

# New York Labor History's Annual Conference

## May 5-7, 2016

THURSDAY, MAY 5TH

NYLHA's Film Festival Program & Opening  
Night of the Annual NYLHA Conference

FRIDAY MAY 6TH

Evening Keynote Address

SATURDAY, MAY 7TH

All-day – NYLHA Annual Labor History  
Conference, "Can't Turn Back: Unfinished Tasks  
of the Civil Rights Movement"  
Tamiment Library, NYU

Activists and scholars will address enduring and timely topics, including mass organizing, policing, housing, and education. Historians and organizers together—where the past meets the present.

## The Great Hunger

*Black Potatoes, The Story of the  
Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850*

By Susan Campbell Bartoletti,  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin  
Company, 2001

Reviewed by Joe Doyle

Susan Campbell Bartoletti has a gift for writing books with an emotional wallop. Her 1999 book, *Growing Up in Coal Country*, is based on the child labor experiences of her Pennsylvania in-laws, searingly illustrated with Lewis Hine photos of haggard, coal-smudged "breaker boys." *Black Potatoes, The Story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850* wrings your heart with Ireland's sufferings.

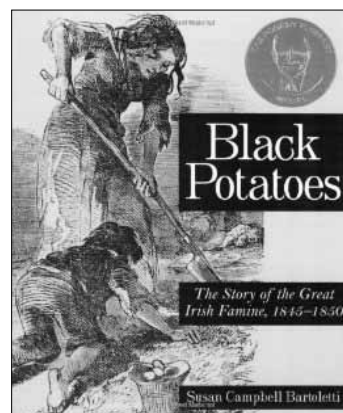
### The horrors of famine

A million people starved to death, another two million emigrated from Ireland, three-quarters of them to the U.S. (many ending up in New York). Haunting contemporary newspaper engravings show skeletal waifs scabbling in the dirt for blackened potatoes;

evicted families huddling in a ditch, "coffin ships," and forced evictions.

*Black Potatoes* targets young readers. (Bartoletti used to teach 8th grade.) Nearly every double-page spread of *Black Potatoes* is illustrated. Young readers can grasp the tragedy of 1840s Ireland simply looking at the pictures and reading Bartoletti's poignant captions. When they're older they can read Bartoletti's powerful narrative.

In 172 pages (plus a useful timeline) Bartoletti skewers British government policy: 1) exporting cattle and grain from Ireland while six million of its citizens had nothing to eat. (Before the potato blight ruined the potato harvest, six million Irish peasants ate nothing but potatoes—more than seven pounds a day, on average. Potatoes were the only crop productive (and nutritious) enough—to feed large peasant families on the tiny acreage they could afford to rent.); 2) British soldiers stood guard as wrecking crews knocked down



cottages of peasants who fell behind on the rent. Already starving, now they became homeless. (Bartoletti devotes Chapter 9 to the Irish patriots who responded in 1848 with the Young Ireland insurrection.) 3) Prime Minister Robert Peel tied himself in knots trying simultaneously to: a) import vast quantities of corn meal from the U.S. to avert mass starvation in Ireland—without outraging opponents in Parliament who'd rather see Irishmen die—than receive charity; b) abolish Britain's mercantilist/protectionist grain import laws in favor of free trade/laissez-

faire economic policies; c) hire starving men to do outdoor manual labor (mostly building roads)—without killing them (in their weakened condition) with overwork—or worse—pampering them in workhouses (combination factory-dormitories). (Each of P.M. Peel's dilemmas sounds eerily familiar today.)

Bartoletti tells just how badly British policy failed Ireland. She personalizes Ireland's vast loss of life during the 1840s Famine by weaving together anecdotal eyewitness accounts by survivors and aid workers, all of them traumatized, some of their protests still white-hot 170 years later, "...the Irish people weren't starving because there was no food. They were starving because they did not have money to buy food." The bitter irony: much of what went wrong in 1840s Ireland—and Britain's hapless efforts to address the crisis—is still going wrong in parts of the world today. And we're equally hapless today trying to save lives and help the victims.

