LAWCHA

The Labor and Working-Class History Association

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2025

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LAWCHA Officers

Letter from the Editors

Greetings from the new editors of our newsletter. We are Martha Guerrero Badillo, Jane Berger, Michael Hillard, and Colleen Woods. We are together at Joe McCartin's invitation as a team that includes folks at various career states, from graduate student to retiree. We want to say a word of appreciation for LAWCHA President McCartin, who has guided and advised us as we've come together to assume this responsibility, and for Patrick Dixon for his great advice and technical support.

Besides Joe's guidance, we benefitted from meeting this past fall with LAWCHA's Executive Committee. Their guidance was for us to focus the newsletter on matters of importance to the LAWCHA membership, versus Labor Online's focus on timely content for both external and internal audiences. We have established a working relationship with Labor Online to ensure both cooperation and clarity about our division of labor. For instance, we will be moving some items, e.g., bibliographies of LAWCHA members' new work, from the newsletter to Labor Online. When relevant, we will embed in the newsletter links to LAWCHA's webpage.

We announce two important developments. First, we are going digital. Specifically, we will now regularly publish the newsletter as a PDF that will be shared electronically with the membership rather than routinely having it printed and mailed to you. We will, however, supplement the PDF with printed versions when we have meetings, e.g., for this June's conference (which will include up-to-date conference program information). Also, we now plan to publish twice a year. This will allow the newsletter to be timelier and enable us to expand the overall content.

Given the historic nature of the 2024 election and the clear likelihood of specific consequences for workers and those who teach and write about US and global labor and working-class history (and, more broadly, social sciences, humanities and interdisciplinary studies programs), we decided to do an "election special." We are certainly in a time of powerful new organizing efforts, growing pro-labor worker consciousness including us as academic workers, and, of course, there is no shortage of burgeoning historical scholarship and comtemporary journalism about workers and movements. At the same time, the strength of a MAGA Right in all its dimensions has important consequences and, unfortunately, poses threats to workers of all kinds, the labor movement, and our shared profession of generating and disseminating critical historical analysis. We have curated here a set of fresh impressions by leading lights of LAWCHA. Some are original essays, but several are reprints of post-election pieces in *Dissent* and *The New Yorker* (in some cases excerpted and edited). We appreciate the range of scholars who responded to our call to provide statements on the current conjuncture on short notice.

Going forward, our vision for the newsletter is still taking shape. We very much invite you, the membership, to engage with us to further shape the newsletter's content and mission. We encourage you to write us with your thoughts and suggestions and look forward to hearing from many of you in person when we meet in Chicago this June. And please mark your calendars and make your travel plans if you haven't already for this year's meeting in Chicago from June 11-14, 2025. https://lawcha.org/biannual-conference/2025-conference/)

Thus far, we plan to bring a special focus on inviting graduate student contributions to the newsletter, while highlighting professional development opportunities for those at early stages of their careers. Another priority is to continue to feature and learn from labor activism within history and the academy. Because of the times, we seek to extend this to bring focus to the expanding attacks from the right on the profession and academia *per se*, and we plan in future issues to reach out to members to learn about what they are confronting - including attacks on curriculum, tenure, employment, scholarship, freedom of expression and speech - and the creative ways in which they are responding.

Again, we are delighted to step up and work as a collective to deliver what we hope to be a rewarding and thoughtful newsletter of great use to our members. Again, we strongly encourage your input as we do so.

We want to thank Alexander Bowen for doing the layout for this issue.

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President's Perspective

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As we begin a new year and look toward an uncertain future on many fronts, this newsletter marks one of the ways that LAWCHA is seeking to meet the moment. In recent years, we have been publishing an annual newsletter. We offer our thanks to Aldo A. Luria Santiago for editing our last issue. At our 2024 meeting the board authorized us to reconsider that model, and the executive committee subsequently resolved to try a semi-annual online newsletter that could be both more timely and less expensive to produce and distribute. When we sent out feelers for possible editors, Michael Hillard (emeritus from U. of So. Maine), Colleen Woods (Maryland), and Martha Guerrero Badillo (Ph.D. candidate, Yale) stepped forward. Jane Berger (Moravian), will join this collective for the next edition. If you haven't already done so, please read about their vision in the Editor's Statement (p. 3).

We are taking other steps to improve our communications including trying to move our former Twitter/X followers to our Bluesky account. If you have not already done so, we urge you to sign up for Bluesky and follow us at @lawcha.bsky.social and join the conversation. Let us help you publicize news of your books, articles, and other activities. As always, we have lots of new and frequently updated content on Labor Online.

Make sure to mark your calendars for our 2025 LAWCHA conference at the University of Chicago, June 12-14. See the preview of the program (on p.20) of this newsletter and look for the full program within the next couple of months. In the meantime, you can find more information at: https://lawcha.org/biannual-conference/2025-conference/

Finally, we should remember that some of our members have been affected by the California wildfires. If you know of members who have lost homes or been displaced, let us know. What's more, within coming weeks many of the working people whose struggles we chronicle may be affected by deportations, government shutdowns, and rollback of workplace protects. Rest assured that we will try to support those affected by events both natural and political in ways that align with our mission and our capacity. Let us know if your thoughts.

LABOR Studies in Working-Class History
the official journal for LAWCHA

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

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Photo Courtesy of the Culinary Union

The 2024 Election and the Working Class
A Postelection Special

We are happy to present fresh reaction by a group of LAWCHA historians to the meanings and implications of the 2024 election. Gabriel Winant sets the stage by laying out the implications of Kamala Harris's and the Democratic Party's unsurprising choice to favor corporate interests and eschew appeals to working class interests in the 2024 election, resulting in voters' choice to "exit right" from neoliberalism by choosing Trump. Geraldo Cadava echoes past historians' criticism of leftist attacks on worker "false consciousness" by calling into question progressive blame of Latino support for Trump, showing how Democrats treat the growing powerhouse Latino vote as decisive when they vote for Democrats, while dismissing them when they don't. Ana Raquel Minian recalls the history of the US's infamous Eisenhower deportation campaign to remind us that abuse and dehumanization are intrinsic to immigrant detention required during mass deportations. Nelson Lichtenstein provides a balanced postmortem of Biden's labor legacy – crediting his early push for a better social wage, a stronger industrial policy and support for unionism but unlocking how weaknesses in these policies that stemmed from both opposition to them and the Biden Administration's incomplete commitments spelled political disaster for the Biden and Democratic party, leaving unions and labor to fight it out on their own under a Trump presidency. Kim Phillips-Fein reflects on the absence of substantial progress for the labor movement despite the past four years' modest gains, and then anticipates the strengthening of capitalist class dominance and impetus towards further repression of democracy under the second Trump presidency. Max Fraser reminds us that because the Democratic Party has lost its credibility as the party that can deliver on class-based social and economic issues, its problem in representing and attracting working class votes now stretches across all working-class demographics.

