The New York Labor History Association’s annual May program took place on May 14 — virtually! The exhibit, panel discussion and book launch took place in conjunction with the Municipal Archives, which normally welcomes its patrons to visit their location on Chambers Street in lower Manhattan. The event was cosponsored and hosted by the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives/Tamiment Library. On Thursday evening, May 14, approximately 150 people zoomed in to take part in the program. While the pandemic doomed the public program, technology saved the day.

Manhattan Borough Historian Rob Snyder started things rolling with a welcome to participants and the celebration of the book, *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives*, just re-issued by the NYU Press in a paperback edition. “We are gathered at a difficult time,” Synder said. “There is no better source to look at working people in New York City. Tonight, the present has a particular relevance.” He noted that Debra Bernhardt, co-author of OPEL along with Rachel Bernstein, had the ability to have constructive conversations with people she differed with, one of her many strengths.

**Spotlight on essential workers**

Next up was Alexander Bernhardt Bloom, Debra’s son, able to take part from Galicia, Spain. He spoke about the timeliness of the book, with so much focus now on the everyday work that supports our lives. Alex centered his remarks on a recitation of a piece written by Henry Foner. “Henry was an object of affection and inspiration, and offers a model to look to, especially at a time like this,” said Bloom. Then he read some of the lyrics from *The Song of the Pennies*, written by Foner and Norman Franklin, in 1947. The theme is the department store workers — the pennies — protesting their wage slavery against the Greenbacks — the capitalists. “It takes the cleaners and stenographers / and the folks on the stockroom crew / And the thousand-and-one who make the big store run / in whatever the job they do.”

Rachel Bernstein, public historian and director of LaborArts.org, spoke about her friend and co-author, Debra Bernhardt. “Debra explained that she did the work she did so that she would be able to look her children in the eye and say: I wanted to stop this — meaning the work was done with the goal of making the world a better place.” Bernstein described the path that the two historians traveled to connect to archivists and archival collections, beginning with a two-year search; two conferences; workshops; an exhibit; and eventually, the book, published in 2000. “The work was all collaborative,” she said. “To me, the most important theme in the book is about the culture of solidarity. It has taken many forms; there have been divisions and setbacks. But when culture is strong, we find the work of artists and see the power of art. Debra would be thrilled to see this book in 2020.”

**Activist archivists**

Commissioner Pauline Toole spoke next about the terrific cache of photographs of workers in both the Municipal Archives, in the exhibit mounted for the program, and those in the first two chapters of the book, OPEL. “What do archivists do? They collect and organize records. What do historians do? They analyze records. Debra did both,” she said. Toole described the challenge that the historian Howard Zinn issued to archivists in 1970: to document the lives of working people — to be activist archivists. “One of the great things that this book does is to serve as a bridge between the past and the present,” she said.

A panel discussion, moderated by former Central Labor Council official and labor professor at the City University, Ed Ott, followed with four young

continued on page 3
Green Interlude
By Molly Charboneau

One day as I was pruning to help nurture city trees
I met a man on duty with the power utility.
“Excuse me, what is that tree there?” he asked as I drew near.
“Why, that’s a common street tree known as a Callery pear.”

He nodded, then continued, “Yes, but what does that tree do?”
“It cleans the air, holds nests for birds and shades the sidewalk, too.”
“I’m Jamaican,” he went on, “and we use plants traditionally.
So, trees and shrubs, and flowers and herbs, they always interest me.”

I smiled and thought, well here’s my chance to ask a question, too.
“So, tell me what’s your recipe for cooking callaloo?”
“Sauté is best — releases iron and cuts the bitter taste.
You chop the plant up, leaf and stem. That way there is no waste.”

We talked about a dandelion in soil beneath the pear,
Then pointing down the block I said, “Do you see that tree there?
It’s called a linden and it makes a lovely, mild iced tea
To help you sleep on those hot nights when there is no AC.”

He laughed at that, since his job was electrical repair,
While mine was helping nature keep our urban climate fair.
Then I returned to pruning, he to tasks he had to do,
Continuing our vital work to keep our city cool.
Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives

continued from page 1
panelists: Laborer Shi Greene, organizer Myriam Hernandez, electrician Shauna Irving, and teacher Donna Chen. Greene spoke about her experiences in Laborers Local 79. Now in her seventh year, she worked for a non-union plumbing firm prior to joining the apprenticeship program. “I was about to lose my job, and my home, due to missing work because of insufficient child care,” she said. She spoke about the opportunities the union has opened up for her, from being on the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC, to attending the national Women Rebuild Conference in Minneapolis. She described her introduction to labor education, and learning about the Triangle Fire in union classrooms. Greene expressed her gratitude for the progress that building trades’ unions have made regarding safety and minority representation, and “for showing women that we are stronger than we thought.” Greene’s greatest accomplishment comes from being able to “pay it forward” for others.