# Work History News



A Bridge Between Past and Present

Volume 33 No 1 Winter | Spring 2016

## Facing the future collectively— with hope

By Jane LaTour

The annual John Commerford Labor Education Awards ceremony on December 2nd felt like the future—and a far happier future at that. Both award recipients brought a huge amount of enthusiasm with them to the 1199/SEIU Penthouse on 42nd Street, and it was contagious. NYLHA board member Gail Malmgreen, the event's chief organizer and M.C., introduced labor attorney Larry Cary, who presented the award to Stuart Applebaum, President of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. Cary noted that, as a labor history association, we look to the past in an attempt to understand how we got to such a bad place. "In that context, Stuart Applebaum is trying to roll back the anti-immigrant tide and the efforts to take away the right to a union shop for public sector workers. These are huge challenges and we are fortunate to have people devising strategies to meet them—and winning—like Stuart Applebaum," Cary said.

### Building better lives

Accepting the award, Mr. Applebaum spoke with great passion about the campaigns his union is leading. He began by saying that the award is for those union members who are struggling just to build better lives for their families. "It's a joy to be involved with such great people and to deal with the world in which we find ourselves. It is only the labor movement that can fight



Stuart Applebaum and Larry Cary

back against economic injustice," he said. He spoke about the contradiction of organizing in New York City, the wealthiest city in the world, yet being surrounded by poverty. He contrasted the percentage of people living in poverty with the handful of Walton family members who hold a disproportionate share of the nation's wealth, while their corporation, Wal-Mart, refuses to pay its employees a living wage—or even to provide them with regular work schedules. "The people working for Wal-Mart are recipients of public assistance. We are subsidizing the wealth of the Wal-Mart heirs," he said.

The union's campaigns to organize the city's car wash workers, the Fight For Fifteen Campaign, the fight to keep Wal-Mart out of the Bronx, have all been carried out by building ties to grass-roots community organizations.



Leyla Vural and Sara Horowitz

"Income inequality is the plague of the 21st century," Applebaum said. "There is only one way we can respond. We have to come together collectively—with a collective voice—a call to action. Time after time, we are inspired by people who stand up and take collective action—people who have been marginalized." He described the 17-week strike by the workers at the Mott Applesauce plant, in opposition to its multi-millionaire CEO. Clearly, the morale-building, hope and energy boost that the RWDSU president brings to the union's organizing campaigns was present in the room.

NYLHA board member Leyla Vural presented the next award to Sara Horowitz, the founder and Executive Director of the Freelancers Union. She gave a passionate oration about Horowitz

*Continued on page 2*

# Facing the future

Continued from page 1

and her accomplishments, and described her own experience working for the union in a research position, and about Horowitz's deep affinity for the history of the labor movement. "Sidney Hillman was one of her heroes. Her daughter was born on Samuel Gompers' birthday." Vural described the long list of prestigious awards that have been showered on Horowitz for her work, and the inspiration she provides for others: "She shows what's possible. She shows what we can do."

## Strategies for change

Horowitz began by saying that she loved the Commerford Awards because she loved the idea of a labor leader who was always re-inventing the labor movement, in a reference to John Commerford. She noted that the movement is about people coming together to solve problems. She spoke about the critical issue the Freelancers Union was founded in 1995 to address: the perpetual problems freelance workers face—getting paid regularly and collecting their pay—that's what we have to fix. It's also about the power of collective action." She used the example of Sidney Hillman—"when workers needed housing and there was no money. So we should have a bank. And that's how the Amalgamated Bank came into existence."

The problem-solving capacity of the labor movement is what Horowitz is focused on as she works to devise new strategies to address the seemingly insurmountable challenges workers are facing in the 21st century. She pointed to the fact that one in three workers, 54 million, are now working independently. "Before you can find these workers logistically, you have to re-imagine how to connect to them, because we have to be building new kinds of institutions," she said. Horowitz intimated that a new strategy is about to be unveiled by the Freelancers Union. Every subway rider in New York City already sees proof of the union's existence—with their cool, Lichtenstein-style drawings and catchy slogans on posters. One example: "Your 90-day pay cycle doesn't really work for my 30-day rent



NYLHA President Irwin Yellowwitz (l.) and a full (pent)house.

cycle." Horowitz is re-imagining strategies to unite people—outside the usual limits but, according to her inspired and intelligent vision, well within the realm of the possible.