Exit Right: Moving Beyond Corporate Democrats After Trump's Election

Gabriel Winant
University of Chicago

As Bernie Sanders and others on the left have noted, Trump's ability to swing new groups of working class voters to his clear (if troubling) message of economic hope is not really a surprise at all. One had to strain during Kamala Harris's short campaign to hear any economic message at all, much less a sense of empathy or hope for the US's chronically struggling working class. The Harris campaign peaked at the very beginning, when she got a chance to embody the collective sigh of relief at Joe Biden's decision to bow out, and to offer something new. From there, it was all downhill. She and her campaign seemed to think that purely superficial changes would suffice. Harris pointedly refused to criticize the incumbent administration or suggest any way in which she differed from it, simply reiterating that she was not Joe Biden (or Trump). Her surrogates and supporters reacted with contempt, scorn, and even racism toward those asking for more. In this fashion, she squandered the wide lead she had opened in the summer. Although food insecurity and poverty—especially child poverty—had increased significantly after the expiration of pandemic relief measures, and inflation had outpaced earnings for tens of millions of Americans, Harris eventually settled into a campaign roadshow of billionaires, celebrities, and neocon Republican defectors, advocating for an ill-defined status quo. It was a rerun of Hillary Clinton's "America is already great": tone-deaf, obsessed with nonexistent moderate Republican voters, and often hostile toward part of its own nominal base.

Prior to Harris taking the mantle, Biden had become a de facto austerity president, overseeing in 2023 the lapse of the child tax credit and temporary cash relief while millions lost SNAP and Medicaid during a period of unified Democratic control.

Biden moved away from progressive social policy, instead focusing on the deficit— repeating Obama administration mistakes that gave rise to Trump in the first place. Further, Biden caved to corporate wishes for an end to pandemic measures —measures that enhanced workers' labor market power—even as COVID continued to rip through Americans' lives. In place of earlier progressive ambitions, Biden offered an economic nationalism borrowed from Trump and a new Cold War liberalism. Worst of all, Biden continued to sign off on whatever Netanyahu wished to do, enabling a genocide in Gaza and the escalation of a multisided war. Whatever concept Biden had once entertained about leading a global struggle over democracy and the rule of law, he reduced it to a grotesque mockery after October 7. (Imagine if Roosevelt had not only remained shamefully neutral in the Spanish Civil War but gave Franco the bombs to drop on Guernica.) While few Americans named Palestine as their top voting issue, the sense of a hypocritical and feckless foreign policy leading to global disaster must have done little to allay young voters' accurate sense that America is, as neatly summed up by one pollster, "a dying empire led by bad people." If Harris was, as she constantly repeated, working tirelessly for a ceasefire, where the hell was it? Insistence could only be received as a confession of incompetence or a lie—which, in fact, it was. And what appeal to protect democracy and to stop fascism could possibly ring true coming from a podium spattered with the blood of thousands of children? Witnessing Biden's stubbornness and Harris's unaccountable refusal even to allow a token Palestinian American to deliver a pre-vetted speech at the convention, one had to ask whether these politicians even cared whether they won or lost. Alternating between calling Republicans a mortal threat and promising to include

them in the cabinet, they paused their warnings of fascist encroachment only to give cover to the world's most militarily aggressive far-right and racist regime.

The Democrats, in other words, comprehensively failed to set the terms of ideological debate in any respect. Their defensiveness and hypocrisy only encouraged Trump while demobilizing their own voters, whom they will no doubt now blame—as though millions of disaggregated, disorganized individuals can constitute a culpable agent in the same way a political party's leadership can. But the party's leaders are to blame, not that many in the center have cared or even seemed willing to reflect on a decade of catastrophe. Has anyone who complained that the 2020 George Floyd rebellion would cost Democrats votes due to the extremism of its associated demands reckoned with the empirical finding that the opposite proved true? That Biden's narrow 2020 victory was likely attributable to noisy protests that liberals wished would be quieter and calmer? Has anyone acknowledged the unique popularity of Sanders with Latinx voters, a once-core constituency that the Democrats are now on the verge of losing outright?

The Democrats' pathologies are not the result of errors. Rather, the party's structure and composition produce its duplicitous and incoherent orientation. It is the mainstream party of globalized neoliberal capitalism, and, by tradition anyway, also the party of the working class. With a weak labor movement, the commitment to working people has become somewhat more aspirational: Harris notably cleaned up with the richest income bracket of voters. Harris only broke slightly from Biden in treating more favorably the billionaires who surrounded her. Her closest advisers included David Plouffe, former senior vice president of Uber, and Harris's brother-in-law Tony West, formerly the chief legal officer of Uber, who successfully urged her to drop Biden-era populism and cultivate relations with corporate allies.

Biden himself pivoted toward economic nationalism because he didn't have a substantive or convincing program of progressive redistribution after Build Back Better failed and he couldn't find a new one acceptable to its corporate wing. As former Biden economic official Bharat Ramamurti, observed after the election, "I wish we had enacted the housing, care, and child tax credit elements in Build Back Better so we would have had concrete cost-of-living benefits to run on. People should reflect on which part of the Democratic Party denied us those agenda items." Instead, Biden stole Trump's agenda: exit right from neoliberalism. Biden sustained Trump's massive expansion of military expenditures, with national security providing the primary ideological justification for full employment and the pursuit of progressive social goals, as it did in the Cold War. In turn, the escalating geopolitical and geoeconomic confrontation with China supplied the logic for unwavering U.S. backing for Netanyahu's wars: renewed great power competition intensified the imperative of consolidating a critical strategic region under U.S. hegemony. Again, in Trumpist mode, Biden's strategy has been to fecklessly pursue this goal by seeking to resolve lingering tensions between Israel and the U.S.–aligned Arab states. Accomplishing this resolution requires the termination of the Palestinian national movement, the main obstacle to such a consolidation. The idea of a Potemkin Palestinian state may return some day, but only after a severe chastising and a stark numerical reduction of the Palestinian people.

The Democratic electorate's demobilization issues from the party's contradictory character. The Democrats' accountability to antagonistic constituencies produces both rhetorical incoherence— what does this party stand for?—and programmatic self-cancellation. Champions of the domestic rule of law and the rules-based international order, they engaged in a spectacular series of violations of domestic and international law. Promising a new New Deal, they admonished voters to be grateful for how well they were already doing economically. Each step taken by the party's policymakers in pursuit of one goal imposes a limit in another direction. It is by this dynamic that a decade of (appropriate) anti-Trump hysteria led first to the Democrats adopting parts of Trump's program, and then finally his reinstallation as president at new heights of public opinion favorability. Nothing better than the real thing.

