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Miriam Frank

Book Talk: *Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America*

September 17, 6:00 p.m. Tamiment Library NYU

A joint event sponsored by Tamiment and the New York Labor History Association

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New York City

Sunday, September 21

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Rosie and her daughters

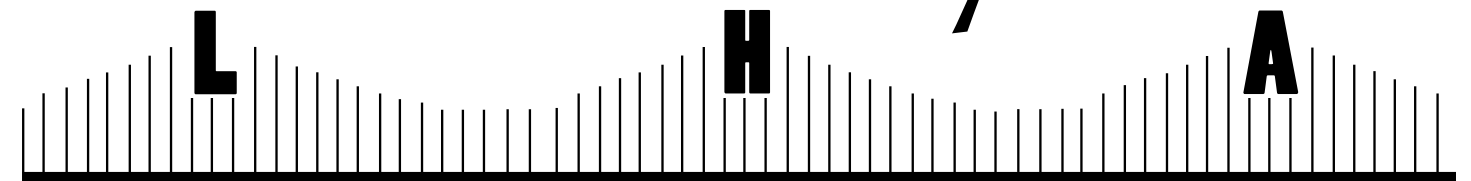
(Continued from page 7)

feeling that a great deal was unfair and fought verbally for my 'wants.' It was very clear what was needed of me in a household of eight: cleaning, cooking, and just don't cause any trouble. Why the heck do I have to ask to hang out with friends while my brothers just seemed to

be able to leave the house? When I was knee deep into my career I was asked 'why couldn't I just have been a teacher and work normal hours?' I had to convince people I was happy with my job and I wasn't going to change. Watching the film *Taking the Heat* about women in the FDNY, I was reminded of many of those

same frustrations. Society is still unsure of our strength. I can get fed up and scream at the screen, or I can just take that energy and apply it to my progress, my bravado, my life lessons and teach my co-workers, colleagues, and fellow technicians that I stand by them, not behind them."

Work History News



New York Labor History Association, Inc.

A Bridge Between Past and Present

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Attack on public workers forum

By Joseph Lopez

Organized labor is the enemy—or so right-wing media outlets like Fox News and politicians like Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker tell us. Private sector workers are inundated with misinformation about unions being greedy and self-serving institutions that cause cities to fall into financial ruin, like Detroit's recent bankruptcy. How do we change this image of public employee unions? "The Attack on Public Workers," a panel discussion hosted by the New York Labor History Association on May 8, looked to answer the question.

"We need to stop talking about ourselves and start talking about the community,"



Emil Pietromonaco, UFT, and Henry Garrido, DC 37 at May 8th conference.

said DC 37 Associate Director Henry Garrido. He pointed out that the labor movement has been at its strongest when fighting for the betterment of society as a whole, such as during the Civil Rights

movement. Unions marched side-by-side with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s and were an essential partner in the battle for racial and economic equality.

Garrido mentioned the 2012 Chicago Teacher's strike, which succeeded because the union reached out to parents and made issues such as teacher evaluations based on student performance a public concern.

"Private sector workers buy into the lies because they don't have the benefits we do," said Emil Pietromonaco, secretary of the United Federation of Teachers. Many non-union employees do not have the pensions or health benefits that they are told we "selfishly" demand. But they would also not have weekends off or eight hour workdays

(Continued on page 5)

New York City Labor Film Club—the past with a blast

By Jane LaTour

While we celebrate the Workers Unite! Film Festival as an on-going contributor to the New York City labor and cultural scene, we look backward to the decade when the New York City Labor Film Club was a vital presence on the labor front. The Club was founded in 1979 by Ken Nash, WBAI radio broadcaster and DC 37 librarian, and cohorts, including the late Lynn Taylor, former president of NYC Public Library Guild Local 1930, and Carol Anshien, of the Community Cable Center, among others. Films were shown at public venues as well as on the monthly news program,

the Labor Journal. The Film Club worked corroboratively with unions, using their headquarters to host programs, and showcasing on-going struggles, such as the organizing drive at what was then the only non-union hotel in New York City—the Marriott-LaGuardia.

The Club welcomed trade unionists from Central America—from El Salvador and Guatemala—holding benefits, pairing speakers with music and films. A benefit for striking Coca Cola workers in Guatemala featured the president of Local 1930, Marion Porro, who chaired the DC 37 Central American Committee; the film, *The Real Thing*, and panelists, including the film's director, Peter Schnall, who was also the

president of NABET Local 15; Baruch College Professor Deborah Levenson, author of *Guatemala in Rebellion, Unfinished History*, and Paul Filson, from the ACTWU's Union Label Department, "recently returned from a fact finding tour of the strike." Music was provided by DJ Fred Herschkowitz, along with a cash bar. DC 37 hosted this event on January 26, 1985. This is just one example among so many of the progressive and imaginative programs that were part of the Film Club's lively schedule.

In 1983, the Film Club organized a Labor Forum Series and a NYC Labor Film Festival. The forums hosted speakers such as Herbert Gutman, speaking on the "Cradle of" (Continued on page 6)

Lessons from the heartland

By Sarah “Sadye” Stern

BARBARA J. MINER begins *Lessons from the Heartland*, her story of the struggle for justice in the Milwaukee school system, with a blighted image of her hometown, and an allusion to the new American ghetto. In Milwaukee in 2011, 55.3 percent of working-age black men in Milwaukee did not have a job, 60 percent of the city’s public school students were black, and by 2013 the city’s eminent voucher program was funneling its one billionth dollar of public money into its private and religious schools, she tells. This is a picture, first and foremost, of unjustifiable abandonment—of the city, of its schools, and of its black population. Inequality within the public schools must never be viewed far from this picture, Miner implies, for the wellbeing of our public school system is tied to the possibility for “an informed citizenry and a vibrant democracy.” During the heyday of the civil rights movement activists had easily moved between issues regarding housing, employment, and schools—for these activists, they were all issues of equality and justice, with roots in racism and discrimination. “The school problem cannot be solved until the housing problem is solved,” Miner notes. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke these clairvoyant words in March of 1963, just months after delivering his “I Have a Dream” speech. And the same remains true today: “Education policy is housing policy,” writes scholar Richard Rothstein in a 2014 article in *Portside*.

