American History & Life (ASALH) to document the experiences, moments, and legacy of Black people in America. Dr. Woodson was concerned that Black history was not being effectively taught as a part of the American historical narrative. A few years later, in 1926, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the son of formerly enslaved parents and the second Black man to get a PhD from Harvard University, decided to set a week aside that would encourage Black people, particularly Black people from the working class who were not connected to universities, to engage in learning our history. He chose a week in February because Black households already celebrated two dates in February: the chosen birthday of Frederick Douglass and the birthday of Abraham Lincoln. Negro History Week was set aside for Black adults to teach Black children about the historical contributions that Black people had made to the American historical narrative. ASALH has continued to do Woodson's work since 1926. It is important to note that over time Negro History Week evolved into Black History Week and began to extend to a month-long celebration.

In 1976, during the Bicentennial year, Black leaders worked with President Gerald Ford for the release of the first official White House Proclamation centering and celebrating Black History Month. It promotes the teaching of Black History in every environment and is taught so that people, whether they have multiple degrees or none, can understand our history.

With that historical scope in mind, we are at a very challenging time in the American historical narrative. I know that there are arguments that people make that we have been here before. I make that argument, but I do add some additional information. Although the ways in which all these things have coalesced at this moment is a stark reminder that although there is nothing new under the sun, it is new for all of these attacks to be happening at the same time. We have seen an intentionality around the erasure of Black history over the last five years. I'm speaking specifically about the book banning campaign that was picked up by the Moms for Liberty, and was pushed forward by individual white women writing letters and protesting to get books written by and about people of color removed from the school libraries and history and English curricula. It has been happening for about five years and over 10,000 books have been banned. But it doesn't stop there. It never stops with book banning. The next step was banning diversity, equity, and inclusion. Not just federal programs but going after universities and looking to withhold federal funding if they talk, teach, focus on, or lift up the racial notions that underscore who we are as a nation. The third step came from the White House; the banning of words you couldn't use in federal documents like Black, woman, diversity, and racism. They were banning language. But we knew it wasn't going to stop there. The next step was the work that the president did to review museums and remove any parts that he believed made people feel uncomfortable. History is supposed to challenge you. History is not beautiful; it's ugly and bloody. If you only want the good parts, you're not going to have anything. America is a nation built on violence and conflict and strife. In the last couple of days, they have sought to take away free access to the parks on MLK Day and Juneteenth and replace them with Flag Day, which is coincidentally the president's birthday. It lets us know that there is an intentional erasure that's happening. Black history is under attack, and it is not enough to say that you believe that Black history is American history. You've got to learn the history, go back to what Carter G. Woodson said, claim every space as a Freedom School, and teach Black history in every space you reside.

**DR. JANE BERGER:** Why do you think this attack is happening?

**DR. KAYE WISE WHITEHEAD:** I think that future historians are going to write dissertations and million-dollar books about what happened during this time in history. People are going to be talking about this more than any other period because you have all these factors coming together with this monumental shift in the American democratic narrative. White supremacy has been a silent monster growing since before legalized slavery. That is something people can dispute. They would argue White supremacy rose at the end of slavery because people were upset that those who were formerly enslaved were legally freed. Well, it wasn't about citizenship, because we didn't have our citizenship until 1868 after the ratification of the 13th and 14th Amendments. It was about the essential question of who does America belong to. Black folks went to bed enslaved on December 5, 1864, woke up legally free with no money, property, clothes, or food. You started in the ground and worked every day for the same plantation owner, except you were paid laborers who never received any money. This is capitalism and in order to understand racialized oppression and the mass-mobilized movement to dehumanize Black people, you must learn the truth about America's history. There is no way that you could either enslave people, rape, beat, and sell them, separate families, and murder babies if you didn't see them as less than human. It takes time to dehumanize and see bodies as property that you can do with what you want, when you want, and how you want. You have to believe that White folks are superior, and Black folks are inferior, so if I rape my property, I don't have to answer for it because it's my property. If I kill my property, I don't have to answer for it, because it's my property. I own body and soul and spirit. That's where the roots of it lie in this country. The first generation had enslaved people,



Former LAWCHA president Will Jones and incoming LAWCHA president Eileen Boris with former LAWCHA president Joe William Trotter at the 2025 ASALH conference which honored Trotter's scholarly work and legacy.