Understanding Latino Support for Trump

Geraldo Cadava
Northwestern University

This is an abridged version of a longer piece that first appeared in The New Yorker *on November 18, 2024. The full article is at*
https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/understanding-latino-support-for-donald-trump

Donald Trump, according to exit polls, won a greater share of the Latino vote than any Republican Presidential candidate in at least the past half century, and maybe ever. At forty-six per cent—a fourteen-percentage-point increase from 2020—Trump beat George W. Bush's record by at least two points, and perhaps as many as six. The most eye-popping results were in Miami-Dade County and in southern Texas, where Trump won almost every county along the Mexican border. According to exit polling in several battleground states—including Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania—his margin with Latino voters grew more between 2020 and 2024 than it did between 2016 and 2020.

Even more surprising, the Biden and Harris campaigns weren't sitting idly by as it happened. They and their allied PAC's responded to the slippage in 2020 by spending more than a hundred million dollars on Latino-targeted ads and sending thousands of volunteers to knock on doors. In the final months of the race, with Kamala Harris as the Democratic nominee, campaign insiders said the efforts were paying off; after months of dismal polls for Joe Biden, Harris was not far from having the same Latino support that he had in 2020, and the insiders claimed those numbers would increase through Election Day. It's hard to say with certainty that their efforts were ineffective, because Harris might have fared even worse without them, and among Latinos in Georgia she did only one point worse, and in Wisconsin one point better, than Biden did four years ago. But that's cold comfort. The Democrats' version of the autopsy report that Republicans put out after their 2012 loss—which argued that they needed to fix their Latino (and Black, and Asian American, and Native American, women, youth, and L.G.B.T.Q.) problem—is already being written.

The assignment of blame came quickly. On Joy Reid's MSNBC show, the host acknowledged that a majority of Gen X voters and white women sided with Trump, but she told Latino men, "You own everything that happens to your mixed-status families, and to your wives, sisters, and abuelas from here on in." The liberal commentator Elie Mystal tweeted that "Black people did their job" by voting for Harris, but that "Latinos wanted this man. I hope that works out for them." Even though working-class Latinos had said that they were struggling to afford rent, food, and gas, and that President Biden had offered little or no relief, many political analysts chalked up Trump's gains to some collective character flaw. Mystal weighed in again, tweeting that "Latinos think they're white." (Many do, in fact, consider themselves white.) The journalist Paola Ramos tweeted that the inroads Trump made with Latinos weren't just about the economy but were also "intertwined with racism, xenophobia, transphobia."

It is beyond doubt that Trumpism is infused with white supremacy, and that this is part of its appeal to some Latinos. With people such as Stephen Miller in Trump's inner circle, his Administration is likely to do what it can to reverse the tide of demographic change, in part through mass deportations. But shifting attention from the thing that voters themselves said motivated them, to something more insidious, is as wrong as it is perilous. It is absolutely possible for Latinos to understand racism and still vote for a racist candidate whom they think, rightly or wrongly, will help them prosper. Moreover, bluntly asserting that Trump's Latino supporters misdiagnosed the root cause of their struggles and that they are, in fact, racist and sexist isn't the way to begin a conversation that could lead them to vote for Democrats going forward. More concretely, it also defies logic that a fourteen-percentage-point shift in four years can be attributed to the racism Latinos hold within themselves. All of a sudden, we're supposed to believe that the new Latino Trump voters decided that they're white, anti-immigrant, and trans- and homophobic?

Blame is not the right idea. To blame means to assign responsibility for a fault, and it implies the violation of some rule, a deviation from a norm.

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According to this logic, Latino voters veered off course. But, if we learn anything between now and the next election, it should be that there is no prescribed path for Latinos. They have never been "naturally" liberal or conservative, despite claims to the contrary by Democrats and Republicans alike. Asserting that Latinos are naturally anything is an attempt to convince party leaders that Latinos are theirs to win, if only they put in the effort. It is also meant to cultivate Latino loyalty—but no group of voters, including Latinos, should be loyal to any party, because parties haven't always been loyal to them.

Latino Republicans in the sixties were among the first to point out that Latino loyalty allowed Democrats to take them for granted. Many Latinos hung a portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt next to an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe because his New Deal had helped them find work and put food on the table, but what, those Republicans asked, had their loyalty got them? Democrats, they argued, sought their votes right before every election, only to ignore them until they needed their support again. When Richard Nixon first ran for President, in 1960, his campaign set up a job-recruitment and health center in a Latino area of Los Angeles. After his election in 1968, he hired several Latinos into his Administration, and, under the rubric of "brown capitalism," he conceived of economic programs designed to uplift Latino communities. When he was reëlected, he became the first Republican in the postwar era to win about a third of the Latino vote, which became an expectation in the decades that followed. Eight years later, Ronald Reagan won a similar share of the Latino vote by appealing to their work ethic, anti-Communism, love of family, and faith. Thousands, like my grandfather, were convinced and became lifelong Republicans.

Political consultants, advocacy organizations, and journalists have helped to create this situation in which less Latino support for Democrats is read as failure by Latinos themselves. A Time magazine cover story in October, 1978, titled "It's Your Turn in the Sun," said that the growing number of Latinos guarantees that "they will play an increasingly important role in shaping the nation's politics and policies." It quotes Raul Yzaguirre, the director of the National Council of La Raza (now the nonprofit advocacy group UnidosUS), who declared, "The 1980s will be the decade of the Hispanics." Around the same time, news articles started calling Latinos a "sleeping giant" that would transform American politics if they ever awakened. About two decades after the sleeping-giant cliché began circulating

in the national press, the legendary Los Angeles Times journalist Frank del Olmo said it had to be slayed, in part because the Latino giant wasn't an especially partisan one; it lumbered in different directions at once. Nevertheless, many Democrats clung to the idea that, so long as Latinos got out to vote, their increasing share of the population would overwhelmingly benefit the Party.

In many ways, the eighties were the decade of the Hispanics, and decades since could even be called the Latino half century. In 1980, the Latino population in the U.S. stood at 14.8 million, or seven per cent of the national population. In 2023, there were more than sixty-five million Latinos, who made up about twenty per cent of the country. During these same decades, the number of Latinos serving in Congress grew from less than ten to more than fifty. One of them, Marco Rubio, is poised to become Trump's Secretary of State. When we debate whether Latinos have assimilated as Americans, the answer is yes. But the America that Latinos assimilate into today is not the America of the mid-twentieth century, when groups like Italians became white. Today, Bad Bunny sings in Spanish on "Saturday Night Live," major-party candidates hold town halls on Spanish-language television stations, and the prospect of living without us strikes fear in the hearts of anyone who wants continued access to food, clothing, and child care. The rest of America is assimilating into Latino America, as writers such as Jorge Ramos and Mike Madrid have argued.