Reasons for inequality

Yet Miner’s history tells that in the trail from the civil rights era to today, this vein of thought has been muted. The public conversation over school reform that has taken place since the 1950s has too often occurred within a vacuum that isolates inequality *within the schools* as the primary issue. The struggle for equality in Milwaukee’s public school system has been strong and deliberate, but Miner’s story suggests that what’s been left out of the institutional dialogue on school reform is that creating a more equal education system relies upon the creation of a more just and equal society, and that inequality within our schools is evidence many aspirations of the Civil



Barbara J. Miner

Rights Movement have yet to be achieved. If we recognize that our commitment to public school reform is not only about improving student achievement but about the creation of a more just society, and that the welfare of our school system is inextricably tied to the existence of justice within our society, then we recognize that we cannot talk about school reform without discussing the conditions that have created and nurtured the inequalities within our school system. For Miner, this means talking about race, the labor market, and housing.

In order to illustrate the role of race and racial stigma in shaping Milwaukee’s modern social fabric, Miner takes us back to before the Great Migration, to a time when our modern concept of the black-white divide did not yet exist. The idyllic nature with which she describes Milwaukee’s “Glory Days” of the 1950s haunts the rest of the history, as the confrontational politics of the 1960s left many white voters and political conservatives with the belief that Milwaukee’s best move was a return to the comfort and segregation of the 1950s. Milwaukee’s Glory Days, of course, were not founded on racial segregation but rather on a thriving economy, which produced nearly full employment through providing jobs for everyone, black and white, and even those with only a high school diploma. Racial discrimination existed, but Milwaukee’s black population was small

which meant the city’s power elite had not yet had to confront the question of racial integration on any large scale.

Abrupt changes

Then came the Great Migration, when blacks flooded into the North’s “rust belt” cities in search of work and an escape from Jim Crow. From 1950 to 1960 the city’s black population nearly tripled from 22,000 to 62,500, causing a drastic and abrupt change in the demographic makeup of many of the city’s neighborhoods. While many Southern blacks did find jobs, they also confronted institutional racism in the form of real estate practices and mortgage and home insurance policies that isolated blacks to a region of the city that was known by the power elite and the media as “The Inner Core,” connoting Milwaukee’s poor black neighborhoods. “The Inner City did not develop by happenstance,” writes Miner, “it was the result of restrictive covenants prohibiting selling or renting to anyone other than Caucasians, and of a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ among realtors not to sell or rent to blacks or Jews except in the Central City.”

Although the U.S. Supreme Court had outlawed restrictive covenants in 1948,

(Continued on page 4)

Work History News

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Lessons from the heartland

(Continued from page 4)

“choice” as justice, and relegated the objective of racial equality.

It seems appropriate that only one chapter of Miner’s book contains what could by any means be called an optimistic title: “The Buses Roll and Desegregation Begins.” For Miner, the rolling buses symbolize both the momentary momentum of the desegregationists’ movement and a prediction of the movement’s ultimate unraveling. In Miner’s depiction “forced bussing” was a fear that haunted Milwaukee politicians and white voters’ imaginations before Milwaukee’s desegregation movement even had feet, thus the power structure was committed to its defeat. When Judge Reynolds pinned the blame for school segregation on the school board, he implied that the problem could be solved through a change of policy

A recycling demo at a museum?

(Continued from page 10)

Richard Hatcher, the first African American Mayor of Gary, Indiana. In this capacity, she travelled to Indiana several times to advise the Mayor and his staff on the formation and implementation of policies and programs of his administration.

Barbara Bailey, President and co-founder of the New York City Labor Chorus, was introduced by labor legend and longtime *Work History News* editor Henry Foner. Bailey has devoted over 40 years to a civil service career in both federal and city governments. A trail-blazer throughout her various careers, she has effected major changes in both clerical and supervisory positions, fighting constantly to transform the status quo towards equal rights.

Bailey was elected shop steward and member-at-large of Communications Workers of America, Local 1180. She served as a staff representative and headed the Community Service Committee that earned the group President Clinton’s Thousand Points of Light recognition. Upon her retirement Barbara was asked by her local’s president to serve as director of local 1180’s newly created Retiree

alone. School board policy, of course, was largely beholden to white voters, many of whom, through decades of racial segregation, remained fearful of calls for integration. Though voluntary bussing posed as equal opportunity, politicians knew that most whites’ “choice” would keep them where they were—geographically and racially segregated in the Milwaukee suburbs. Thus at its grandest moment the struggle for integration was pursued through a half-hearted bussing program, which did little to lessen segregation on any broad scale and did nothing to confront the issues of housing segregation and economic inequality that lay at the root of disparity within the schools.

Media fosters bias

Miner shrewdly follows the role of media in shaping the debates surrounding Milwaukee’s various attempts at school

Division. The Division’s mission is to improve the overall health and well being of over 4,000 retirees by providing activities and programs which continued to stimulate their intellect and provide health information to enhance their capacity to function at home and in the world during their retirement years.

Together with Bobbie Rabinowitz (SEIU 371) and Laura Friedman (CWE), Barbara founded the NYC Labor Chorus, which has blossomed into an international, multi-ethnic and multi-generational labor chorus with over 100 members. The chorus has performed in Sweden, Cuba and many states, and was invited to perform with choruses from Japan and Wales, and at the United Nations. Music has always been a catalyst and a platform for workers to speak out, and the labor chorus aims to preserve labor’s rich history and help motivate the labor movement of today.

The chorus certainly motivated the crowd at the Lemlich Awards—their performance was warmly received by honorees, audience and dignitaries alike. President of the museum Susan Henshaw Jones led the many requests for the chorus to return next year.