but the brutality started with that second generation, and it kept getting more brutal with every generation until we got to a point where we were seen as inferior property. Three-fifths of a man. You can change the law, policies, practices, and procedures, but hearts and minds have never been dealt with. To think that it's the exact same discussion in 2025 that we have been having and fighting against for years. It's just further proof that they needed to tear down everything when slavery ended. The entire system needed to be rebuilt, like Germany after the fall of Hitler. Nobody went to jail for slavery. In fact, they pardoned members of the Confederate States of America. There was never any reckoning or real accountability, so those beliefs around Black folks carried over into how police officers treat people in the Black community, the lack of reparations, this belief that our children are inferior so therefore the schools can be inferior, and the lies that were being told to Black people about who they are. Dr. Carter G. Woodson talked about this in *The Miseducation of the Negro*; that you are intentionally miseducating Black children because you want them to see themselves as inferior and not worthy of conversation. That's what's happening now. The MAGA movement has always been riding underneath the surface. With the 2024 election all of those ugly conversations that were had at home are now public. You don't have to be ashamed, you can say what you want. You're seeing the exact result of that. Instead of moving forward we are reverting back to some of the base ideologies that frame this country around racism, othering, and this notion of white superiority. If it means we have to cut everyone out, then we have to fire Black people who sit in some of the highest offices because in our eyes, they were never qualified anyway. We must go after Black women who are directors, judges, and justices. The only way that we can advance this kind of White male superior narrative is to tear down everyone who was in a position and argue that they are all inferior. I'm going to replace the head of the Department of Defense, who's not even half as qualified as the person we fired, but that person was Black, so they probably weren't qualified anyway. And the new person is White, which means they're overqualified, even if the record doesn't speak to that.

**DR. JANE BERGER:** How do you think this is playing out in the K-12 context?

**DR. KAYE WISE WHITEHEAD:** I think there are at least three places where we must take a stand. One of them is in the Bible Belt churches and concerns the ways in which they aren't trying to live up to laws and policies or to God's Word. The belief that God has given you the right to enact laws against a woman's body. If it is God that has given you the right to remove things from children, you don't think that they should read about Black people because that's detrimental, and it makes you feel bad. The impact and power of the church through the Bible Belt cannot be discounted.

A second contentious space where we must take our stand is the voting booth. That's what's happening with redrawing the district lines, the attacks on the Voting Rights Act, Section 3, and the conversation around birthright citizenship. Slavery ended and Black men began to exercise their right to vote, not in 1865, but in 1868 when they received their full citizenship. Black men, as only men could vote at that time, began to go to the polls. Over 600 Black men were elected throughout the South for national and local positions. I'm thinking about Hiram Rhodes Revels, and Blanche K. Bruce, the first Black men elected to the U.S. Senate. They were congressmen, mayors, sheriffs, city councilmen, and school board members. Black men, under what I jokingly call wedding band power, were probably told by their wives to vote for the whole family. So, how do you stop the waves of diversity, equity, and social justice and the advancement that's needed in society from going forward? You throw up a dam, and you go after the voting rights. You control who can get to the ballot, because if I can redraw a district line, I can take a progressive district of a hundred people and put them in a hundred different districts where they will never win. We will have a supermajority and set things up the way that we want. We're going to claim it's because they're not qualified while we take away their access to show us that they are.

The third space, that gets to the heart of your question, is in K-12 education. I think that we must look at generations to frame this correctly. I'm not talking about the Silent Generation. This week, Viola Fletcher, may she rest in peace and power, passed away as the oldest living survivor of the Tulsa Race Riot at 111 years old. Viola Fletcher once said that she wanted to stay alive until she got her reparations. Sadly, that did not happen. I'm not talking about the boomers, who are my parents, who I call the last Jim Crow generation. They left high school and college to put their bodies on the line to say we can overcome. I'm not even talking about my generation, Generation X. At one point I called this the greatest generation, but Generation X voted in the highest numbers for Trump 2.0, so I don't know if that's a good term to use anymore. I'm not even talking about the Millennials, who are very close in age to Gen X'ers. I'm saying go down to Gen Z. They are the generation that scares White Christian nationalists the most. Gen Z had the most progressive policies taught to them in school. We were redefining family, talking about diversity, bringing in books of all different languages, and using differentiated instruction. Generation Z was by far the bulk of those who got involved in Black Lives Matter 1.0. with Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray,