Yet the flip side of the idea that we're "giants" is that we can be blamed, which in turn leads Latino advocacy organizations into an argumentative cul-de-sac. For progressive organizations, it seems that Latinos are only decisive when Democrats win. Clarissa Martínez de Castro, of UnidosUS, said earlier this year that Latinos would play a "decisive role" in the election, echoing almost forty years of asserting the decisiveness of the Latino vote. But, during the post-election Webinar hosted by UnidosUS, the pollster they worked with shared a slide that said Latinos made no difference at all. Wait a second: Do our votes matter or not? Advocacy groups have hyped the idea that we're decisive, because they have fought hard, for decades, to make candidates, legislators, and parties believe that Latinos deserve their attention, and investments of time and money. But we might get even more of those things when we're seen as tens of millions of Americans who are persuadable voters rather than members of a unified voting bloc—who deserve to be heard for the things they say about themselves.

Trump's Deportation Model

Ana Raquel Minian
Stanford University

In 2016, Donald Trump's signature campaign promise was to build a wall between the United States and Mexico. During the current election cycle, Trump has escalated his xenophobic rhetoric and pledged to deport tens of millions of migrants already in the United States if elected to a second term. At an event in Iowa in 2023, he cited a historical precedent for his plan: "Following the Eisenhower model, we will carry out the largest domestic deportation operation in American history."

The history of the "Eisenhower model" should give pause to anyone who values the rule of law or human rights. In the early 1950s, U.S. officials became alarmed by a sharp rise in unauthorized border crossings from Mexico. They accused migrants of committing crimes, taking jobs away from citizens, engaging in drug trafficking, and spreading disease. The Border Patrol claimed that this problem could be solved if the government allowed the military and National Guard to help the agency seal the southern border. This suggested fix, however, overlooked an 1878 law known as Posse Comitatus, which prohibits the government from using the military to enforce domestic policies unless such use is approved by Congress. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's former West Point classmate Lieutenant General Joseph M. Swing insisted that the administration disregard the law, but Eisenhower refused.

Trump has shown no such reluctance. In an interview with Time earlier this year, he claimed that he would carry out his plan with the help of the National Guard, along with other branches of the military if "things were getting out of control."

While Eisenhower rejected the use of the army on U.S. soil, he appointed Swing as commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1954.

Almost immediately, Swing launched Operation Wetback, a harsh paramilitary campaign to expel Mexicans whose name invoked a derogatory slur for migrants who cross the Rio Grande. The Immigration Service marshalled approximately 750 immigration officers; seven airplanes; and 300 jeeps, cars, and buses to round up migrants. Within three months, historian Mae Ngai notes, the service had apprehended approximately 170,000 people. Given the sheer number of those captured, the government lacked the resources to deport all of them immediately. Instead, it erected temporary detention facilities to hold them while they awaited expulsion.

During his presidential administration, Trump took a similar action by building sprawling camps to detain apprehended individuals before deportation—a measure he plans to expand if reelected. One such facility, which opened in Tornillo, Texas in 2018, housed thousands of minors in tents. While many noted the inhumane conditions at these sites as well as the cruelty of the family separation policy, mistreatment in detention facilities was not unique to the Trump administration. As I show in my new book, In the Shadow of Liberty, abuse and dehumanization have occurred no matter when, how, or why immigrant detention was used—they are intrinsic to the system. In fact, immigrant detention facilities were originally conceived as spaces where the Constitution did not apply.

Just like Trump, politicians and the media in the 1950s spoke of migrants as a faceless, dangerous mass with no humanity. Few records were left of their experiences. But some people have been able to tell their stories. The late former congressman Esteban Torres, a child of Mexican immigrants, recalled that when he was only three years old, his father did not return home one day because he had been deported.

"My brother and I were left without a father," he recounted. "We never saw him again." Deportation tears families and communities apart; it is traumatic both for those who experience it and for those around them.

Deportation campaigns also infringe on the rights of citizens. During the 1954 operation, the Border Patrol increased surveillance and racial profiling of those who "looked Mexican." Claiming that many migrants tried to avoid deportation by posing as U.S. citizens, officials insisted that immigration officers had to question anyone who appeared to be from south of the border.

While Operation Wetback did reduce unauthorized border crossings, it did not do so strictly through deportations—as Trump seems to assume. Alongside mass deportations, the government expanded the Bracero Program, a set of agreements between the United States and Mexico that allowed Mexican men to work in the United States legally as contract laborers. As a result, men who had crossed the border before 1954 without papers because they had been denied a slot in the Bracero Program began to come as legal guest workers, thus reducing unauthorized migration.

Other massive deportation campaigns in American history have had similarly pernicious effects. Between 1919 and 1920, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer set out to purge the country of political radicals, often immigrants from Southern or Eastern Europe. During the Palmer Raids, federal, state, and local agents arrested thousands of people whom they believed to harbor revolutionary intentions (First Amendment be damned), detained them at Ellis Island, and eventually deported over 500 of them. Among them was well-known anarchist Emma Goldman, who described the awful conditions during her detention: the "quarters were congested, the food was abominable, and [we] were treated like felons." These detentions and deportations also ripped families apart: those classified as radicals were sent away, while their parents, spouses, and children remained behind.

In the 1930s, the government launched an even more massive deportation campaign. Amid the hardships of the Great Depression, Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans were blamed, paradoxically, for both taking jobs away from U.S. citizens and relying on public assistance. In response, immigration authorities sought to expel ethnic Mexicans, not only targeting unauthorized migrants but also pressuring legal residents and even U.S. citizens to leave under the guise of "voluntary" departure. Estimates of the number of Mexicans repatriated during this period range from 350,000 to 2 million, with about 60 percent believed to have been U.S. citizens—most of them children.

Though Mexicans and Mexican Americans were blamed for the nation's problems, their expulsion did nothing to improve the economy. Ironically, just a few years later, during the Second World War, the U.S. government decided that it needed more Mexican laborers in the country to fill the jobs left by American men serving in the military.

Our history speaks loudly to the legal and human toll of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies. Scapegoating migrants—much less deporting them—does not solve our social or economic crises. Indeed, deportation has proved time and time again to hurt not only migrants themselves but also their families and communities who stay behind. Anti-immigrant politics have diluted the rights granted by the Constitution and as such threatened all American citizens. We should reject the Eisenhower model—or any other draconian approaches to immigration.

Opportunities Found and Lost

Nelson Lichtenstein
University of California, Santa Barbara

During the all too short presidency of Joe Biden, the opportunities for a revival and expansion of trade unionism seemed exceptionally promising. In a nearly full employment economy, public support for trade unionism had reached a 70-year high, with job switching and substantial wage increases an increasingly familiar norm even among workers in the bottom half of the American job market, which is almost entirely non-union. Add to this a trillion-dollar effort to reindustrialize flyover country, an innovatively pro-worker Federal Trade Commission, an aggressively pro-union National Labor Relations Board, and a sitting president who actually showed up on the picket line, and you have the ingredients for a union revival. Indeed, we did witness a set of militant, high-profile strikes whose pattern-creating impact won large wage increases for millions of workers, regardless of whether they were in a trade union or not.