Created by LaborArts and the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition in 2011 for the

integration, and her tale illuminates the media’s role in fostering bias within the very language of the debate. While the keystone of desegregation policy was laden the burdensome “forced bussing,” the voluntary bussing and voucher programs were pitched as “choice,” which alluded to the free market ideology that began to take root in the 1980s. The idea of equality thus became more narrowly defined by equality of opportunity—i.e. everybody has equal opportunity to apply for the new “specialty schools”—rather than equality of outcome—i.e. we will ensure your child, rich or poor, black or white, receives a good education. The framework of choice is deceptive further because it places the welfare and outcome of students’ on the decisions of the individual or their.. *Visit the NYLHA website to read the full article.*



Lemlich ceremony, Henry Foner, Barbara Bailey and Esther Cohen.

centennial commemoration of the Triangle Factory Fire, the Awards were funded by The Puffin Foundation and the Donald and Shelley Rubin Foundation.

Gladys and Perry Rosenstein, founders of the Puffin Foundation, and the Social Activism Gallery, spoke at the event, and poet and curator Esther Cohen was the MC.

Nominations for Lemlich Awards are welcome throughout the year.

Information about nominating someone, video from the ceremony, portraits of previous nominees, and information about Clara Lemlich and about the Triangle Factory Fire are all to be found at LaborArts.org.

A recycling demo at a museum?

LaborArts Honors Unsung Heroines at Lemlich Awards Ceremony

By Rachael Bernstein

The Lemlich Award for Social Activism honors, in the words of the poet Marge Piercy, people who—

*jump into work head first
without dallying in the shadows...
who do what has to be done, again and again.*

Clara Lemlich's great grandson and Borough President of Manhattan Gale Brewer joined a crowd of activists at the Social Activism Gallery in the Museum of the City of New York for the Fourth Annual Clara Lemlich Awards on April 2, 2014.

Seven amazing women were honored, women who have been working for the larger good their entire lives, in the tradition of Clara Lemlich, who sparked so many reforms in the aftermath of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire over one hundred years ago.

First, the recycling. **Joan Levine** lives in the Morningside Gardens housing cooperative off 125th Street in West Harlem and **Sarah Martin** lives across the street in the Ulysses S. Grant Houses, a large NYC public housing project. Searching for ways to make their neighborhood more of a community, they realized that environmental concerns—and above all garbage issues—were a key shared concern. “Our rats were playing together”—so why not work together? And they did.

Their efforts improved the immediate garbage crisis, and their Hands Across the Street program continued to grow, creating one of the most successful recycling efforts in the city, and at the same time lowering social, economic and racial barriers, and building a real sense of community in the neighborhood.

Together with other block associations they formed the infelicitously named Morningside Heights/West Harlem Sanitation Coalition. A member of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, the Coalition works on both neighborhood issues and citywide environmental justice campaigns.

Hands-on, neighbor-to-neighbor environmental education has been the key to their success. Introduced for their Lemlich Award by Robert Jackson, former City Council

member and long time activist himself, Sarah and Joan whipped out a large green bag and launched into a recycling demonstration on the spot. They wanted everyone in the audience to be able to teach recycling.

Agnes Wong, an activist in the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union for more than 30 years, was introduced by long time union leader Edgar Romney. Born in Guangzhou, China, Wong moved to Hong Kong as a child and came to New York with her husband in 1974. She took a job as a seamstress in a garment factory in Chinatown and joined Local 23–25 ILGWU. She walked out of her factory with 20,000 of her co-workers in the 1982 Chinatown Garment Factory Strike, and later became a shop representative and a Local 23–25 Executive Board member.

Wong credits the union with ‘bringing her up’—she met strong women leaders, and learned English, leadership development, and organizing. The union, in return, benefited from Agnes' activism. Over the years, she helped organize Chinese speaking workers in various industries in the US and in Canada.

Judy Lerner, a peace activist for over five decades, was introduced by Natalia Saavedra, a young activist. Lerner was a founding member of Women Strike for Peace in 1961, mobilizing tens of thousands of women to get rid of nuclear testing in the atmosphere. She led a delegation to the 17th Anti-Atomic and Hydrogen Bomb Conference in Hiroshima, Japan, in 1971, and was very active in the anti-Vietnam war movement. She served on the Board of the Center for Constitutional Rights for over 20 years and currently chairs the International Committee of Peace Action at the United Nations. She also serves as a director on the NGO/DPI Executive committee at the UN.

Her day job was important too, as a special education teacher for over 30 years in Hastings-on-Hudson School District and president of the Teacher's Union in that district for 12 years.

Lerner worked with former Congresswoman Bella Abzug for many years



Recycling demo from Joan Levine and Sarah Martin.

and headed her office during her race for the US Senate in the 1970s. As a feminist she was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the continuing Committee of the National Women's Conference and participated at all the UN Women's meetings in Copenhagen, Nairobi, and Beijing.

Marilyn Frankenstein, developer of a theoretically based practice in critical mathematics literacy education, was introduced by Rachel Bernstein.

“Reading the World with Math,” for instance, targets teachers working on interdisciplinary math and social studies curricula, providing ways to use math as a tool to interpret and challenge inequities in our society. Her work with A.B. Powell, *Ethno-mathematics: Challenging Eurocentrism in Mathematics Education*, looks at the relationship between culture and mathematics, and she works with an international group of mathematics educators developing this field.

Marilyn has spoken about this work internationally, including in South Africa, Mozambique, Brazil, England, Denmark, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and many places in the USA.

Jane Kalmus was unable to attend the ceremony but Neal Rosenstein of the Puffin Foundation spoke about her long and admirable career. She served the City of New York since 1961 when she worked as Director of Communications for Mayor Robert F. Wagner. In 1968, Senator Robert F. Kennedy appointed Kalmus as the Chief Advisor to

(Continued on page 11)

Paul Washington speaks on Morris Schappes—radical trade unionist and City College teacher

By Stephen Leberstein

Why is it so important for New York labor historians to learn something about the life and activism of Morris Schappes? Paul Washington, Medgar Evers College/CUNY and member Executive Council, Professional Staff Congress, spoke passionately about Schappes life and political activism at the April 9th event at the Tamiment Library to an engaged audience of about 50. Washington had done extensive archival research on Schappes at the Tamiment and the Jewish Historical Society, and interviewed people who knew and worked with Schappes.