and Tamir Rice. White Christian nationalist men started seeing little White kids in Whites-only elementary and middle schools marching out for Black Lives Matter. They began to understand that this is a humanitarian issue, because they had teachers telling them we don't have to have a Black kid in the classroom for Black lives to matter because if Black lives don't matter, then nobody matters. I remember when I traveled down to Annapolis; it was the Whitest Black Lives Matter march I've ever seen. Gen Z also started dealing with school shootings. Instead of just taking it quietly, they marched out all over the country. They demanded that Congress do something. They were saying, "look, you're not going to change the law, but one day we're going to be old enough, and we're going to change it." That's what David Hogg said. He's like, "we got to vote these old people out when we're able to vote." That's the second movement they had, and they were new to high school. Then Gen Z marched out for climate control. You're talking about watching children with three major movements before they even get out of high school: Black Lives Matter, gun control, and the climate. You had young people who could read, who could do critical thinking, saw the world as being very small, and understood social media. It scared White Christian nationals because they understand if you are teaching these young people in first and second grade that these are humanitarian issues, they will march out in seventh grade and vote you out when they turn eighteen. So where do they make their big challenge? The curriculum. They wanted to remove Black, women's, and LGBTQIA history and go back to what they call "pure history," which is just White history. We were teaching Gen Z'ers that they make history. What they want to shift back to is the ideology that existed before; history is something that happens outside of you, and you don't have a voice until you become an adult. They're fighting to control what happens in the schools because that's where you learn how to be an engaged global citizen or not.

**DR. JANE BERGER:** What is your organization doing to respond, and who have you partnered with?

**DR. KAYE WISE WHITEHEAD:** ASALH, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, is the keeper of Black history. We stand in Woodson's seat. This is what we were created to do. As the thirtieth president and eighth woman to hold Woodson's chair, I am continuing to do the work in every space that we teach Black history. We launched our Freedom Schools all over the country in churches and community centers. Here at my institute, the Karson Institute for Race, Peace, and Social Justice we're hosting a free Saturday school for adults. No matter who you are, we're going to get you armed with the knowledge of Black history so you can go out and teach your community. The second thing we're doing is our national convenings. We meet on Zoom with partners from all over the country: the African American Policy Forum, AAPF, Kimberlé Crenshaw's organization; the National Council of Negro Women, led by Shavon Arline-Bradley; the Legal Defense Fund, led by Janai Nelson; the National Black Child Development Institute; the National Urban League, led by Marc Morial; and, the NAACP, led by Derrick Johnson. We partner with anybody who protects, promotes, and preserves Black history as an essential part of the American historical narrative. Third is our Black History Month Luncheon. It's going to be in Washington, D.C. on February 28th. I am going to talk about what I have adopted as my personal theme for 2026; the stronger the wind, the deeper the root; telling people that we have survived. Our roots have grown very deep since we were brought into this country involuntarily as captured people. If we continue to understand how deep our courageous roots go, we will survive the storm that we are in. ASALH will continue to be a lighthouse. Like a lighthouse, you don't see us until you need to. No one sees it if the sun is shining. It's when it's a foggy night, where the moon isn't shining bright, when you're looking to try to get your way back to shore that you see the light. But it's always been on. ASALH has been a lighthouse for one hundred and ten years. We've been celebrating Negro History Week, Black History Week, Black History Month for a century. We've always been a lighthouse, and we will continue to be a lighthouse, pointing the way to truth.

**DR. JANE BERGER:** How can historians participate or help support everything that ASALH is doing and other ongoing efforts?

**DR. KAYE WISE WHITEHEAD:** In February 2025, I put out what I called the North Star. It was ten small acts of daily resistance that I think people should do, because like Ida B. Wells, I think that resistance is a muscle you can exercise and build in small ways. One of the steps I laid out was to find the organizations that are doing the work that you agree with and defend them with everything you have. Give your offerings to ASALH like you give your tithes to your church. Support us, not just with thoughts and prayers, but financially. Give up a \$5 cup of coffee for one work week, then send that \$25 off to ASALH. \$25 may seem like a small thing, but it helps to continue the work. The anger, frustration, and fight we have in front of us against this administration cannot be fought by individuals. It must be fought by organizations. Organizations have to hold the anger, the fuel, and the fire, but organizations cannot stand for and with us unless financially supported.

# Making Work Matter

## A Report on Chicago 2025

On June 12-14, 2025, over 300 LAWCHA members attended our biennial conference which was organized on the theme “Making Work Matter: Solidarity & Action Across Space and Time” held on the campus of the University of Chicago. Incredible teamwork and diligent planning helped make this one of the best conferences LAWCHA has yet organized. A Program Committee co-chaired by Lilia Fernández and Emily E. LB. Twarog, and peopled by Tom Alter, Ikulu Asaka, Dana Caldemayer, Lorenzo Costaguta, Elisa F. Garcia, Toby Higbie, Gordon Mantler, Verónica Martínez-Matsuda, Sarah McNamara, Crystal Moten, and August Wood put together a program that featured scholars and activists, LAWCHA veterans and newcomers. And a Local Arrangements Committee led by Gabe Winant and including Rudi Baltzell, Colleen Doody, Stephanie Fortado, Tina Groeger, Michelle Nickerson, and Antonio Ramirez, put together inviting activities, including an amazing closing banquet over soul food at union hall of Local 11 of the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Three conference plenaries provided a highlight of the conference. The opening plenary saw Crystal Moten moderate a discussion on Chicago’s rich history of cross-ethnic/cross-racial efforts to build solidarity that was informed by the contributions of Gordon Mantler, Juan Mora-Torres, and Lilia Fernández. On Day 2, Emily Twarog led Elizabeth Todd Breland, Katie Batza, and Bethany Moreton, in a discussion on the theme “Historians Respond to the Current Political Moment.” And the conference closed with a plenary that focused on activism, much of which involved opposition to the carceral state, called “Making Work Matter: Solidarity & Action Across Space and Time,” moderated by Juan Gonzalez of Democracy Now!, which included Karla Altmayer, Alonzo Waheed, Jimmy Soto and Stanley Howard.