Advocate for immigrants

Myriam Hernandez described her difficult journey from Ecuador to New York City, and the opportunities that have resulted from her membership in Local 32BJ. “I was working as an office cleaner. I had to deal with all of those difficulties of immigrant workers,” she said. “The lack of family support; the lack of language. It is very hard. But you learn that you have rights in this country.”

Now, as an organizer, she works to ensure that other immigrants learn about their rights and exercise them. “Now I am an advocate for immigrant workers and am happy to be doing it.”

Shauna Irving spoke about being an African-American woman, and her pathway to Local 3. “I heard about NEW and from that pre-apprenticeship program was able to become a Local 3 Journeywoman. “Local 3 has given me so many opportunities,” she said. “It has such a rich history. There are so many opportunities to volunteer. I went to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. I also serve as the Vice President of the Amber Lights Society, which has been embraced by countless journeywomen in Local 3. My union, the IBEW, has given me a sense of community that I didn’t grow up with,” she said.

Donna Chen, the daughter of activist labor leader and community activist May Chen, spoke about her desire to return to her roots when she began teaching. Her comments focused on diversity, both the progress that’s been made, as evidenced in the pages of the re-issued OPEL; “the engagement and shifts in advocacy efforts; the gains made in bi-lingual education, which is no longer called by that name; but also much more work that needs to be done.” Chen spoke about the recent report issued by a youth school diversity group, on “The Five Rs of Real Integration,” and the critical need to build solidarity with parents, to advocate alongside them. “When my mom called me, and asked me to participate in this event, it was like coming full circle,” Chen said. “I’m very gratified to be here and to have my voice and story included.”

The Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Collections Curator Shannon O’Neill concluded the program, thanking Debra’s family, Rachel Bernstein and Debra for the gift of their book, the panelists for sharing their stories, and noted that, of the eight months she has been in her position (two under quarantine), she often stops to ask herself what her predecessor would do. O’Neill quoted Debra on the topic of suitable collections: “In Debra’s view, all collections having to do with working people are important.”

Successful celebration

A lively Q&A followed and the program concluded with a powerful rendition of Sam Cooke’s anthem, A Change is Gonna Come, performed by poet, theater artist, and Actors Equity member, Rachel Caro-Perez.

Exhibits on both Henry Foner singing The Song of the Pennies; and on Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives, are available on the LaborArts.org website; In addition, this program is available on the LaborArts site, plus a photo exhibit connected to the book is available on the website of the Municipal Archives.

The book can be ordered from NYUPress.org. Use this code for 30% discount; ORDINARYPPL30 R.
If you’re in search of some historical perspectives on the last major pandemic, one of the deadliest pandemics in human history, here are two sources that take us back to that period — when World War I had ended and the influenza pandemic spread across the globe — in three waves. The 1918 — 1919 pandemic was largely forgotten, despite the terrific toll it took on the population, and the economy.

Cal Winslow’s excellent essay, “When the Seattle General Strike and the 1918 Flu Collided,” captures a stirring story. Read it and be inspired: https://jacobinmag.com/2020/05/seattle-general-strike-1918-spanish-flu

Sandra Bloodworth’s essay, “Class War in the Spanish Flu Pandemic, March 20, 2020, (REDFLAG), starts with this compelling hook: “Lots of people are thinking about the Spanish flu right now. That pandemic of the past didn’t just cause mass death. It also led to class struggle.” Find it at: https://redflag.org.au/node/7065

As Alice Kessler-Harris recalls, the publishing date for her book, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America*, was scheduled for September 13, 2001. “The Institute for Research on Women and Gender planned a big launch party, and Bert and I — who were spending the year at the Radcliffe Institute in Cambridge, Mass — had arranged to return to the city. When the disaster hit on Sept. 11 — we did not at first think of the book. Our thoughts were about New York, our home, our family, our friends. But when the phone started ringing the next morning, we knew that we had to make a decision. Should the party go on? How would people get there? Was it appropriate to celebrate anything in the midst of the dust and devastation? In the end, the publisher (Oxford) helped us to make the decision. We all need the feedback of friends and critics to locate ourselves in the world.”