Paul recounted how he first learned about Schappes from an exhibit at City College's Center for Worker Education. He saw that Morris was politically engaged in the most important issues of the day as a trade unionist, an anti-fascist, and an anti-racist. And, he said, advice his father had given him, to reject the crude anti-Semitism of the street in the 1960s, led him to look further into Morris' life and work.

Schappes defense in song

To recreate some of the context for Paul's presentation, Henry Foner sang “The Ballad of Morris Schappes” which he and Norman Franklin wrote for Schappes' defense committee when he was on trial for perjury in 1941 in connection with the infamous Rapp Coudert investigation into subversion in New York City's public schools and colleges. Foner, an American Student Union activist during his days at City College, was a long-time contributor to *Jewish Currents*, which Schappes edited from its inception as *Jewish Life* in 1946 until his death in 2004.

For Schappes as for many other immigrants and first generation Americans, City College was a vitally important gateway to a life of possibilities otherwise beyond the reach of poor Ukrainian Jews. Paul's research explored the road that Schappes travelled to a life as writer, teacher, trade unionist and political activist. His presentation recounted Schappes' early life, noting that his parents



Henry Foner singing “The Ballad of Morris Schappes” during Paul Washington's presentation for the NYLHA on Schappes life and legacy at the Tamiment Library, April 9, 2014.

left Ukraine for Brazil, where he spent his first seven years. Discouraged by a harsh life in Brazil, the family was on its way back to Ukraine in 1914, stopping in New York just as war broke out. There they stayed.

His father, an illiterate wood-turner with anarchist tendencies, earned his living running a small newsstand on the Lower East Side. On family outings on the subway Morris's mother, Ida, would read the Yiddish press to his father, embarrassing the young boy. But Morris excelled in school and won admission to Townsend Harris Hall, City College's preparatory high school. That brought him to City College and, later, to a position as “Tutor” there, teaching English. As a student, Morris would claim that he was relatively a-political.

After earning his degree in 1928, Schappes began teaching English. Like others of his generation, he was hired at the lowly rank of tutor to teach an expanding student population, and his politics quickly developed in response to the social conditions of the Depression that he lived and witnessed.

He joined the Communist Party, began to organize the faculty at the college into the Instructional Staff Association which soon became a part of the NY Teachers Union, AFT Local 5, and then the NY College

Teachers Union, AFT Local 537 in 1938. He was also active in the wider labor movement, for example by leafleting transit workers on the 6th and 9th Avenue “Els” in support of the Transport Workers Union, which he later remembered as “a proletarian aspect of my activity.”

One of the victories that the union won at City College was to persuade the History Department to hire Max Yergan, President of the National Negro Congress, to teach a course in black culture and history. Yergan was the first and only black instructor at City College when he began in 1938. He was let go in 1941 in the Rapp Coudert purge, and then no other blacks taught at the college until Kenneth Clark came to the Sociology Department in the late 1940s.

This record of political engagement in behalf of social justice is the hallmark of Schappes' life, Paul argued. It was this kind of activism that helped to make the NY College Teachers Union an important example of social unionism, putting organized labor in the forefront of the fight for racial and social justice, a stance that can be seen as a model for the unionism of the Professional Staff Congress.

The audience responded warmly to Paul's presentation. In particular, the complex role of Communists in the labor movement led to a spirited discussion. It also led some members of the audience to discuss what they saw as parallels with their own political experience. The presentation and the ballad made the history of the New York labor movement in the 1930s and '40s come alive in 2014.

♪ “Letters-we get letters, we get stacks and stacks of letters” ♪

Send *your* letter to the editor... e-mail it to: jlatour13@gmail.com or snail mail it to: Jane LaTour
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Lessons from the heartland

(Continued from page 2)

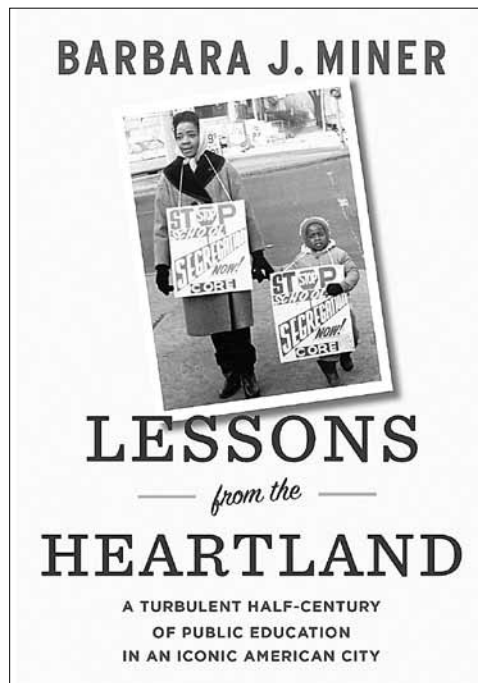
isolated, with little choice as to where to live or where to send their children to school. Miner includes a poignant quote by a white student from an urban neighborhood undergoing white flight that illustrates the devastating effects of white flight on Milwaukee's schools:

"Higher mathematics and science were falling by the wayside in favor of shop or home economics...when I was a freshman, four foreign languages were being taught. When I graduated, the program for the next year included only Spanish. In my last two years at the school the teaching staff changed every semester. The teachers who had been there for a few years transferred to other schools. Our new teachers generally came directly from colleges" (36).

Fight back develops

As institutionally condoned white flight wreaked havoc on inner city neighborhoods and the welfare of black families, activists began to demand action to curb inequality within housing and the schools. During the 1960s activists from newly-formed organizations (such as the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee, or MUSIC) joined with members of the clergy and more established organizations such as the NAACP and CORE to take advantage of the grassroots momentum and political mindset of the civil rights era and to use the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling to press for an end to segregation and ambitious housing and school reforms.