In keeping with tradition, the prizes for student scholarship were awarded at the event. Professor Brian Greenberg, of Monmouth College, who serves along with Robert Wechsler, of Lehman College, CUNY, as a judge, presented the awards. Greenberg noted that, this year, the NYLHA received more submissions than ever, "a testament to the continued engagement of an embattled labor movement," he said. Two papers shared the 2015 Bernard Bellush Prize for graduate students: Jonathan Cohen, a doctoral student at the University of Virginia, for "This is Your Hometown: Collective Memory, Industrial Flight, and the Fate of Freehold, New Jersey;" and Doug Genens, a student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, for "Fighting Poverty in the Fields: Legal Services and the War on Poverty in Rural California." The 2015 Barbara Wertheimer Prize was awarded to Jared Odessky, of Columbia University, for his Senior Honor Thesis,

**"John Commerford did not have the benefit of major prior unionization, and thus much of what he accomplished was a new response to a new situation."**

"Queer Teacher Organizing: The Religious Right, and Battles over Child Protection in South Florida's Schools, 1977-1997." This paper addressed the long and short term responses of South Florida's queer teachers to Anita Bryant's 1977 "Save Our Children" campaign. "The three papers are outstanding examples of the range and high quality of the work being submitted to the committee," Greenberg said. In accepting his award, Odessky praised the pioneering scholarship of NYLHA board member Miriam Frank, and thanked her for her mentorship of his work.

NYLHA President Irwin Yellowwitz delivered this year's remarks on the significance of John Commerford, a labor leader of the 1830s. "He did not have the benefit of major prior unionization, and thus much of what he accomplished was a new response to a new situation," Yellowwitz said. To read Dr. Yellowwitz's full remarks, and a synopsis of the three prize-winning student papers, visit the NYLHA website. A slide show, "Photos By and About Department Store Workers," was presented by LaborArts at the event. To view the exhibit, visit the LaborArts website.

## Work History News



Work History News is published two times per year to keep NYLHA's members informed of labor history events, activities and tours.

### For more information contact:

NYLHA  
c/o Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives  
70 Washington Square South, 10th Floor  
New York, NY 10012  
<http://newyorklaborhistory.org>

President	Irwin Yellowwitz
Vice-President	George Altomare
Secretary	Abbe Nosoff; Regina Olff
Treasurer	Peter Filardo
Editor	Jane LaTour
Contributors	

Rachel Bernstein, Mark Brenner, Bette Craig, Joe Doyle, Melvyn Dubofsky, Kelsey Harrison, Steve Leberstein, Staughton Lynd, Ken Nash, Robert Parmet

# Save the Date

## New York Labor History's Annual Conference May 5-7, 2016

## The Debra E. Bernhardt Labor Journalism Prize

CALL FOR ENTRIES  
2015-2016



The 2015 winners of the Bernhardt Prize are Emily Harris and David Kameras for their article, *From Tragedy to Triumph: 100 Years Later Workers Benefit From Ludlow's Legacy*, which appeared in the May-June 2014 issue of the *United Mine Workers Journal*.

THE BERNHARDT PRIZE is an award of \$500 given to an article or series of articles that furthers the understanding of the history of working people. 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—in a union or workers' center publication or by an independent/free-lance journalist.

THE NEW YORK LABOR HISTORY ASSOCIATION is sponsoring this award in order to inspire more great writing for a general audience about the history of work, workers, and their organizations. The prize will be given to insightful work that contributes to the understanding of labor history; shows creativity; demonstrates excellence in writing; and adheres to the highest journalistic standards of accuracy.

**Deadline: Thursday September 1, 2016.**

The winner will be announced at the Tamiment Library on **Thursday October 13, 2016**, during a forum about the history of labor journalism.

To enter and for additional guidelines see [LaborArts.org/Bernhardt](http://LaborArts.org/Bernhardt)  
Questions? Contact: [info@LaborArts.org](mailto:info@LaborArts.org) or 212 998-2637.