Two scholars have their say

Why not go ahead? Life would go on — and a new book would provide an excuse to get together for those who could. So we did. Bert and I drove down from Cambridge; the roads were nearly deserted; people were fleeing New York City — not coming into it. We felt good about coming home to share the city’s tragedy. The launch cheered everyone up. For me, it proved essential. It reminded me that even though the book tour was cancelled, talks postponed, and reviews ditched for more timely subjects, the book hadn’t just disappeared. In retrospect, I was lucky. A virus that separates people from each other, is quite different from a disaster that brings people together. I could have at least one public moment. Now, I hope for those caught in the current moment that there will be literary celebrations, written commentaries, virtual talks.

New From Oxford

**The Southern Key**

**CLASS, RACE, AND RADICALISM IN THE 1930S AND 1940S**

By Michael Goldfield

The Southern Key explains the reasons for the failure of the US South to unionize—especially during the 1930s and 1940s—and why this is crucial to understanding the evolution of American politics since that era. It is argued, primarily, that the failure of the labor movement to fully confront white supremacy led to its ultimate failure in the South, and that this regional failure has led to the nationwide decline in labor unionism, growing inequality, and the perpetuation of white supremacy.

**Features**

- Includes analysis of previously unexamined archival material from dozens of southern archives
- Uses historical analysis to make theoretically compelling claims about contemporary US politics
- Offers an extremely interdisciplinary work, utilizing political science, economics, sociology, race studies, labor history, and southern history

“*The political and scholarly importance of The Southern Key cannot be overstated. Michael Goldfield’s empirically thorough and theoretically reflective work convincingly argues that the failures of southern labor during the 1930s and 1940s are essential for understanding everything else that has happened since, in the US, and therefore also in the world at large.*

—Marcel van der Linden, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

March 2020
Hardcover | 9780190079321
432 pages
£54.97

Michael Goldfield is Professor Emeritus of Political Science and currently Research Fellow at the Fraser Center for Workplace Issues at Wayne State University.

Order online at global.oup.com/academic with promotion code AAFYG6 to save 30%!
Publishing in a time of peril

continued from previous page
and writing, to see your book
 birthed into the marketplace
in a period that differs so
dramatically from former times.
We invited scholars to share
their experiences. Like Alice
Kessler-Harris, they are not
new to publishing. Michael
Goldfield is the author of The
Southern Key: Class, Race, &
Radicalism in the 1930s &
1940s, published by Oxford
University Press on March
16. David Witwer, the author
of two earlier books, wrote
his new book with his wife,
Catherine Rios. Their book,
Murder in the Garment
District: The Grip of Organized
Crime and the Decline of Labor,
was published on May 5 by
The New Press. Here, the
authors share their strategies
for getting their books into the
hands of the readers.

Mike Goldfield: My book
was delayed in its publication.
It was originally supposed
to be out by the first of the
year; then in early February,
I showed up for a book
signing in Washington, D.C.,
but my book did not show.
I gave a talk at Harvard on
March 4, and at the Citadel
in Charleston, SC, March 5
(by which time copies were
available). Then things got
scary. So, my wife and I have
been sheltering in place in
Michigan since then. All
my immediate talks and
conferences were cancelled,
prompted or put on hold.
To top things off, the
warehouse that my publisher
ships from was shut down
as a nonessential business,
although it is now open.
Fortunately, I had several
radio interviews and podcasts
that preceded all this. My
publisher has done a number
of good things (e.g., I like the
cover design that they did; the
endorsements; etc.). But for
promotion, I have basically
been on my own. With my
previous books, I paid little
attention to promotion;
reviews seemed to happen, or
not. But this time, I sent out
emails to a lot of my friends
and contacts. I am fairly new
to Facebook, but several of
my friends and colleagues
have large followings there
and on Twitter, and have
been reposting interviews and
podcasts, helping to publicize
the book.