In 1964, in one of the largest Milwaukee demonstrations, members of MUSIC organized a one-day Freedom Boycott of the public schools to pressure the school board to act to end segregation and discrimination within the public schools. Between 11,000 and 15,000 students participated, roughly half of the nonwhite students in public schools. Rather than attend school, students flooded into churches and community buildings where they were taught for the day by a mixture of businessmen, retired teachers, clergy, blue-collar workers, and a few participating public school teachers.



Martin Luther King Jr. referred to the Freedom School Boycott as "a creative way" to dramatize the segregation issue.

Yet it would be difficult for any reader to walk away from Miner's account with a vision of the desegregation era as a success. Miner alludes to the metaphor of square dancing to describe the progress of the desegregation movement: each step forward followed by a step sideways and a step backwards. What the reader senses is the truth of Miner's assertion that the era of desegregation was, like the post-Civil War Reconstruction era, "a brief attempt to redress injustice" situated within a long history of institutionally-perpetuated inequality. Miner's history of desegregation is indeed long, arduous, and ultimately anticlimactic—much as the struggle itself was, by Miner's telling. Despite the apparent success of the Freedom School Boycott and years of large scale protests calling for open housing legislation, Miner writes that "the Milwaukee Public Schools ended the tumultuous 1960s much as it began: segregated" (67). Miner shows that in large part this was because the school board fought tooth and nail to avoid facing the complicated issue of housing segregation, which was bound to upset white voters. The school board continued to protect the conventional concept of "neighborhood schools" as the

stalwart of the educational system. Rather than fighting institutional racism in housing policy, which would have brought some fairness to neighborhood schooling, the school board instead spent the 1960s and 70s using housing patterns to *justify* segregation within the schools.

The culmination of the civil rights era's mobilizations around desegregation in fact occurred a decade after the initial demand. Finally on January 19, 1976, eleven years after forty one black and white public school students filed charges challenging segregation within the school—Milwaukee Judge John Reynolds Jr. ruled that segregation did indeed exist within Milwaukee's schools and that "segregation was intentionally created and maintained by the defendants," or the Milwaukee school board. Though this declaration paved the way for activists of the desegregation movement to go on the offensive, Miner recognizes that by placing blame on the school board Reynolds' helped to dismiss the view that housing segregation was to blame. At the same time, bussing—the much-anticipated method to racial integration—was undermined before the busses even got rolling as "the bus, not segregation or equal educational opportunity, became the hot-button issue" (78).

The bus conjured up—with help from the media—images of Boston's turbulent attempts at school integration, and Milwaukee's anti-integrationists immediately took up the mantra of "no forced bussing" before the order had even been mandated. In order to assuage conflict and confrontation, members of the Milwaukee power structure—who by now knew they had to act on desegregation—decided to deemphasize the issue of racial integration altogether, centering the reforms around the creation of a series of "specialty schools" to be filled by lottery, and keeping bussing voluntary. The plan was sold to the public "using the carrot of voluntary choice" to appeal to white voters and beat back the violent connotation of "forced bussing" that was already being thrown around by the opposition. Thus the public was sold on an integration plan through a rhetoric that posed

(Continued on page 11)

Workers Unite! Film Festival

By Kimberly Schiller

"Individual people could hold a letter up, but it wouldn't spell anything..."

This was one of the strong opening lines from the "Overpass Light Brigade" short film that started the Workers Unite! Films from the *Frontlines* evening sponsored by the New York Labor History Association's Working Group. Throughout the evening, the message of community and power in numbers resonated with the audience. Bright lights with powerful phrases like, "TEACHERS = HEROES" and "SOLIDARITY FOREVER" lit the screen. Barely a word was spoken at the start, but the silent message was more than heard.

The evening began with the short film documenting the story behind Wisconsin's Holder of Lights. The film uses time lapse photography and interviews with founding members and other activists to tell the story behind the OLB (*Overpass Light Brigade*) and describe their purpose. The OLB founders' purpose is to take a stand that people could see. "They may agree. They may not, but it got the message out" and it was clear that throughout their short film, that message was understood.

TWU on the frontlines

With this message in mind, a series of short films, titled "TWU: Organizing Across the Country," was shown beginning with thousands of Transport Workers Union members (TWU) rallying behind Allegiant Air employees.

"An injury to one is an injury to all!" shouted one of the strikers with cheers and



Image from *Overpass Light Brigade*.

applause from the TWU members in the film and from the Workers Unite! audience. This short film was followed by a series of films that focused on community-building programs sponsored and organized by TWU members.

At one event, the TWU members organized a food drive that helped 4,000 families. TWU members coordinated the donations and made sure that every family took much-needed meals home with them. One TWU member remarked, "It's about giving back, not just fighting for money or a contract," while another poignantly noted, "It's part of who I am and it's what my union is."

Feelings of community and solidarity led to "Under the Bus," by filmmakers Keif Roberts and Peter Haas, which chronicled the New York City school bus drivers' strike. The film followed Anthony, a 24-year veteran Staten Island school bus driver on the verge of retirement, and his colleagues who go out on strike in response to a contract dispute with the City of New York. In the film, drivers are out in the harsh cold, trying to make their voices heard, but find

it difficult due to a media blackout, a mayor that "refuses to negotiate" and a city that puts their jobs "out to bid" for non-union replacement drivers.

One driver questioned, "Why should you have job protection? The question should be why shouldn't everyone have job protection?" while another stated, "When it comes to my job, you're taking my livelihood away and it's time to do more."

Throughout the evening, applause and gasps echoed from the audience. All of the films were thoughtful and galvanized the viewers.

Films stimulate dialogue

At the end of the program, there was a short Q&A with the "Under the Bus" filmmakers, Roberts and Haas. One audience member inquired whether the filmmakers contacted the city or the bus companies during the filming. Roberts and Haas said that they had, but "the city had hung up on them twice and the companies did not want to get involved." Another asked, "What was it like when the strike ended?" The filmmakers recounted that there was "a lot of debate and it was not an easy decision. [The drivers] were skeptical of politics and politicians" after all that they have experienced.