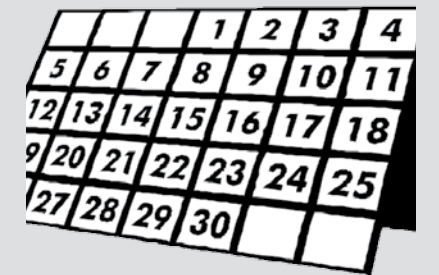
We are guided by the vision of the late Debra E. Bernhardt, who worked in so many different realms to share the hidden histories of working people. As head of the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives she reached

out to an astonishing number of people and organizations, to document undocumented stories and unrecognized contributions, and to make links between past and present.

The award is co-sponsored by LaborArts • Metro New York Labor Communications Council • the NYC Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO • and the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at NYU's Tamiment Library.

printed in-house

# CALENDAR



**THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 6 PM**

Book Party at Tamiment Library, NYU  
*Fighting for Total Person Unionism: Harold Gibbons, Ernest Calloway, and Working-Class Citizenship*, by Bob Bussel

**MAY 4-MAY 18**

5th Annual Workers Unite! Film Festival  
Visit [workersunitefilmfestival.org](http://workersunitefilmfestival.org) for schedule and ticketing

**THURSDAY, MAY 5**

NYLHA's Film Festival Program & Opening Night of the Annual NYLHA Conference

**FRIDAY MAY 6, KEYNOTE ADDRESS, & SATURDAY, MAY 7**

All-day NYLHA Annual Labor History Conference  
*Can't Turn Back: Unfinished Tasks of the Civil Rights Movement*  
Tamiment Library, NYU.

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8**

Tentative book talk at Tamiment Library  
*Public Sector Unions in Philadelphia* – James Wolfinger on the Transit Workers' Union, and Francis Ryan on AFSCME.  
Check [newyorklaborhistory.org](http://newyorklaborhistory.org) for information.

# Harper Lee's re-set

*Continued from page 4*  
unforgettable scene in *Mockingbird* in front of the local court house when the lynch mob comes looking for its victim.

Two incidents cause Jean Louise, formerly known as Scout, to feel betrayed.

In *Watchman* the case at the center of *Mockingbird* is summarized in one page as the case in which Atticus “won an acquittal for a colored boy on a rape charge.” Jean Louise thinks of that case as she sits in the balcony of the court room watching her father and her probable husband-to-be as they play prominent roles at a meeting of the local White Citizens’ Council.

The principal speaker at the meeting is a dreadful Mr. O’Hanlon who, we are told, goes from place to place spewing hate and prejudice. Atticus introduces him, albeit briefly. Henry gives silent assent.

The second incident centers on Calpurnia. Her biological mother having died when Jean Louise was young, Calpurnia became a substitute mother. In *Watchman*, Calpurnia, now old and seeing with difficulty, has a small house in the African American “Quarter.”

There comes a morning when the Finch household learns that Calpurnia’s most promising grandson, while drunk, has run over and killed a Mr. Healy. Henry tells the sheriff that he and Atticus will not take the case. Atticus responds, “Of course we’ll take it.”

Jean Louise rejoices inwardly. This is the father she admires, going to bat for the poor and unrepresented. Then she learns that his reason is to prevent the NAACP from demanding that there be Negroes on the jury. She leaves the room.

Making her way to Calpurnia’s home, Jean Louise finds the elderly African American woman dignified but remote. When she tries to say that her father will help Calpurnia’s grandson, Calpurnia responds that her grandson Frank will “go to jail with or without Mr. Finch.”

Calpurnia adds a question: “What are you all doing to us?” She apparently understands why Atticus is offering representation. Desperate, Jean Louise asks

the woman who was her nurse if she “hates us.” There is a pause. “Finally, Calpurnia shook her head.”

Bewildered, but determined, Jean Louise turns to Uncle Jack as a last possible person of honor in her hometown. She feels that she needs a watchman “to lead me around and declare what he seeth every hour on the hour. I need a watchman to tell me this is what a man says but this is what he means...” Uncle Jack responds, several scenes later, “every man’s watchman is his conscience.”