But none of this really shifted the structure of class power in the United States. There were all too few "Eisenhower" executives in the corner office: men and women who, accepting the new popularity of the unions and the government that supposedly had their back, were willing to accommodate to the union impulse and the government's favorable endorsement thereof. The successful strikes and negotiations that have marked the last couple of years were mainly conducted by trade unions 90 to 120 years old, although the new unions in the academy and among some in Silicon Valley constitute a partial exception to that rule. (At this writing Starbucks management is hanging tough, blowing up nearly a year of first-contract negotiations with unionized workers at more than 500 coffee shops). Even more consequential, of course, the Democratic election losses in November seemed to demonstrate that the revival of American trade unionism, as both an idea and a movement, has thus far been far too limited and isolated to have much of a progressive political impact on the rest of the working-class, 90 percent of whom are not in a union.

Indeed, most American voters, and especially those in an increasingly multi-racial working class, told pollsters that the economy was their most important issue. 52 percent said they were worse off than in the last years of the Trump Administration. Most commentators pointed to inflation, which had reached above nine percent in 2022, as the chief culprit that had substantially eroded the value of all those post pandemic wage increases. There was sticker shock at the gas pump and grocery store, with prices remaining high even as Biden and his economic team claimed, correctly but ineffectually, that the rate of inflation had sharply dropped in 2023 and 2024.

Despite the chaos attendant to Trump's handling of the pandemic, the idea that the economic life experience of wage earners was better in the first couple of years following Covid's onset has real substance, but not because an inflationary surge later eroded working-class incomes. In effect, the United States created something close to a Nordic style welfare state between March 2020, when the $2.2 trillion CARES Act was enacted and March 2021 when Congress passed Biden's unprecedentedly massive – $1.8 trillion – American Rescue Plan. For the bottom half of the working class in particular, savings accounts grew larger, medical insurance was subsidized and extended to ten million more adults, family allowances slashed child poverty in half, student loan payments were suspended, and evictions practically ceased. It was an amazing and unexpected social experiment, and on a scale that put the welfare expenditures of even the New Deal and the Great Society in the shade.

And like the New Deal, the Biden Administration sought to follow these emergency relief programs with a "Build Back Better" set of laws and appropriations that promised to raise taxes on the corporate rich and shift resources and power downward toward working-class strata long victims of the neoliberal order. The original BBB idea signified the extent to which Joe Biden, a classic, long-time centrist Democrat, had shifted leftward, a product, first, of his frustrating experience defending President Barack Obama's tepidly inadequate stimulus programs; and second, of the strategic compromise he reached with the Sanders and Warren wing of the Democratic Party. That accommodation, reached just as the Black Lives Matter movement was mobilizing millions across the country, proposed that the government would spend an additional $2 trillion on infrastructure and a green manufacturing transition, plus nearly as much on an American Families Plan that would have provided the "social infrastructure" – tuition-free community college, universal pre-kindergarten, Medicaid expansion for dental, vision, and hearing, 12-weeks paid sick leave, and an expanded and permanent Child Tax Credit – necessary to dramatically enhance the social wage and market power of tens of millions of service sector workers living paycheck to paycheck. This was not just a Green New Deal, but a social deal particularly equitable to tens of million women and people of color.

And Biden put a cadre of genuine progressives in charge of the Federal Trade Commission, the anti-trust

division of the Department of Justice, at the National Economic Council, the Council of Economic Advisors, and on the NLRB. As early as the summer of 2021 the president signed a sweeping executive order signaling an effort to curb corporate monopolies, give consumers more actual choices, and challenge monopsony control of their labor markets by employers like Walmart, Amazon, and the tech giants. The president called this set of initiatives a return to the "antitrust traditions" of the Roosevelt presidencies early in the last century.

We can see the progressive potential generated by this massive program in two places, first within the low-wage, poorly unionized retail/service/hospitality/distribution sector, and second, in an auto industry slated for a radical shift toward electric vehicle manufacture. The "great resignation" that captured newspaper headlines in 2020 and 2021 signaled the degree to which low-wage and contingent workers had finally acquired some market power, a consequence not just of the renewed demand for front-line service work in a still-dangerous pandemic era, but of all those new income supports upon which they could now rely. Wages rose faster than inflation and at some high–profile companies, including Starbucks, REI, and the stores operated by Apple, unionization efforts won traction. In education the Red State Revolt of 2018 and 2019, the big city school system strikes, and the academic worker unionization wave a few years later also demonstrated that chronic austerity and precarity might be reversed in this sector. Given both the kind of permanently enhanced social spending proposed by the Administration and the genuine sense of resentment and empowerment engendered by such "essential workers," it seemed just possible that a sector of the economy employing more than thirty million workers might undergo a truly substantial and progressive shift in the balance of power and income.

On the blue-collar side of the economy, the Biden Administration did successfully put upwards of two trillion dollars into the country's physical infrastructure, the green manufacturing transition, and into a set of large subsidies designed to enable the U.S. to produce a new generation of computer chips without reliance on Taiwan or China. A trillion–dollar infrastructure act that promised to create three-quarters of a million jobs per year during the next decade, passed with bipartisan support. But the misnamed "Inflation Reduction Act," providing $370 billion in spending and tax credits for EV manufacture and health-insurance subsidies, was a Democratic measure that most Republicans thought a kissing cousin to the Green New Deal earlier put forward by the Democratic party's left wing. Likewise, a $280 billion dollar CHIPS and Science Act, designed to bring digital supply chains home also passed on a party-line vote.

This was "industrial policy," an effort to manage investment and target economic growth pushed forward by the liberal left since the 1970s. Andrew Elrod, Adam Tooze, and other historically–minded commentators have argued that such investments were championed by companies and industry sectors that saw China as a military and economic threat, among them semiconductor manufacturers, various defense contractors, and all those other firms whose trans–Pacific supply chains had been disrupted by Trump's erratic tariff bluster and the follow-on pandemic. The Biden Administration was in sync with such a military-oriented industrial policy, especially after Russia invaded Ukraine. Elrod called the outcome, which included a supporting vote by Joe Manchin, "the embrace of national security justifications for public expenditure," what National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan called "a strong, resilient, and leading edge techno–industrial base" that eclipsed the incipient BBB construction of an alternative economy enhancing the social and political power of workers and unions in the vast service sector. The conclusion: industrial policy in the U.S. is doomed unless linked to those forces and interests seeking to enhance the national security state.

However, the geopolitical impulse that stood behind the Biden infrastructure initiative did not mean that the expenditure of all that money had no progressive social consequences. During World War II, when an industrial policy was militarized far more directly, working–class incomes lurched upward and the trade unions, with recourse to a powerful War Labor Board, increased their membership by 50 percent. Recalcitrant employers faced government seizure of their enterprises. Bidenomics was less directly pro-union. Original versions of both the infrastructure law, the IRA, and the CHIPS Act required companies receiving benefits to remain neutral in the face of an organizing drive, and in the EV sector Biden wanted consumer rebates to go specifically to purchasers of union–built cars, which would have added $4,500 onto the existing $7,500 federal tax credit extended by the bill. But those pro–union provisions were stripped away in the face of united GOP opposition and the defection of Senators Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema from a slim Democratic majority.