Overall, it was an inspirational evening. Union members working together on the frontlines inspired the audience and created a feeling of unity. It was evident that the opening lines of the OLB were valid, "Individual people could hold a letter up, but it wouldn't spell anything..." instead, "the most powerful thing is community."

Book Shelf continued

Progressives in American Society
John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2014

Karen Pastorello, a member of the Executive Board of the New York Labor History Association has released a new book entitled *The Progressives: Activism and Reform in American Society, 1893-1917* (2014). The book offers a comprehensive



analysis of the country's transition from its agrarian roots to urban industrial life.

Pastorello examines the efforts of reformers from muckrakers to settlement workers, politicians, religious officials, university professors, public health professionals, and labor leaders to alleviate social, economic and political injustices on behalf of poor immigrant workers. In the process, the Progressives and their movement shaped the modern welfare state that forever changed the relationship between the U.S. government and its citizens.

The strike that changed New York

The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean-Hill Brownsville Crisis

Jerald E. Podair

Review by: Steve Golin

The Journal of American History, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Mar., 2004), pp. 1539-1540

THE OCEAN HILL-BROWNSVILLE teacher strike of 1968 split New York City. Most black New Yorkers perceived community control of the schools in black neighborhoods as part of the struggle for racial justice; they saw the teacher strike as a defense of white privilege. Most white New Yorkers perceived black community control of the schools as a power grab; they saw the strike as a defense of a society based on individual achievement. In his fine study, *The Strike That Changed New York*, Jerald E. Podair argues that the perceptual gulf between blacks and whites, who view the same events in opposed ways, became suddenly evident in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

From 1964 to 1966, organized white parents in the city's outer boroughs defeated attempts at racially integrating the schools. Abandoning integration, blacks adopted the idea of community control of schools

as a platform for their own struggle. Black community control advocates, backed by white business and civic elites (including the Ford Foundation and Mayor John Lindsay) won the right to administer the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district of Brooklyn. Led by Rhody McCoy, the new administrator of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, a school board composed of black parents terminated several white teachers. Albert Shanker, the president of the United Federation of Teachers, called three strikes in the fall of 1968 to defend the teachers; the last and bitterest strike lasted five weeks. In the end, white middle-class protest stripped black community control of its elite white support and assured its defeat.

Scrupulously fair analysis

Most scholarship about Ocean Hill-Brownsville has taken sides. Scrupulously fair, Podair explains how each side blamed the other for the poor performance of most black students. White teachers blamed black families and communities; black parents blamed the teachers and the schools. The white teachers, Podair explains, were drawing on their own successful experience in New York schools; black parents were drawing on their own, mostly negative, school experience.

Podair highlights the pivotal role of Jews. Before 1968, Jewish New Yorkers often mediated between blacks and whites. Ocean Hill-Brownsville ended that role. Most Jewish teachers were horrified by the black critique of the system of individual competition, including the practices of tracking students and promoting teachers by examination. Afraid of black power, Jewish teachers and other outer-borough Jews found a common cause with white Catholics, their erstwhile enemies. The Jews and the Irish came together as white, propelling New York politics in a conservative direction.

Podair's clearly written, well-argued study is stronger analytically than experientially; he says that white teachers felt their dignity was at stake, but the reader does not get close enough to feel what teachers, or black parents for that matter, felt. And Podair is not as sharp on class as he is on race, effectively eliminating the working class by using the term "middle class" for everyone who fell between poor blacks and white elites. But those criticisms are minor compared to his significant achievement in explaining what was at stake for blacks and whites in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike and how it became a turning point for New York.

New York City Labor Film Club

(Continued from page 1)

the Modern Labor Movement, 1881-1900"; Barbara Wertheimer, on "The Rising of the Women, 1901-1918"; and NYLHA's own Irwin Yellowitz on "Toward Modern Times, 1946-Present." The film festival premier took place at the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, and was sponsored by Teamster locals—Local 102, 111, 808, and 840. *Labor's Turning Point* opened the festival, and filmmaker John DeGraaf spoke about his movie. *Poetown Lives* was shown at the People's Firehouse, along with filmmakers and community activists as speakers. *Men and Dust: Our Health is Not For Sale*, was accompanied by a special



performance by Mass Transit Street Theater.

Labor historians and activists look back fondly at the rich array of educational, exciting programs brought to the city by the energetic organizers of the Labor Film Club. Jon Bloom, director of the Workers Defense League, recalled one eventful evening. "Tuli Kupferberg (the counterculture poet and co-

founder of the satirical rock band, The Fugs) took part in a post-film Q&A. The filmmaker Leo Hurwitz was moderating and I remember that he handled the whole thing very well. The essence of the lively discussion was that Kupferberg was questioning some of the pieties of the films we had just viewed." Hurwitz,

whose documentary films include *Native Land*, *Verdict for Tomorrow*, and *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, was blacklisted during the McCarthy period.

The Labor Film Club defined themselves as "people who were interested in both film and the labor movement. By screening and discussing appropriate controversial and/or distinguished films we hope to explore not only labor history on film but also how film might be used to illuminate our current work crises and our lives. Since September, 1979, we have presented monthly programs at which attendance has ranged from 20 to 105." This is the same spirit that infuses the Workers Unite! Film Festival. The New York Labor History Association is proud to be an active sponsor and supporter of a festival that continues in the tradition of the NYC Labor Film Club.

Rosie and her daughters at the film festival!