Sharing the stories
I was also fortunate to have
a number of articles published
related to the book research.
The first was an article in
Labor on “The Myth of 7a,”
which argued that the coal
miners were fully organized
before any enabling legislation
was actually passed, contrary
to what most commentators
suggest. I was also invited
to publish several articles, a
number before the shutdown.
The Oxford Encyclopedia
of American History has
invited me to write a piece
on Operation Dixie and
southern labor organizing,
which fortuitously came out
at the beginning of 2020.
Both of these articles were co-
authored with Cody Melcher.
I was also asked to write a
piece for Jacobin on the 100th
anniversary of the founding
of the U.S. Communist Party,
which drew on material in the
book. A number of magazines
and blogs have written
summaries of the book. So, I
have been fairly busy, writing
and doing online events.
This has been something
of a surprise. My book has
also put me in touch with a
number of labor organizers
who I did not previously
know who are organizing
essential workers in relatively
unsafe conditions, many
of whom are in the South.
So, aside from the general
distress we all feel, both for
ourselves, and the millions
of people in this country, but
especially in less developed
countries, I have been able to
plug along a bit.

Past meets present
My book has several
dimensions. The first, of

course, is to provide a detailed
account based on many
years of archival research
of the failures in southern
labor organizing, and the
implications for the country
as a whole. The second is an
argument that the failure of
southern labor organizing
during the 1930s and 1940s,
especially the extension
of seemingly promising
interracial unionism, laid
the basis for much that
followed; the character of the
civil rights movement; white
backlash; the racist evolution
of the Republican (and to
some extent the Democratic)
Party; and Trump. This is
an aspect of the book that I
believe makes it potentially
continued on next page
I am including a discount coupon for those who might be interested.

David Witwer and Catherine Rios: We are taking part in virtual book talks. Later this month, on May 26th, at 7 PM, for instance, the Brooklyn Historical Society will be holding a book talk via Zoom. We will be discussing our work with Joseph McCartin and will be accessible to questions from an on-line audience. We have also been writing and submitting Op Ed pieces that are related to our work. You may have encountered one that was published a couple of months ago on the movie, The Irishman, and the film’s take on issues involving labor corruption and organized crime, which are similar to the subjects that our book covers. This coming academic year, I (David) will be the Penn State Laureate, a university-wide year-long position, in which I am tasked with talking about my scholarship to students, faculty, alumni and the general public throughout the state. I plan to use these talks to promote awareness of the book.

Definitely, our publisher has a very helpful and active publicity division. They have been actively involved in helping to set up book talks, like the one later this month and promoting book reviews in mainstream publications, such as The New York Times. We think that, in time, there will be more public presentations, especially via the Penn State Laureate. But having spent the last few weeks conducting classes and meetings via Zoom, we have to say that we find such online interactions to have real benefits and the potential to reach audiences in important new ways.

Beating labor back

We are struck by some of the parallels between today and the time period covered in our book. Labor was resurgent in the 1950s and poised to make significant gains. But just at that moment of potential for growth, anti-union elements were able to seize on flagrant cases of corruption and labor racketeering to tarnish the labor movement and justify efforts to curtail its power. In a similar way, just as the current crisis has highlighted the need for a stronger union movement, and amid signs of a rebirth of labor militancy, we see scandals, such as the one involving the leadership of the United Auto Workers union, being seized upon by anti-unionists. Corruption remains today, as it was in the 1950s, a potent issue, and one that labor’s opponents avidly use to their benefit. As in the 1950s, so too today, mainstream labor struggles to find an effective response, one that acknowledges and tackles those relatively rare but still reprehensible instances of corruption or racketeering, while at the same time offering an effective political rebuttal to the political use of this issue.

The narrative of union corruption entrenched in the 1950s curbed the progress of labor and weakened the American worker. To strengthen workers now, vital to the economic recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, requires a deep analysis of the conditions that led to the corruption as well as its political exploitation.

Our most important strategy was to get the book placed with the right publisher, which we think we did. The New Press specializes in publishing books by scholars that seriously address issues, but which do so in ways that aim to reach beyond the academy. The New Press helped us to create a book with a strong narrative line that would appeal to a broader audience, and now they have played important roles in publicizing the book.

Luckily, we have an old and valued friend at the New York Labor History Association. We are drawing on similar connections with other labor historians to try to arrange book talks/virtual book talks at venues such as the Tamiment-Wagner Library and the Special Collections Library at the University of Maryland, both sites that hold record collections that we used in the research for this book.
ON FEBRUARY 12, the New York Labor History Association, The Tamiment Library, and the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee co-sponsored a book launch and discussion of Andrew Feffer’s *Bad Faith: Teachers, Liberalism, and the Origins of McCarthyism*. The book was published in 2019 by Fordham University Press, and has generated a number of interesting reviews. Rather than report on the discussion at Tamiment, we are excerpting some selections taken from two reviews. The first, by NYLHA board member, historian and member of the PSC Steve Leberstein, was published in Cornell’s *New York History Journal*.