### AWARDS

As is our custom, we bestowed our annual awards at our membership meeting. **Issay Matasumoto** of the University of Southern California won the Alice Kessler-Harris Dissertation Prospectus Award for his prospectus “Aloha, Incorporated: Trans-Pacific Capitalism and the Rise of Tourism in Hawai’i.” **Aaron Jesch** of Washington State University, Vancouver, won the LAWCHA/LABOR Research Grant for Contingent and Community College Faculty and Independent Scholars for “Written on the Wobbly: Working-Class Tattoos and the Industrial Workers of the World.” **Eugene Charles Fanning**, now teaching at Florida Southern University, won the Herbert Gutman Prize for Outstanding Dissertation for “Empire of the Everglades: Agriculture, Migrant Workers, and the Nature of the Modern Food System,” completed at University of Maryland under Julie Greene. **Debbie J. Goldman** won the Davide Montgomery Award for her book *Disconnected: Call Center Workers Fight for Good Jobs in the Digital Age*. And **Seth Rockman** of Brown University won the Philip Taft Prize for his book *Plantation Goods: A Material History of American Slavery*.

At our closing banquet, we also recognized two of our most esteemed members, **Thavolia Glymph** of Duke University and Michael Honey, emeritus of the University of Washington in Tacoma, with the **Distinguished Service to Labor and Working-Class History Award**.



Distinguished Service to Labor and Working-Class History Award winners Michael Honey and Thavolia Glymph with LAWCHA officers Eileen Boris and Joe McCartin at the closing banquet.



Chair Crystal Moten and panelists Lilia Fernández, Gordon Mantler, Juan Mora-Torres at the opening plenary. “Solidarity & Work in Chicago: Past & Present.” Photo courtesy of John McKerley



Bethany Moreton, Emily E. L. B. Twarog, Elizabeth Todd Breland, and Katie Batza, panelists on Day 2 plenary. “Historians Respond to the Current Political Moment.” Photo courtesy of John McKerley.



Naomi Williams responding to another LAWCHA member’s comment during Day 2 plenary. Photo courtesy of John McKerley.

# LAWCHA Advances a “Peoples’ 250th”

As the United States approaches its semisesquicentennial in July, LAWCHA has partnered with a range of different educational associations, historical societies, and labor unions from across the country to host the #peoples250 social media campaign. We aim to use short form video as a tool that can allow multiple groups and individuals to contribute to lifting up the history of struggle that has advanced worker rights, individual rights, equality, and democracy over the course of the 250 years of the history of the United States as we head toward the commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2026.

The past year has presented a wide array of different challenges to public history in the US, from intense pressure at the Smithsonian Institutions to the rewriting of historical markers and exhibits within the National Park Service to the many difficulties faced on our university campuses. While the official America250 program, partnered with PragerU, will offer its predictably unreliable interpretation of the nation’s past, Peoples250 offers an opportunity for historians, students, and all within the labor movement to share our own experiences, learnings, and understandings of the many different episodes, individuals, movements and organizations that have contributed to the creation of the United States in all its complexity.

LAWCHA members are uniquely well positioned to lift up the working-class history of the United States at this time. In late February we will begin posting periodic prompts, allowing participants to respond to a range of different themes. No official registration is required and anyone is free to record and contribute a video using the #Peoples250 hashtag. We intend to use TikTok as our primary social media platform, but will also be making videos available to watch on YouTube, and reposting on Bluesky and Facebook. Recording short form videos is a new adventure for many of us and we have tutorial materials available and we are able to provide support in editing recordings.

Our present partners include AAUP, the Albert Shanker Institute, Working America, the Labor Heritage Foundation, the Labor Education Program at the University of Illinois, and the Pennsylvania and Wisconsin State Labor History Societies, the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association, and the Southern Labor Studies Association. We enthusiastically welcome the partnership and participation of both individuals and organizations. If you would like to be involved in Peoples250 please contact Patrick Dixon at [lawcha.office@gmail.com](mailto:lawcha.office@gmail.com).