By Jane LaTour

The program on May 13 at the 3rd annual Workers Unite! Film Festival sponsored by the New York Labor History Association was chock full of films and speakers to inspire. The evening was billed around the theme, "Equal Pay for Equal Work," and opened with *Rosie the Riveter*. Playwright/filmmaker and NYLHA board member Bette Craig was elated about the combination of films and speakers: "To be seeing Connie Field's wonderful documentary for the second time and finding it even better than I remembered. And then there was the pleasure of seeing it at the Cinema Village with a New York City Rosie and current tradeswomen working in a man's world. *The Overpass Light Brigade* was a rousing opening for the program and *Judith: Portrait of a Street Vendor*, about the Vamos Unidos movement put us in touch with a struggle going on now. Then, adding to that, the story of Lilly Ledbetter—in the short but powerful film, *Never Got a Dime*, and Brenda Berkman, in person, with *Taking the Heat*. It was a magical evening and spot on as to what we should be bringing to an even wider audience as the New York Labor History Association."

Women lead the way

Corporate Campaign's founder and director, Ray Rogers, was equally enthusiastic. "The Workers Unite! Film Festival spotlight on women in the workplace showed what great role models women represent for everyone as they struggle for justice, respect and equality in the workplace. The examples of the trials and tribulations women have overcome in their workplace struggles, and victories against gender discrimination, can set the tone for many more success stories in the future until equality for all becomes a reality," he said.

NYLHA President and historian Irwin Yellowitz noted that he was seeing *Rosie the Riveter* for the first time. "What stood out for me, first and foremost, was that it was accurate history. In addition, it was excellent as a film. The women who described their experiences were wonderfully articulate, and diverse, so that their comments on personal experiences represented the larger reality of the millions of



women who worked in war industries during World War II. The audience laughed many times at the propaganda films that were widely shown during the war. The humor came from the gap between the attitudes of that time, and current experience. We have come a long way since Rosie the Riveter in support of a woman's right to employment and a full set of life choices. Rosie was not the spark for women's rights. Work for women was purely a wartime measure. The women's rights movement—the Second Wave—would have to wait for the 1960s. The women interviewed for this film were ahead of the curve, but they all lived to see substantial progress—even if not for themselves."

Third Annual Workers Unite! Film Festival focuses on inequality

THE 3RD ANNUAL Workers Unite! Film Festival, May 9-May 19, grew by over 50 percent from last year's extravaganza, with just over 1,900 admissions. The festival increased its support from labor union and affiliated local worker and community groups, as well as labor-friendly support businesses.

The 2014 festival celebrated global labor solidarity and focused on the stories of workers and their unions from across the United States and around the world. Andrew Tilson, founder and executive director of the festival, noted that, "this year, the Workers Unite! Film Festival expanded to 10 days at four different locations.

"We partnered with over three dozen unions and worker centers in New York City to bring films to our audiences from

Rachel Bernstein, co-founder and co-historian of LaborArts.org, and a NYLHA board member, found the "Rosie" film "remarkable—it was and still is," she said. "The young tradeswomen who watched it and gave some remarks seemed to be as moved as I was—remarkable, given how many times I've seen it, and how far removed it is from their generation."

A young tradeswoman expressed gratitude for the program. Apprentice Nani Noverita, said: "I am thankful for taking part in this event! Watching the documentary about all the Rosie the Riveters was amazing and then to meet and share a platform with a real Rosie was an experience in living history. I was in awe and honored. They were the pin up girls—so sexy! Because of what they did, and how they paved the way for women like me to be welders and iron workers, I am in Local 46 Metallic Lathers. I am so grateful and honored by their beauty, strength, and courage. Awesome!"

Another representative of the younger generation in the audience was Nicoletta Green, a member of Local One, IATSE (the Stagehands). She shared her perspective as an Italian-American woman. "I grew up

(Continued on page 12)

Bangladesh, China, Turkey, Greece, to South Africa, Columbia, and Spain, and then back home to the Bronx, Staten Island and even New Jersey! These films focused on the daily lives of workers from around the world and their on-going fight to organize and build their organizations. These workers see unions and collective action as their best defense against the attack by the global 1 percent to crush workers' rights around the world.

"The films show that they are fighting back against this global march toward income inequality and winning when they organize and unite to fight." Visit the festival website to experience the full range of films and programs—poetry, music, plays and speakers—from this year's festival: www.workersunitefilmfestival.org.

BOOK SHELF

Enough Blame to Go Around

The Labor Pains of New York City's Public Employee Unions

Richard Steier



Excelsior Editions/SUNY Press, 2014

Just as negotiations season heats up in the city and we await further Supreme Court rulings regarding the collective bargaining rights of public servants, *Enough Blame to Go Around* is released, providing a storehouse of smart, incisive and witty columns about our municipal (and some state) labor unions. Even regular readers of the civil service weekly, *The Chief-Leader*, will find this book a Bible—essential for a comprehensive understanding of

Civil Rights in New York City: From World War II to the Giuliani Era

Edited by Clarence Taylor



Fordham University Press, 2011

This year's 50th anniversary commemorations—the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Mississippi Freedom Summer—put the spotlight on the history of civil rights in the South. But as Clarence Taylor notes in his Introduction to this collection: “The fight for civil rights has always been a national struggle.” New York City is no stranger to epic battles over equality. As the historian Jerald E. Podair frames it in his entry to the collection: “Context and circumstances

Labor Rising: The Past and Future of Working People in America

Edited by Daniel Katz & Richard A. Greenwald



The New Press, 2012

This is a useful and exciting collection of essays. A score of contributors put their deep knowledge of labor history at the service of contemporary issues facing the American working class. Their informed analyses shed some hope on a seemingly bleak landscape. A couple of examples: NYLHA board member Professor Richard A. Greenwald's essay on “Contingent, Transient, and At-Risk Workers in a Gig Economy,” pits the ever-increasing loss of what used to be—the 40-hour-week job with benefits and some security, alongside what is: the ever-expanding world of “free agents, contractors, day laborers, consultants, and the self-employed,” or, in the words of a cover story in *Bloomberg Businessweek*: “making the era of

labor relations in New York City. Editor Richard Steier's “Razzle Dazzle” columns reflect the in-depth, independent journalism that is a hallmark of the paper under his leadership. As veteran labor reporter Tom Robbins wrote: “New York City's labor unions have been luckier than they deserved to have had reporter and editor Richard Steier around to spotlight their occasional triumphs and their much more frequent failures. Like Murray Kempton, another great New York columnist who loved the men and women of labor but never suffered the fools who sometimes ran their unions, Steier's columns are filled with news, insight, and always compassion for those who ride (and drive) the early trains and buses to work.”