**First full study**

“Despite the notoriety of the Rapp Coudert Committee in its time (known by the name of its dual chairs, Herbert Rapp and Frederick Coudert, Jr.), no full-length study of it appeared before the recent publication of Andrew Feffer’s book … Feffer has done an excellent job of explaining the history of this attack on the faculty of New York City’s municipal colleges, mainly Brooklyn and City College. While we might ascribe the purge that resulted to reactionary political forces, he shows how it was liberal intellectuals and politicians who took charge of this attack, claiming that left-wing faculty were guilty of ‘bad faith’ for their supposed radicalization of their students. … If that purge succeeded in its aim of ridding the public colleges of their troublemakers, it did so by substituting the judgment of politicians for the professional autonomy that is the indispensable mainstay of academic freedom. … The distinction between academic freedom and the Constitutional freedoms of speech and assembly, however, deserves some further examination. And placing Rapp Coudert in the broader context of failure of the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Association of University Professors to stand up against the toxic tide of anti-Communism, would provide a broader context for the purge.”


“Historian Andrew Feffer challenges us to rethink both our standard narrative about the emergence of McCarthyism and our conventional political categories. Such substantial and consequential arguments are supported by a remarkably detailed exploration of a little-known episode of anticommunist persecution that took place in New York between 1940 and 1942, the Rapp-Coudert hearings. While Feffer takes his readers through the process that eventually led to the firings or forced resignations of more than 40 teachers at City College of New York and Brooklyn College, he also situates this outcome as deeply connected to conflicts from within New York teachers’ unions themselves — in particular, disputes between liberals and leftists that reached back into the 1930s and involved some of the most respected representatives of the liberal creed. As a result, Feffer challenges more common ways of approaching the relationship between liberals and leftists.”

COLLECTING IN THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC

**A Wagner Labor Archives project**

**THE TAMIMENT LIBRARY** and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives seeks to create a record for the long-term understanding of the lives of New Yorkers, especially the working-class in New York, during COVID-19. In addition to archiving labor movement and COVID-19 activism websites and online content, the Tamiment-Wagner Collections invites you to document your experience during the COVID-19 crisis. Keep your letters, your photographs, your journals; perhaps you are working collectively to organize your colleagues: the meeting minutes, agendas, flyers you are creating are significant. If you’re interested in finding an archival home for those documents that you are producing, please contact Shannon O’Neill, Curator for Tamiment-Wagner Collections at smo224@nyu.edu. Though the Tamiment-Wagner Collections are temporarily unable to accept donations of materials at this time, due to working remotely and the constraints of social distancing, Shannon would love to have a conversation with you about the long-term preservation of your records. Shannon O’Neill.
Profiles in Activism

Since 1976, the New York Labor History Association has relied on the talents of many individuals. In an all-volunteer organization, a wide variety of skills and expertise has sustained the work of promoting labor history and bringing our programs to the public. We offer these interviews of two new board members — Kyle Friend, 24, and Marcia Newfield, 84 — both of whom bring fresh voices and a terrific range of talents to the NYLHA.

Marcia Newfield

Q: Are you a New York City native?
I was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, but was raised in the Bronx from two months old, so I guess I can be considered a native.

Q: Your early writing career is so interesting. What are some of the things you wrote that you particularly like or feel proud of having written?
I guess that my poems are closest to my heart…both they and my children’s books came out of intense reflection and persistence.

In 1972, I wrote a book called *Iggy*, about a formerly mistreated iguana who lives a pampered life and lives in a shower stall. In 1975, I wrote *A Book for Jordan*, the story of a girl and her daddy, who are separated by divorce, and she wonders, what can be done to keep them together?

Q: With so many union members apathetic, what led you to become an activist and then take on ever-escalating roles of leadership in the Professional Staff Congress (PSC)?
I began teaching English as an adjunct at CUNY in 1988. My involvement grew by leaps and bounds as I fought for representation, better health insurance, salary increases, better pensions, office hours, promotion and respect. I served as vice president of the PSC part-time personnel from 2002 to 2015. I was teaching at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and Long Island University. I also served as an adjunct grievance counselor, and member of the Executive Committee and the negotiating team. I became an active member of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) in its formative years; I coordinated the COCAL XI Conference in New York City in 2014, and served as the co-editor of the September 2015 *Working USA* issue on *Contingent Academic Labor: The Way Forward*.