## LAWCHA 2027 CONFERENCE to be held at University of Massachusetts–Boston

LAWCHA members, start making your plans to join us at our next biennial conference in Boston in June 2027 (exact dates TBD). We are grateful to **Nick Juravich** and **Steve Striffler** at UMass Boston for agreeing to act as our hosts. A program committee co-chaired by **Alex Finley** of the University of Pittsburgh and **Sergio Gonzalez** of Marquette is in the process of formation. The conference theme and dates will be available by the time of LAWCHA’s membership meeting at the OAH in Philadelphia on April 17 and the call for papers will be circulated before Labor Day. So be on the lookout. We are looking forward to seeing you in June 2027 in New England!

# LAWCHA Election Now Underway Vote by February 9th

LAWCHA is fortunate to have a deep bench of leaders standing for election this year. If you were a dues-paying member at the close of 2025, you should have received your ballot by email from our automated election service, ElectionBuddy. The ballot should have landed in your inbox in the during the night of January 4-5. The election will remain open until February 9. If you have not voted, please find the original email or one of the subsequent reminders we have sent out in your inbox click on the link provided and vote.

In March Vice President Eileen Boris will assume the presidency. The following candidates have been nominated by the Nominations Committee for Officers and Members of the Board who will serve with her.

### OFFICERS



#### **PAUL ORTIZ**, *Vice President/Incoming President (unopposed)*

I am currently a professor of labor history and an affiliate faculty member of Latino Studies at Cornell University. I was formerly a professor of history and director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida. In addition to labor, my areas of research include the study of social movements, African American and Latinx history, as well as comparative race and ethnicity. I served as a board member of LAWCHA in 2004-2007 and 2020-2023. I have been a member of the Philip Taft Labor History Book Award committee since 2019, and I am a former chair of the LAWCHA/OAH David Montgomery Award book committee.

My books include, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* and the PEN award-winning *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*.

As a public-facing scholar, I have worked regularly with public school districts, labor unions, and digital media to promote people’s histories. I was a consultant and featured narrator for John Leguizamo’s *American Historia: The Untold History of Latinos* docuseries that aired on PBS in 2024. I wrote the coda/epilogue essay for the most recent edition of the American Social History Project’s *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation’s History*.

I am a first-generation university graduate and a third generation US military veteran. My pathway to academia included working as an organizer with the United Farm Workers of Washington State, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee and many other unions and community organizations. I am the past president of the United Faculty of Florida-UF (FEA-AFL-CIO), the union that represents tenured and non-tenure track faculty at UF.

I am thrilled at the opportunity to continue to serve LAWCHA. As president, my goals will be to listen and learn from our members as we find new ways to build membership and carry on LAWCHA’s traditions of weaving together scholarship, activism, professional development and popular education.



**EMILY LABARBERA-TWAROG, Secretary (unopposed)**

I am very honored and excited to be nominated as Secretary for LAWCHA. LAWCHA has been my scholarly home since my graduate school days at the University of Illinois at Chicago. My service to the organization includes three years as LABOR's Editorial Coordinator (2003-2006), LAWCHA Executive Board member (2016-2019), LaborOnline Editorial Board member (2017 – present), Co-Chair, Program Committee, 2025 LAWCHA Conference, and Associate Editor at LABOR.

I am an Associate Professor in the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Co-Director of the Regina V. Polk Women's Labor Leadership Programs. I am the author of two books – *Politics of the Pantry: Food, Housewives, and Consumer Protest in 20th Century America* (Oxford, 2017) and with Stephanie Fortado, *The Spindle City: A Historical Resource Study of Lowell National Historical Park* (NPS, 2023). I am currently finishing a

manuscript – *Hands Off: A History of Fighting Back Against Sexual Harassment in the American Workplace*.

As a former food service worker and member of UNITE HERE Local 1 as well as a former member of the UAW and IFT while a graduate student and organizer with Jobs with Justice, my roots in the labor movement shape who I am as a scholar-activist. I am currently involved in organizing TT faculty at my university. As Secretary of LAWCHA I will use my organizational skills to help keep LAWCHA running smoothly, but I will also work to find ways for LAWCHA to continue to bridge the divide between the academy and the broader community specifically using my relationships with labor unions and K-12 teacher and student networks.



**LIESL MILLER ORENIC, Treasurer (unopposed)**

It has been my pleasure to participate in LAWCHA as a member, a Board Member, a committee chairperson, conference organizer and currently as Treasurer over the last twenty-five years. I believe I have been a responsible and trustworthy Treasurer for LAWCHA over the last decade and would like to continue my service in this role.