That was a defeat, but we should not lose sight of why industrial policy has almost always been anathema to most non-military corporate interests and the political right. It was not just that Biden's program promised to rebuild a good slice of the nation's hollowed out manufacturing base, but that Bidenomics wrenched much economic power and decision making out of the hands of either corporate executives or conservative politicians, and put it with a federal government that socialized and politicized a giant set of investments.

Take for example the effort to build a green, electric vehicle manufacturing infrastructure in the American South. In decades past, conservative politicians had deployed a sort of policy blackmail when they sought to entice foreign automakers with a package of tax and loan incentives to build factories in their region. For example, in 2008 Tennessee officials gave Volkswagen a $577 million incentive package to build a factory complex in Chattanooga. Republican Senator Bob Crocker, formerly that city's major, had gotten VW to agree that the company would resist unionization as part of the incentive deal. But

by 2024 things were very different. The UAW had won large wage increases in a well–publicized and militant strike against the Detroit Big Three, forcing non–union auto firms in the South to raise wages and ameliorate or eliminate outright the two–tier wage structures put into place years earlier.

Southern politicians remained intensely hostile to unionism, with six governors from key auto manufacturing states putting out a joint statement denouncing the UAW as a socialist organization that would stop regional "growth in its tracks." But such threats now contained more bark than bite. With massive federal loans and other incentives encouraging a factory-building boom at VW and other foreign companies, neither auto industry managers nor workers paid much attention to state-level warnings of economic retaliation should workers choose to go union. In just two years after the 2022 passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, companies foreign and domestic announced more than $17 billion in Tennessee–based EV manufacturing investment, with nearby Georgia and North Carolina winning still more. This helped create an environment where factory managers tempered the most overt forms of anti–unionism, and in some cases proved genuinely neutral. A large majority of the 4,000 plus VW workers voted to join the UAW in Chattanooga, a thousand battery–plant workers voted for the same union in Spring Hill, and in Alabama and Georgia workers at heavily subsidized electric bus manufacturing firms also voted to go union.

But none of this had the political payoff that might have extended the life of a center–left government. The failure to pass the American Family Plan was probably most damaging. As Elrod has shown in an illuminating Phenomenal World essay, it was not just Manchin and Simena that torpedoed Biden's effort to advance a social infrastructure program. Their defection was backstopped by the mobilization of all those corporate forces – among them the National Retail Federation, the International Franchise Association, and the American Hotel and Lodging Association – determined to sustain a non-unionized, low-wage service sector. At the same time, the Biden Administration's failure to pass his Family Plan was disastrously compounded by the phasing out of all those pandemic era social supports, including the suspension of student loan payments, eviction controls, tax credits that halved child poverty, and direct cash payments to lower income Americans. From the point of view of millions of working-class Americans, their real income took an unexpected hit just as inflation robbed their higher wages of any substantially enhanced value. The IRA and other infrastructure initiatives would take years to have a large employment impact and still longer to make a dent in the political outlook of blue-collar America. In contrast, Biden's social infrastructure program, that would have compensated for the demise of all those pandemic era programs, would have had an immediate, election-year impact on the welfare of a far larger slice of the American electorate.

In this environment it is hard to say if the Harris campaign had much of a chance. Given her effort to distance herself from an unpopular president, Harris was reluctant to identify her potential presidency with a renewal of Bidenomics, and there is much evidence, as an analysis by the Center for Working-Class Politics makes clear, that the Harris campaign pivoted away from economically populist themes in the last two months of the campaign, playing down her support for a large minimum wage increase, union organizing rights, and higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy. Above all, the campaign failed to counter Trump's pseudo- populism with any equally visceral denunciation of corporate power and elite arrogance. Her defense of democratic norms and laws was right and just, but if it was a necessary progressive campaign plank, it was hardly sufficient to mobilize those sections of the Democratic electorate whose economic frustrations kept them disengaged. Donald Trump was hardly more popular in 2024 than four years before, but about 19 million Americans who cast ballots for Biden in 2020 failed to vote in 2024. The election is therefore best understood as a "vote of no confidence in Democrats, not an embrace of Trump or MAGA," writes Michael Podhorzer, a former political director of the AFL-CIO.

For organized labor there are two silver linings. First, union voters remained in the Harris camp by traditional Democratic margins, upwards of 15 to 20 percent overall. Despite the well-publicized MAGA curiosity of some union leaders, the rank and file remained steadfast, far more than their counterparts among the non-union working-class population. Unfortunately, this is partly a consequence of the degree to which the union movement is today composed of far more well educated and professional members than in past (more teachers and other government employees, fewer miners, waitresses, and factory workers), men and women who would vote for the Democrats even if they were not union members. Still, even among those with a poor command of English or without a college degree, union membership nudges consciousness to the left.

Second, while most unions strongly supported the Harris ticket, they don't feel responsible for the loss. Unlike Biden, Harris hardly identified with the labor movement. That so many working–class voters abstained in this election may well temper the degree to which organizing drives, strike votes and collective bargaining more generally are impacted by the Harris defeat. And while one should discount the degree to which MAGA politicians like Josh Hawley and J.D. Vance put forward workerist themes and legislation, the very fact that they feel compelled to do so may be of some rhetorical, even political, advantage to labor in its effort to maintain and take advantage of the favorable public opinion the movement now enjoys. The Trump years will be hard, but the unions can still fight.

Interview with Michael Hillard

MH: We are just ending what many consider the most pro-labor Presidency in decades. Looking back on Biden's term – just how influential is the federal government in this era on organizing, the balance of class power between workers and employers, and for the fortunes of the US working class? And how effective was the Biden administration at leveraging the power of the state on workers' behalf? Do you see missed opportunities from the last four years?

Unfortunately, the pro-union rhetoric of the Biden administration did not translate into meaningful changes in American labor relations, and it did not result in greater power for American workers, inside or outside of the workplace. The level of strike activity went back to what it had been prior to the pandemic, and in polls, more workers say that they want unions. The role of young workers in organizing the campaigns at Starbucks, Amazon, and among academic employees is culturally important. The rise of new and more politically aggressive leadership at unions such as the United Auto Workers matters too. But despite these positive developments, the Biden administration was unable to push for meaningful legislative reforms that would help workers to organize. As a result, the labor movement continued to lose members over the Biden years, and the claims of MAGA and of the right more generally—that entrepreneurship and business ownership rather than collective action are the way to achieve economic gains, security, and greater control over your own life—come to seem more plausible and appealing.

Being pro-union means much more than walking a picket line. It means using political capital to make it easier for workers to exercise their political rights to form unions, when they want to do so.

MH: Given Trump's victory – what does his election mean for the labor movement in the coming four years? What are you most worried about, and least worried about?