I started teaching concurrent with an involvement in the civil rights movement, self-help, and feminism. As I became more and more aware of the inequalities in the academic community and found others who, like me, wanted to change things, momentum built. Simultaneously, there was a movement of full-time activists in the PSC, the New Caucus, with whom the adjuncts bonded, and we went on together to achieve the union leadership in 2000.

Q: Contingent academic labor — as the number of adjuncts has grown, did their leverage increase and what are some of the gains that especially improved their lives?
We made some significant gains in terms of roles in leadership as well as increased adjunct membership in the union. We have made salary gains, received dedicated funds for professional development, have more access to insurance, and receive pay for office hours.

continued page 10
Kyle Friend

Q: Tell me about your home town?

I grew up in a small city of 10,000 people near the center of New York state, called Oneida — the birthplace of the concept of “free love” and home to the world’s smallest church, oddly enough. It bordered the Oneida Indian nation and was home for the better part of the 20th century to the world’s largest silverware manufacturer, Oneida Limited. It’s not an exaggeration to say my life was shaped by those plants — my mother, step-father, grandma, grandpa, and both of my uncles worked there, making spoons, knives, and forks.

Around 2004 — 2005, after allowing the brand onto WalMart’s shelves, the retail giant continued to pressure Oneida to lower the cost of production. To do so, they shifted production overseas, laying off every single one of my family members and 500 more of my neighbors. The city changed drastically as tax revenues declined and people were out of work. It no longer was a “nice” place to live; drugs, especially meth, took over downtown Oneida. People left as the jobs did, further depleting the area’s resources.

It really shaped how I view work, and is probably closely tied to why I ended up in the career I did. I was the first person in my entire family to go to college — which made more sense considering they could all make a good honorable living at the silverware plants.

Q: You had an interesting mix of concentrations at Cornell. How do you see the inequality studies and the law and society focus working together and having an impact on our current problems?

I think they’re of central importance when thinking through the issues we’re looking at today. There is a reason, constructed intentionally and well in advance of COVID-19, why black and brown folks are hardest-hit, dying at higher rates, and suffering the most financially from the pandemic. I view the entire American system as rooted in a goal to maintain inequality through a system of laws, regulations, and cultural practices built by and for those at the very top.

Q: As a Research Fellow working with Dr. Lois Gray, what did you take away from that experience?

Dr. Gray gave me so much confidence in myself. Being such a titan in her field for so many years, it was an honor to work with her to research the topic of women working in the construction industry in New York City, an issue she had been passionate about for decades. She used to tell me that my work ethic reminded her of herself, which was the biggest ego boost she could’ve ever given me.

Q: What are some of the exciting things you have been experiencing as the Communication Strategist for the OPEIU?

The first thing to come to mind is being a part of the creation of the first-ever tech worker union in U.S. history, Kickstarter United. I spent a decent amount of time in college studying and theorizing how best to help this growing segment of the economy be better for the workers in it, so it was truly one of the pleasures of my life to have conducted research, written releases, etc., to help them win their campaign.

I recently authored a lengthy guide on how to conduct research on non-profits, corporations, hospitals, etc. It is very fulfilling to directly be able to help our organizers and potential members think through and conceptualize all of the different factors that will influence their campaign. To know that something I did has a direct, positive impact on someone’s life is the greatest gift the labor movement has given me personally, and why I keep going.

Besides being the international research person, I also run the union’s social media accounts, write for the White Collar magazine on a range of topics, and authored our national legislative agenda, which guides our priorities in the halls of power.

Q: The outsourcing project you did seems to have a special relevance now. Also the work you did on the housing crisis. Are you entertaining any plans for future work in journalism, or do you feel able to satisfy your interests within the labor movement?

I gave up my career in journalism because I was tired of writing about things when I knew I was capable of doing things that deserved to be written about. It was difficult to maintain “objectivity” when I see the world as objectively skewed against the interests of working-class people, like my family. I find the work admirable, and clearly important, but it left a hole in me that was difficult to fill. I was more interested in changing the world than simply interpreting it. Luckily, the skills I learned as a journalist — most importantly, the ability to simply see a task and then complete a task, no matter what — have helped me tremendously in my work at OPEIU.

The way I think about issues has informed virtually every aspect of my work. That being said, I have always toyed with the idea of becoming a labor journalist later in life. I would like to write a book on how my hometown was disrupted by WalMart — both in the way described above, by lowering labor costs, but also by physically opening a store in my hometown, running smaller retailers out of business.