Since taking on the role of Treasurer I have worked with the Executive Board and the Duke University Press to develop a new membership dues structure, relocated our financial home to the Amalgamated Bank of Chicago, helped streamline conference registration through an online payment platform and worked with the conference committee for our independent conferences to support excellent and well-attended meetings. In particular, I am proud to have been a part of the expanded financial commitment to

contingent faculty participation at LAWCHA conferences. I would like to continue to cultivate our conference revenue stream and also continue to build funds for named honors for academic writing, travel grants and other subsidies which help bring our members together, including new honors which highlight the important work (scholarly, activist and public engagement) LAWCHA members do. Since 2023, my biggest task has been to help shepherd our new LAWCHA Endowment Fund which will help ensure our stability for decades to come.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES (CHOOSE 5)**



**MARGOT CANADAY**

I teach in the History Department at Princeton University. My primary field is the history of sexuality. In 2009, I published *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton University Press). Thematically related is a 2021 volume I co-edited with Nancy Cott and Robert Self entitled, *Intimate States: Gender, Sexuality, and Governance in Modern America* (University of Chicago Press). Most recently, I published *Queer Career: Sexuality and Work in Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2023). In researching and writing that book, I engaged deeply with the history of work and labor (as well as the history of capitalism). My graduate teaching and advising has followed a similar path, and LAWCHA has been an extremely warm and welcoming community. So, I would be pleased to be more involved in the organization. I currently serve on the board of the journal, *Labor*, and am on the program committee that is organizing a workshop at Tulane next Spring on “Labor’s Capitalism.”



**LORENZO COSTAGUTA**

I am a Senior Lecturer in United States History at the University of Bristol (UK). I am a scholar of ideas of race and class in the global socialist movement and the author of *Workers of All Colors Unite: Race and the Origins of American Socialism* (University of Illinois Press, 2023). I joined LAWCHA in 2015, when I was a PhD student, and have attended every LAWCHA conference since then. I see the organization as my academic home. The professional and personal support I received from junior and senior members across the years has made me the scholar I am. If elected, I will dedicate my time on the board to support the internationalisation of the organization. I have served as coordinator of the Labour&Empire Working Group of the European Labour History Network for four years. In that capacity, I arranged an international conference

and several seminar series with labor historians from all over the world. In 2024, I joined the LAWCHA Global Affairs committee. I am eager to join the board with the aim of promoting broader participation of international scholars at LAWCHA conferences, a stronger presence of global and transnational research in our conference programs, and tighter academic links with labor associations across the world.



**JOAN FLORES-VILLALOBOS**

An Associate Professor of History at the University of Southern California, I am a historian of labor, race, gender, and diaspora in the U.S. and the Caribbean. In 2023, I published *The Silver Women: How Black Women's Labor Made the Panama Canal*, which was awarded the OAH/LAWCHA David Montgomery Prize. I have served for two years as a committee member for the LAWCHA/Labor Research Grant for Contingent and Independent Scholars and Community College Faculty. I have also chaired the David Montgomery Prize committee, and I'm on the Board of Contributing Editors of *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History*. I look forward to further expanding LAWCHA's coverage and outreach in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as finding ways to protect academic workers facing increased surveillance and attacks on their labor conditions.



**JESSE HALVORSEN**

I am an Independent Scholar focused on labor and political economy. A first-generation college student from a union household, I earned my PhD in U.S. History from the University of California – Santa Barbara in 2022. My dissertation, *Moving Goods, Moving America: Labor, Technology, Policy, Development, & the Struggle Over North America’s Largest Port-Logistics Nexus*, won the 2023 Herbert Gutman Prize for Outstanding Dissertation from LAWCHA. My forthcoming manuscript is under contract with the University of Illinois Press for their *Working Class in American History* series. As a graduate student, I served members of the UC Student-Worker Union, UAW 2865 (now UAW 4811), in a variety of roles and positions. At LAWCHA I have served on

the Graduate Student Affairs Committee. I envision LAWCHA as having multiple interrelated purposes – to promote scholarship focused on labor and working-class history, to build connections between LAWCHA and the broader labor movement, and to serve as an organizational vehicle for activist scholars – all in an effort to advance the cause of working people and other marginalized groups.