My greatest fear about the Trump administration for the labor movement is really its political vision. Trump taps into anti-elitist politics but channels it toward the veneration of authority, especially the authority and power of business and of "genius" entrepreneurs like himself. There are many problems with this, of course, but from the standpoint of the labor movement, it is a deeply anti-democratic vision, one in which the power of the boss is celebrated above all else and the right of the boss to exact punishment on disobedient workers is also praised. All kinds of political dissent and rebellion, under Trump, may be figured as the irresponsible acts of bad-mannered children who primarily need to be disciplined. This is a political atmosphere antithetical to democracy, but also to union organizing. Should the labor movement ever gain real dynamism, should we see real conflicts emerging in any part of American society, Trump will feel little compunction about repressing them forcefully and figuring those most involved as dangerous to his authority and to "legitimate" forms of authority (fathers, police, employers) throughout society. Trump puts forward a vision of society that

treats the working class as a collection of isolated and anomic entrepreneurs—in certain ways, a vision that suits our current "conjuncture" (as Stuart Hall might put it) and the disorganization of the working class.

More narrowly, I am concerned about the National Labor Relations Board appointments. Right now, the question of who has access to the right to organize (as frail as this is) is one of the central questions of the labor movement. Restricting the categories of workers who can access the protections of the NLRB is one of the major playbooks for the right.

Finally, on the positive side for labor: I can imagine that the deepening disillusionment of many young people with American politics may actually aid the labor movement, which is able to tap into a desire for political change at a time when electoral politics seems unable to deliver this.

MH: You have written quite a bit over the years about the "exceptional" power of American capital/capitalists in the workplace and US politics, and how this power has shaped the current fortunes of the American working class. Does the election have anything to say about the status of capital's power, and do you expect labor and working–class activists and their allies will be able to further challenge that power in the coming years?

The Trump administration would seem to be especially responsive to the kinds of businesses that have historically been at the forefront of anti-union politics. Trump is himself a real estate developer and a landlord whose wealth comes from a privately held family firm. His politics is in the vernacular of small business owners and manufacturers—sectors of the business class that have usually been especially militant in their opposition to unions, for reasons both economic and political. At the same time, many of the Silicon Valley tech magnates that have lined up behind Trump share his antipathy toward democracy

and toward any legal or collective restrictions on their own wealth and their own actions. They are forthright reactionaries, committed to a deeply anti-egalitarian vision of society and to their own right to rule.

It is interesting to think about how the economic coalition behind the Trump administration and the MAGA movement differ from earlier moments of conservative ascendance (a topic that journalist Doug Henwood has touched on, as has historian Steve Fraser). Like Trump, Ronald Reagan also really drew on a political movement that had mobilized small- and mid-sized manufacturers against the New Deal. But at that time, unions were still much stronger, corporate bureaucracies more stable, and American society was not as hierarchical as it is today. Trump leads a wing of the billionaire class that—like him—sees itself as a disruptive, chaotic force in American society, and embraces this. Reagan did not have anyone like the finance wizards or Elon Musk when he first ran for office.

I wish I could say that working-class activists will be able to challenge that power. I am sure that workers will continue seeking to gain greater control over their lives, and that the struggle to organize unions will be a major place where this happens. Overall, though, I think that we need to press for political rights more generally, and to continue to articulate basic civil and political rights of assembly, protest, and dissent. This will ultimately allow us to challenge the extreme concentration of power and wealth that at the moment seems to define American society.

Missing the Forest for the Trees:
Democrats Have More Than "a White Working Class Problem"

Max Fraser
Darmouth College

"Is this the end of the white working-class Democrat?" So mused the New York Times in the aftermath of last November's election. By most measures of the drubbing the party received at the hands of Donald Trump's GOP, the answer would seem to be yes. Although exit poll data broken down by race and income is notoriously hard to come by, fully two-thirds of white non-college graduates voted for Trump in 2024. The margins were similar or even larger among other more-or-less accurate group proxies for white working-class voters: roughly 70 percent of white rural voters, and more than 80 percent of white evangelicals (nearly three-quarters of whom do not have a college degree), likewise pulled the lever for Trump. In the various Midwestern swing states where white working-class voters tend to exercise an outsized influence—Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania—Trump not only delivered a clean sweep on Election Day but helped take down Ohio Senator and populist champion of the working classes Sherrod Brown while he was at it. (Ohio itself, until recently a perennial swing state, has become solidly Republican over the last couple election cycles, largely due to the shifting voting habits of working-class whites in the state's northeastern and Appalachian counties). In West Virginia, the second whitest state in the country and also the state with the second-lowest median income, Trump even managed to outdo his earlier runaway victories in 2016 and 2020 and took home a whopping 70 percent of the vote.

In any other year, these results would be understood as simply the latest proof of the ineluctable conservatism of "the white working class", that singular and monolithically reactionary force in American politics over the last five or six decades. But such a reading of the 2024 election is not only as flatly reductive as ever—it also obscures the bigger picture. The substantial margins that white voters with working-class signifiers—non-college educated whites, rural whites, evangelical whites, and by all indications low-income whites and whites in non-supervisory

job categories as well—gave to Trump last fall were essentially constant from 2016 and 2020. Among Latinx voters without a college-degree, however, Trump's support grew by 16 percent. Among Black men without a college degree, Trump improved his margin by 9 points over 2020. As the historian Matt Karp has noted, in an election year when almost every part of the country moved noticeably to the right, the places that experienced the biggest swings in that direction were not in the Rust Belt or Appalachia but along the Rio Grande in South Texas, in immigrant working-class New York City, throughout stretches of the southern Black Belt, and across indigenous western Alaska.

To be sure, it would be a mistake to confuse marginal changes with absolute numbers. Working class voters of color, especially Black voters, still voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party, and Donald Trump's latest victory should in no way be attributed to the "multi-ethnic, multi-racial coalition of hard-working Americans" that then-Florida Senator Marco Rubio fancifully invoked as the election results poured in.

But what November 5 did make clear is that what has been discussed since 2004, or 1980, or 1968, primarily as the Democratic Party's intractable "white working-class problem" has finally revealed itself to be what it truly is: simply a working-class problem. If the 2024 election results do not yet give credence to Rubio's vision of a Republican rainbow coalition, they do further bolster the comparisons that the economist Thomas Piketty and others have made between the United States and other industrialized nations around the world, which have also seen traditional labor-left parties losing support among blue-collar, non-college educated workers and replacing those voters with the generally better-off and more highly educated beneficiaries of the so-called post-industrial knowledge economy. In 2024, Kamala Harris won

just 43 percent of the vote from non-college graduates but received 56 percent from voters with a four-year degree and more than 60 percent from those with advanced degrees. Among voters making more than $200,000 a year—the top 15 percent of household earners in the country—52 percent voted for Harris. By an identical margin, households making between $30,000 and $100,000 gave their votes to Trump.