Q: What is the importance or relevance of labor history in today’s world?

For the untrained eye, the issues we’re collectively facing today may seem novel. But, armed with a background of labor history, it’s clear that these contemporary issues are the exact same issues we’ve been working on for decades. There is nothing new about a lack of care for workers’ rights among employers and the political class. There’s nothing to suggest...
However, the gap between full-time and adjunct jobs is still enormous in terms of salary, job security, and benefits. Careers and precarious jobs are still miles apart.

Q: Now, with teaching having moved on-line, how do you see the precarious nature of contingent labor at CUNY?

It is more precarious than ever. Adjuncts have to adjust to new techniques on their own time; they are scared. There is also a growing momentum for change in higher education that is mirrored throughout the United States, in both public and private institutions. CUNY graduates, and that includes many adjuncts, make their livelihoods in the city and contribute to the culture and the tax base. What kind of education will further their lives? What kind of jobs will be available to them?

Q: How do you see the relevance of labor history now and why does it matter?

Connecting to the NYLHA has brought me in touch with people whose life-long activism and scholarship I greatly admire. Their work sheds light on how we got to where we are, the politics and possibilities of working people. That light becomes a rainbow path to change. It is always stimulating to get in touch with your roots. It can give you courage, even though you realize that there has always been struggle and defeat. History as viewed through periods and people who have otherwise been stereotyped can be transformative. Art that has given voice to labor is inspiring.

Profiles in activism – Marcia Newfield

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However, the gap between full-time and adjunct jobs is still enormous in terms of salary, job security, and benefits. Careers and precarious jobs are still miles apart.

Q: Now, with teaching having moved on-line, how do you see the precarious nature of contingent labor at CUNY?

It is more precarious than ever. Adjuncts have to adjust to new techniques on their own time; they are scared. There is also a growing momentum for change in higher education that is mirrored throughout the United States, in both public and private institutions. CUNY graduates, and that includes many adjuncts, make their livelihoods in the city and contribute to the culture and the tax base. What kind of education will further their lives? What kind of jobs will be available to them?

Q: How do you see the relevance of labor history now and why does it matter?

Connecting to the NYLHA has brought me in touch with people whose life-long activism and scholarship I greatly admire. Their work sheds light on how we got to where we are, the politics and possibilities of working people. That light becomes a rainbow path to change. It is always stimulating to get in touch with your roots. It can give you courage, even though you realize that there has always been struggle and defeat. History as viewed through periods and people who have otherwise been stereotyped can be transformative. Art that has given voice to labor is inspiring.
“Silk Walk” bricks honor the memory of Philoine Fried and Bessie Abramowitz

By Keith Danish

The American Labor Museum/Botto House, in Haledon, New Jersey has unveiled memorial bricks sponsored by the N.Y. Labor History Association to honor the memory of our co-founder and long-time Treasurer, Philoine Fried, a lifelong labor activist, and her mother, Bessie Abramowitz, who, together with her husband Sidney Hillman, made the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America an exemplar of Social Unionism. A memorial brick honoring Mr. Hillman had already been installed in the Botto House “Silk Walk”, where the names and histories of many other labor leaders and social justice activists are kept alive. A public unveiling ceremony was not possible this year due to the Covid Virus, but it is expected to take place in June 2021. Your support for the Botto House (which is a member of our Association) would be appreciated in these difficult times.
Profiles in activism – Kyle Friend

continued from page 9

the COVID-19 crisis has done anything but exacerbate existing issues, and we’re prone to do it again, if we don’t stop it beforehand.

Demonstrations across the country continue with hundreds of thousands of citizens calling for change in policing practices. George Floyd’s name now joins those of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Laquan McDonald, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray and so many more — Black men murdered by police. While Black Americans account for less than 13 percent of the population, they are shot and killed by the police at a disproportionate rate that is twice as high as for white Americans. (In Minnesota, black people are four times as likely to be killed by law enforcement as white people.)

Clarence Taylor’s book, *Fight the Power: African Americans and the Long History of Police Brutality in New York City* (2018), provides historical context for this crisis, and as his reviewer, Brian Greenberg notes, “Clarence is especially insightful on the politics involved in achieving any real change.” Check out the review at http://newyorklaborhistory.org

**DEBRA E. BERNHARDT LABOR JOURNALISM PRIZE 2020 CALL FOR ENTRIES**

Articles focused on historical events AND articles about current issues (work, housing, organizing, health, education) that include historical context are both welcome. The work should be published in print or online between August 26, 2019 and August 30, 2020.