**MAX KROCHMAL**

I am a Professor of History and Director of Justice Studies at the University of New Orleans. I study the nuts and bolts of community organizing, coalition-building, social movements, and grassroots politics, uncovering the links between labor and the overlapping Black and Chicanx/Latinx liberation struggles of the long 20th century. My publications include a monograph, *Blue Texas*, and two collaborative books, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown and Latinx Studies Curriculum in K-12 Schools*. I also work on oral history and public humanities projects that blend activism with community-engaged scholarship. Most recently, I helped create a traveling exhibition, *Don’t Stand Alone: Black Labor Organizing in New Orleans*, and I am now launching the Economic

Justice Research Lab at UNO. I joined and worked for LAWCHA as a graduate student before serving on various committees and a term on the Board (2014-17). I am the past president of the Southern Labor Studies Association and am on the Advisory Committee for Labor South: Center for Working Class Studies. I’m also on the executive board of United Campus Workers Southeast (CWA). I’d like to help LAWCHA extend the impact of labor history by expanding our popular education initiatives alongside present-day antifascist movements.



**SETH ROCKMAN**

I am a nineteenth-century US historian whose scholarship addresses the survival strategies of the working poor, the dynamics of class among diverse laboring populations, and the relationship of slavery and capitalism. A professor in the Department of History at Brown University, my books include *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* and the recent *Plantation Goods: A Material History of American Slavery*. I currently serve on the editorial committee of *Labor* and recently co-edited a special issue on the labor history of science. In recent years, I have participated in LAWCHA initiatives to cultivate early career scholars and to foster research on pre-twentieth-century topics. At my own institution, I’ve worked to establish postdoctoral appointments in labor history and to generate greater visibility for the field within the academy. Recognizing that each member of the LAWCHA board has a particular contribution to make, I anticipate that mine will be on the academic side: to promote labor history as a research field, to open pathways for the next generation of labor historians to launch academic careers, and to foster

cutting-edge research that distinguishes our field within the broader discipline of History. I indicate this not to privilege such work over the other interventions that LAWCHA seeks to make in education, organizing, and public debate; but rather because this is simply where I am best situated to contribute to our collective endeavor.

**LARA VAPNEK**



I am a Professor of History at St. John’s University in New York. At a time when democracy is in peril and faculty are under attack, LAWCHA’s mission -- to support cutting-edge scholarship, build bridges to the labor movement, and communicate to the public – has never been more significant. My first book, *Breadwinners: Women and Economic Independence, 1865-1920* (2009) taught me about the importance of organizing. Researching my second book, *Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: Modern American Revolutionary* (2015), I learned about the dangers of political repression and the need to build coalitions. These lessons have been supplemented by twenty years of teaching at a university that serves a diverse student population, eager to understand how social inequities shape the past and the present. I have benefitted immensely from LAWCHA’s resources for teaching labor history and from the

spirit of intellectual exchange LAWCHA fosters through its conferences, publications, and book talks. I serve as a Contributing Editor to *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History*; I am a member of the Communications Committee and the Working Group for an Earlier Labor History. If elected to the Board, I would work to strengthen the organization for whatever challenges lie ahead by building membership and by continuing to develop relationships with other scholarly associations.

**AUGUSTUS WOOD**



I have been engaged in organizing workers for over 20 years now, as a scholar as well as an activist. My research focus is political economy and labor, gentrification and working-class social movements in modern African American history. This is captured in my first book, *Class Warfare in Black Atlanta: Grassroots Struggles, Resistance, and Repression Under Gentrification*, published by UNC Press in the Justice, Power, and Politics Series. On the ground, I’ve organized workers in both private and public sector, including food service, transit, firefighters, teachers, steelworkers, the Hollywood guilds during the SAG-AFTRA and WGA Strikes, and many more. I am a former two-term president of the Graduate Employees Organization Union Local 6300 and one of the coordinators of the fourteen-day 2018 GEO Strike at the University of Illinois. Outside of labor, I organize within my community as well. I am the President of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, a founding member of the Ubuntu Project Urbana-Champaign, and

host the podcast “Off the Shelf: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crisis” and the award-nominated Radio Free Labor program on 90.1 FM WEFT Champaign Community Radio, Saturdays, 11-1pm. I am the Chair of the Association for the Study of African American Life & History 2025 and the 2026 Conference's Academic Program Committee, and I’m a member of the ASALH Executive Council as well. I also serve on the Editorial Boards of the *Journal of African American History* and *Labor Studies Journal*. I have used these positions to form a relationship with LAWCHA, creating a joint sponsorship between both organizations' national conferences in 2025. I hope to continue building power and expanding LAWCHA's reach at multiple levels of society and energizing the research on the Black working classes.

# LAWCHA

At the OAH

LAWCHA has solicited and sponsored several panels at this year's Organization of American Historians (OAH) conference, which will meet in Philadelphia, April 16-19. Below is a list of events solicited by LAWCHA. Please join us there!