It is a striking fact of last November's election that despite the Biden administration's undeniable efforts to strategically target job-poor communities in the country's deindustrialized heartland with massive spending initiatives like the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS Act, Democrats still failed to make any headway with working class whites, and only lost ground with working class voters of color. What is now clear is that with a significant portion of the working class—certainly the largest and most heterogenous portion of the working class at any point since the New Deal coalition was first forged—the Democratic Party has lost its credibility as the party that can deliver on class-based social and economic issues. Wondering, then, whether this is "the end of the white working-class Democrat" misses the forest for the trees. Here may lie 2024's most enduring legacy: as the year when the class-coordinates that largely framed American politics for the better part of a century were relegated once and for all to the dustbin of history.

Letter from the Treasurer

Dear LAWCHA Members,

I am happy to announce we have crossed the $200,000 mark and are continuing our matching challenge from our former president, Julie Greene. Our goal is a strong and useful endowment of $750,000 by 2029. We would love to announce that we've met Julie's match challenge of $25,000 before our meeting this summer. Can you donate $50 toward this goal?

As we move into a changing political climate for labor and higher education, we reflect on the vital work of the Labor and Working-Class History Association (LAWCHA) — a community dedicated to researching and preserving the stories and struggles of workers while fostering opportunities for collaboration, education, and organization. Your membership, and previous donations make it possible to advance and safeguard our mission, which will be even more important as we prepare to meet the challenges of the coming years.

LAWCHA's effectiveness depends on contributions from members like you. These funds enable us to keep dues low, offer scholarships for members to attend LAWCHA conferences, pay our one part-time staff member properly, and support our efforts to get labor and working-class scholarship to the widest audience possible. Your support also helps us remain a powerful and independent advocate for labor history and labor organizing in academia and beyond.

If you have questions about stock donations or a bequest, reach out to LAWCHA Treasurer Liesl Orenic at lorenic@dom.edu.

Together, we can continue to celebrate and protect the history of working people. Thank you for your solidarity and generosity.

Please consider a GIFT TODAY.

Liesl Miller Orenic
Dominican University

LAWCHA

The Labor and Working–Class History Association

Mark your Calendars!

LAWCHA's 2025 Conference
"Making Work Matter: Solidarity and Action across Space and Time"

Grad Student Workshop, June 11-12, 2025
LAWCHA Conference, June 12-14, 2025
University of Chicago

As recent events have shown, workers around the globe are facing many diverse challenges. Whether it's contingent faculty, non-union employees, migrant workers in the U.S. or across the globe who are trafficked or severely exploited, workers being displaced by technology and AI, or those participating in the new "gig economy" of part-time and insecure labor without benefits, the world of work is changing at a rapid pace. The 2025 LAWCHA Conference will consider the broad theme of "Making Work Matter: Solidarity and Action across Space and Time" and its panels will connect the challenges of work today with struggles and stories of the past.

The program committee will finalize the program and get word out to those who have submitted paper or panel proposals by mid-February. An announcement regarding travel grants for grad students and contingent faculty will follow. See conference information on our website at https://lawcha.org/biannual-conference/2025-conference/

LAWCHA 2025 Program Co-Chairs:

Lilia Fernandez, *University of Illinois at Chicago*

Emily E. LB. Twarog, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Conference email: LAWCHA2025@gmail.com

LAWCHA at AHA 2025

Eileen Boris
University of California, Santa Barbara

LAWCHA cosponsored 14 sessions at the AHA, one of which we put together but was submitted through Radical History Review due to timing. Faith Bennett gives a summary of that session below. These sessions range over time and space, including "Insecurity and Wageless Life in the New Deal Order;" "Global Chinese Lives: Work, Exchange, and Activism across Borders"; "Pragmatism and Socialism: A Long American Tradition?"; "New Directions in the History of Sexual Labor, Migration, Race, and Governance"; "Investing in Ourselves: Black Community Building and Economic Uplift in the Mid-20th Century"; and "Working and Organizing in Diaspora; Syrian, Puerto Rican, and Sephardic Jewish Women Workers in the ILGWU." As Vice-President, I attended the AHA called affiliates meeting. The AHA explained that it was ready to serve as a connecter between historical affiliates and a facilitator of services, like web design and financial management through providing information and again linking affiliates together which may want to share in costs. I raised some larger questions facing the professional societies, that is, how do we sustain groups like the AHA if there is no profession? If rising scholars become precarious gig workers, who is going to do peer reviews and promotion letters, be able to afford to come to conferences, or participate in our organizations? This question is central to Scholars for a New Deal for Higher Education but also to our own committee on contingent workers and the growing labor movement among teaching assistants and faculty in universities, as organized in HELU (Higher Education Labor United, a wall-to-wall and coast-to-coast new labor federation.). There was a lively discussion with interest in these questions that most labor and working-class historians embrace.

If you are interested in presenting with LAWCHA or through LAWCHA at the 2026 AHA, please contact me asap. The AHA deadline is mid-February but usually there is some leeway for the affiliated societies to propose a few sessions on our own. Finally I would like to thank the members of our external program committee for their help with the AHA 2025, especially Justine Modica, Dana Caldemeyer, and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer. If you would like to join the external program committee, whose role is to link LAWCHA to other conferences, let us know!

 - Faith Bennett, UC Davis

LAWCHA and the *Radical History Review* presented a roundtable titled "Labor Educators, Labor Historians and Labor Activists: A Conversation" chaired by Samir Sonti which included panelists Brandon Mancilla, Nelson Lichtenstein, Alethia Jones, and Faith Bennett. The early morning session was attended by an engaged audience that included graduate students, contingent scholars, professors, K-12 educators, and other union members. Panelists made brief opening remarks on the legacy of the UAW and the increased prevalence of academic workers within the union, the need for care and reflection in the labor movement, and the role of dissent and disagreement in the labor movement and as a topic of labor history. Questions from attendees and the chair prompted discussion of the wall-to-wall strategy in academic unions, the role of political education, and differing organizing strategies across academic unions affiliated with the UAW, AFT, and others. Panelists and attendees alike continued conversation after the panel's formal end, demonstrating the enthusiasm at the AHA for consideration of the intersection of participation in and study of the labor movement.

Labor Spring Report

Lane Windham
Georgetown University

A broad coalition of academics, activists, unionists, students and more are once again planning Labor Spring, a series of events happening throughout the Spring semester on campuses and in communities nationwide. See the full call for participation, and sign up here!   Labor Spring held more than 80 events nationwide in both 2023 and 2024.

Labor Spring 2025 will support workers' organizing efforts in a broad range of events, 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.

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. The events could be in-person, virtual or hybrid. For more information, including to join the national planning committee, contact Alexis Harper at kilwp@georgetown.edu   Labor Spring is a project of the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor of Georgetown University

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Labor History Bibliography 2024
Compiled by Rosemary Feurer, Northern Illinois University

Accessible at Labor Online: http://www.lawcha.org/2025/01/31/bibliography-2024