**TO ENTER: visit http://LaborArts.org/Bernhardt**

**DEADLINE: SUNDAY AUGUST 30, 2020**

The winner will be announced at a virtual forum on labor journalism with NYU’s Bobst Library on Tuesday October 13, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.

The award is sponsored by the New York Labor History Association and NYU's Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives with ♦ LaborArts ♦ Metro New York Labor Communications Council ♦ NYC Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Progressive Crossword Puzzle
by Kelsey Harrison
ACROSS

4. _____ is a 2019 Oscar-winning documentary about a Chinese company’s take-over of an abandoned General Motors’ plant in Ohio.

8. Long-time labor activist Steve _____ wrote Refinery Town about the fight against the Chevron Oil Company in Richmond, California. (The foreword was written by the answer to three down.)

10. The _____ Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 was signed into law by President Obama and makes it easier to file anti-discrimination lawsuits against companies.

11. _____ Staley is a long-time AIDS activist and leader of ACT-UP.

12. Adam Hochschild’s latest book is a biography of Rose Pastor _____.

13. ___: Not quite reggae music but also originating in Jamaica.

14. Harrison Gray ____ was the union-busting publisher of the Los Angeles Times for most of three decades.

15. Cynthia ____ ran against Governor Cuomo in 2018 with the backing of the Working Families Party.


19. This group of workers makes, but does not earn, more money than any other group of workers in the nation at the United States _____.

20. The Fight for $15 Movement focuses on the _____ food industry.

22. Michael Eric _____ is a prolific author with books about Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., NAS and Marvin Gaye, among others.

23. Founded in 1933, the Chinese Hand _____ Alliance fought for the rights of immigrant workers in the “cleanest” industry in the country.

24. Captain _____ was fired by the U.S. Navy for standing up for the health of his crew on the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt during the Corona Virus epidemic.

25. Housing _____ began in 1990 and has been one of the most successful housing groups in New York City history.


29. In the 1840s _____, Massachusetts was the site of the first union of working women in the United States textile mills.

31. May 1, 2020 was characterized by widespread _____ strikes around the country.

33. Poet Walt _______ first published Leaves of Grass in Brooklyn in 1853.

35. Many people believe there will be a United States Baby _____ nine months after the height of the Corona Virus Epidemic.

36. Harriet _____ was prevented from replacing Andrew Jackson on the twenty-dollar bill by the Trump Administration.

38. Reverend Joseph _____ was a colleague of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and a co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He died at the age of 98 in March 2020.


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On March 25, 1911, 146 workers, most of them young immigrant women — lost their lives in a garment loft fire at the Triangle shirtwaist factory in Greenwich Village. An annual ceremony takes place each year to commemorate this tragedy, sponsored by the ILGWU, with participants from the New York City Central Labor Council, the New York Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH), the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and members of many trade unions. The site of the fire, which took place at the Asch building, is now a National Historic Landmark.

History takes root

For the past ten years, I’ve been taking students to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire commemoration. This year, the commemoration was cancelled. But a friend, Ruth Sergel, creator of the Chalk Project, asked if I could chalk the name of one of the victims outside my home. This gave me the idea to contact former students and ask them to do the same. A few students are currently at Huntington High School and others have graduated. All were enthusiastic and proud to take part in this different type of commemoration. They shared their chalking’s with me and you can see them here, along with a few photos from years gone by.

The name that was sent to me by Ruth Sergel was Josie Del Castillo, who was the cousin of former Finley School Guidance Counselor Cathy Cain. Just prior to the 102nd commemoration in 2013, Mrs. Cain learned that her cousin had died in the fire, age 21, and was one of the “Cherry Street girls.” When Ruth asked me to chalk for her, I was honored to do so. Two of my former students chose to chalk for victims that were the same age as they are now. HHS graduate James Vicari chalked for Nettie Liebowitz, who was 23 years old when she perished, and HHS freshman Yorimilet Rodriguez chalked for Kate Leon, who was only 14 years old. Senior Gabriel Medina-Jaudes and his sisters Naomi and Elisa (HHS graduates and former students) chalked a poignant recreation of the Triangle building with “109th Anniversary. Remember the Triangle” written above it, and senior Robert Jean-Gilles chalked in remembrance for all those who died. Their photos and sentiments flooded my phone and I was overwhelmed. I am happy to share the thoughtfulness of these amazing kids.