change, but the questions remain the same. What is equality? Is it merely equal treatment under the law? Or does it have more substantive meaning?” This is a collection that brings that contested history to the fore—a collection where the footnotes are as compelling as the text—and an inclusive set of issues are unpacked. These include a fascinating essay on the experiment in integrated housing in the Rochdale Village; the organizing that went into Operation Clean Sweep—the Congress of Racial Equality's struggle for better garbage collection in Bedford-Stuyvesant during the fall of 1962; the emergence and history of the Young Lords and “late sixties urban radicalism”—and so much more. The cues and connections to the reality that we are living today are a vibrant element of these essays.

the temp more than temporary.” Greenwald explores the ramifications for individual workers, and outlines potential options that could pose a challenge to “the new normal.” He writes: “We are in a transitional zone between two coherent systems of work or economic regimes, and we must understand what is happening in order to shape the trajectory rather than passively watch it play out.”

Professor Eileen Boris takes on another ever-expanding sector of the economy in her essay “Home as Work”—nannies, housekeepers and elder care providers. She writes: “Workers once at the margins of production, no less than scholarship, today stand at its center; home laborers—whether domestics, health aides and attendants, or sweated manufacturers—are crucial in today's global order and the carework economy that generates low-wage jobs in a transformed and feminized U.S. labor market.” There are so many important issues and such creative application of scholarship within these pages—it belongs on your bookshelf. Read it and get inspired!

UFT Social Studies conference

The 54th annual Greater Metropolitan New York Social Studies Conference was held at the UFT headquarters on February 1 and the NYLHA made some important contributions. As board member Joe Doyle reported, “Alan Singer, a virtuoso (recently retired) high school teacher—who has taught future social studies teachers for many years at Hofstra College—gave a superb presentation on Common Core requirements, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.” At the moment, Common Core requirements are currently giving teachers headaches across the United States. No one quite knows what is expected of them—other than that high school graduates should be given enough college level readings/assignments that they are equipped for college. Singer reproduced an article from *The New York Times* (Jan. 25, 2014) written by Steve Ratner, a Wall Street/real estate executive and business advisor to President Barack Obama, “The Myth of Industrial Rebound.” It's the sort of article Singer thinks is important for high school students to read in order to understand their job prospects. But it's written in difficult language—which Singer demonstrates that high school students can understand—but teachers need to give them a lot of help.

Making language accessible

The article starts with the sentence: “With metronomic regularity, gauzy accounts extol the return of manufacturing jobs to the United States...” Singer broke the article down so that students could make sense of it. He provided a glossary of dozens of vocabulary words students would need to understand the business content of the article (e.g. high-wage country) and another dozen vocabulary words (e.g. dispiriting) which students will need in many different academic disciplines they'll study in college. Singer's glossary empowers students to make sense of the article. He counseled teachers to get students to cross out particularly vexing words (like “gauzy”) and write in a word that makes more sense to them. He also gave teachers a few follow-up questions for students to work in small groups (with a strong reader assigned to each group)—and individually (so students



Musician Peter Yarrow, was presented with the Hubert H. Humphrey Humanitarian award at the conference presenting the award (from left) are Robert Dytell, conference committee co-chair, Ollie Fields Thacker president of the Association of Teachers of Social Studies, UFT and George Altomare, director of the UFT Professional Committees.

Photo: Jonathan Fickies

see the importance of puzzling out the article's meaning for themselves).”

Board Member Kimberly Schiller shared the content of the workshop she took part in leading, on “The Triangle Fire, Workplace Safety and Globalization”. Schiller worked in partnership with board member Leigh Benin “to discuss the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and its impact on workplace safety today and its connection to tragedies such as the horrifying conditions at garment sweatshops in Bangladesh.

Dr. Benin began the session with an audio visual description of his personal connection to the fire, which drew in the audience. He discussed his grandmother's devastation over his cousin's tragic death in the Triangle fire and how that propelled his own interest in labor history. He then discussed photographs of the tragedy and captioned each before showing teachers where to find lesson plans and other supplemental materials on the HBO and Kheel Center websites. Kimberly Schiller then presented a Google site that she had prepared which is stocked with various lessons and activities educators can put to use in the classroom. All of this material was developed from the Triangle fire and correlates with the Common Core Learning Standards to allow for a smooth implementation in any educator's classroom. They are also differentiated to allow for students of varying abilities and learning styles to shine and learn more about labor history. A discussion followed and the educators in attendance asked thoughtful questions regarding parent and community responses to the curriculum, how to introduce these topics in elementary classes, and the connection between

students and victims of the past and present. The presentation was a great balance between the personal and the practical.”

As Doyle noted, NYLHA Vice President George Altomare, the director of professional committees and one of the founders of the UFT, “puts a lot of tender loving care into organizing this conference every year.” During this year's conference, “On the Wings of Workers: A Celebration of the Global History of Labor,” Altomare presented the Hubert H. Humphrey Award to folk singer Peter Yarrow at the luncheon. Altomare's remarks focused on Yarrow's long term contributions to the struggle for civil rights. Visit the NYLHA website to read his full remarks.

Attack on public workers

(Continued from page 1)

if it wasn't for organized labor winning those rights decades ago.

Panel moderator Gene Carroll, co-director of the New York State AFL-CIO/Cornell Union Leadership Institute, brought up the example of the 1919 Boston Police Strike. Tired of unjust treatment that included wages stagnant for 60 years and seven-day, 98 hour work weeks, the officers went on strike on Sept. 9. Though they never returned to work, replaced instead by scabs, those replacement workers received the higher pay, time off and better work conditions that the strikers demanded.

Learning from the past is an essential part of labor's future. “The only way to celebrate a history is to go back to the principles that started that history,” Garrido said.