*Thursday April 16, 2:45-4:15 pm*

## **Hidden in Plain Sight: The Making of Unfree Work in the 20th Century Southwest**

Roundtable Discussion

*Chair:* Dr. Jessica Pliley, Texas State University

*Discussants:* Anh Adams, Rutgers University; Dr. Erik Bernardino, Bates College

Dr. John Mckiernan-Gonzalez, Texas State University; Dr. Jason Mellard

Dr. Karen Miller, U.S. Strategic Command; Dr. Jermaine Thibodeaux, University of Oklahoma

*Friday April 17, 8:45AM – 10:15 am*

## **Workers' Education: Spaces, Strategies, and Legacies**

Roundtable Discussion

*Chair and Commentator:* Tobias Higbie, UCLA

*Discussants:* Michelle Chen, Labor History, Rutgers University – New Brunswick; Leilah Danielson, Northern

Arizona University; Andrew Elrod, Charles Warren Center, Harvard;

Daniel Judt, Oxford University; Nick Juravich, UMass – Boston

*Friday, April 17, 1:30-3 pm*

## **LAWCHA Presidential Address**

“Where Are We? How Did We Get Here? Where Are We Headed?”

Labor and Working-Class History Meets this Moment”

Joseph A. McCartin

Georgetown University, Immediate Past President of LAWCHA

*Friday, April 17: 3:30-5 pm*

## **LAWCHA Business Meeting and Reception**

At this meeting, awards will be presented, LAWCHA's 2027 conference scheduled for Boston in Jun 2027 will be discussed, and new business will be considered.

*Saturday 8:45-10:15 am*

## **Uncovering Coerced Labor and Resistance within American Carceral and Quasi-Carceral Spaces, 1898-1973**

Paper Session

*Chair:* Robert Chase, Stony Brook University

*Presenters:* Rachel Pitkin, CUNY Graduate Center;

Moises Acuna-Gurrola, Cal State Bakersfield;

and Donna Haverty-Stacke, Hunter College, CUNY

*Commentator:* Anthony Gregory, Hoover Institution, Stanford

*Saturday April 18, 3:30-5 pm*

## **Radical Care: Reframing Domestic, Laundry, and Garment Work as Essential Labor**

Paper Session

*Chair and Commentator:* Carolina Ortega, Indiana University

*Presenters:* Melissa Flowers, Mellon Fellow; Beth Robinson, St. Catherine University;

And Sarah Crossley, University of Kansas



In 2023 LAWCHA helped launch Labor Spring in collaboration with the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor & the Working Poor at Georgetown University. Since then, Labor Spring events have been held in more than 100 locations on or near campuses. This year promises to see those events focusing on the defense of democracy and the rights of immigrant workers. See the call for participation below.

## **#LaborSpring2026**

Call for Participation

[Sign Up for Labor Spring 2026 Here](#)

[Learn more about Labor Spring Here](#)

Labor Spring is a series of events and gatherings supporting working people on campuses and in communities nationwide. For the fourth year, Labor Spring will bring together students, workers, unionists, faculty, allies, environmentalists, elected leaders and more to support workers' organizing and power-building efforts in a broad range of events, anchored on college campuses and in the community. Events will be organized by local committees, crossing institutional silos and ideological divides, and uniting workers and campuses to bolster workplace justice, racial equity, and the public good.

Many Labor Spring 2026 events will spotlight the connections between a strong democracy and a robust worker justice movement. Unions and other worker organizations undergird democracy. They curb inequality, model democratic functions, bring democracy to the workplace, and balance outsized corporate power. When workers' organizations face increased attack, a major pillar of our democratic system weakens. Standing up for workers is standing up for democracy.

Events will also support immigrant workers on our campuses and in our communities. Through Labor Spring events, communities will take a stand against the targeted attacks, sweeps and violence against immigrants that violate fundamental human rights and freedoms. Immigrants are vital members of our communities and are at the core of America's working class. Labor Spring events stand in solidarity with immigrant workers in the face of escalating and shocking assaults and targeted violence against them.

We invite you and your allies to join this movement, link up to the national effort, and form a local group to plan an event of your own, such as teach-ins, speakers, conferences, social events, demonstrations, and rallies. All types of organizations can serve as hosts for Labor Spring events. The events could be in-person, virtual or hybrid. They will take place in the Spring semester, from January through May. We encourage all Labor Spring organizers to build events that are fully accessible to all.

For more information, including to join the national planning committee, contact Alexis Harper at [kilwp@georgetown.edu](mailto:kilwp@georgetown.edu) or Patrick Dixon at [lawcha.office@gmail.com](mailto:lawcha.office@gmail.com)