After breaking her *de facto* engagement with Henry, Jean Louise confronts her father. She tells Atticus that what she witnessed at the court house meeting was “disgusting.” She calls Atticus a coward, a snob, and a tyrant. She says that “there’s no place for me anymore in Maycomb, and I’ll never be entirely at home anywhere else.” She accuses her father of denying Negroes hope. Atticus, she charges, is telling blacks “that Jesus loves them, but not much.”

Her diatribe ends ugly. Jean Louise tells her father that she despises him, that he is a “double-dealing, ring-tailed old son of a bitch!”

Atticus responds, in part, “I love you.” But, alas, that is only part of the story.

## Tea leaves

The hard, cold facts of the matter are that at the height of their intense encounter, the father and daughter in *Watchman* agree on certain political perspectives. These perspectives were those of pro-slavery politicians before the Civil War, and Tea Party ideologues since the election of Barack Obama.

The reader with a copy of *Watchman* handy might turn to pages 238 and following. Atticus states that the two reasons he was at the Citizens’ Council meeting were “The Federal Government and the NAACP.” He asks his daughter how she reacted to the decision of the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

“I was furious,” she replies. Her father asks, “Why?”

Jean Louise f.k.a. Scout answers: “Well, sir, there they were, tellin’ us what to do

again.” She continues that “in trying to satisfy one amendment [the Fourteenth], it looks like they rubbed out another one [the Tenth].”

Prodded further by Atticus, she explains that to her, to “one small citizen,” the Federal Government is mostly dreary hallways and waiting around. The more we have, the longer we wait and the tired we get. Those old mossbacks on the wall up there knew it—but now, instead of going about it through Congress and the state legislatures like we should, when we tried to do right we just made it easier for them to set up more hallways and more waiting...

The dialogue between generations then turned to the Negro. “Let’s look at it this way,” Atticus begins.

“You realize that our Negro population is backward, don’t you? You will concede that?” “Yes, sir.”

“You realize that the vast majority of them here in the South are unable to share fully in the responsibilities of citizenship, and why?”

“Yes, sir.”

Atticus then asserts, “I’m a sort of Jeffersonian Democrat.” I think he is correct in describing his ideology this way. But what is easy to forget in thinking of Jefferson in the last half of his lifetime (say, from 1790 to his death in 1825) is that he believed in what Atticus tells Jean Louise: first, that government should be as decentralized as possible, and second, that African Americans are not prepared to be full participants in self-government.

I submit that when you strip away the persiflage, this is also the working program of the Tea Party.

And what I find so frightening about this Permanent Southern Ideology is that, just as Atticus and Uncle Jack in their different ways assert, it **is** organic, it **is** nested in a web of supporting practices and institutions, and because of these characteristics it **has** lasted more than two hundred years.

I hope the Left has or can develop a counterforce of similar weight and staying power.

# Two Gilded Ages in comparison

Steve Fraser, *The Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of American Resistance to Organized Wealth and Power*. New York, Little, Brown & Company, 2015. viii, 471 pp. (Index and Notes). \$28.

*Reviewed by Melvyn Dubofsky,*  
Distinguished Professor Emeritus  
Binghamton University, SUNY

Steve Fraser is a prolific writer and historian, the author of a superb prize-winning scholarly biography of the labor leader, Sidney Hillman and an equally excellent history of Wall Street and the broader financial community written for a general audience. He also contributes regularly to several small circulation leftist periodicals and online news and commentary sites. Perhaps it is his reputation as a serious observer of US history and contemporary politics that has produced the glowing blurbs on his latest book’s dust jacket from such eminent historians as Eric Foner, Greg Grandin, and David Nasaw.

## Lengthy tome

Writing as an historian who considered Fraser’s biography of Hillman to rank, alongside Nelson Lichtenstein’s biography of Walter Reuther, as the two finest studies of U.S. labor leaders ever written, I found Fraser’s *Age of Acquiescence* to be confounding if not dismaying. His purpose in writing the book is clear enough; as he asks in the introduction, why during our last three decades of rising economic inequality and increasing immiseration for millions of ordinary citizens has there been so little mass popular resistance unlike the first Gilded Age, c. 1870s-1890s, when citizen resistance to economic inequality surged and bloody class warfare erupted.

Yet I am not sure for whom he has written this book. It lacks original research and draws overwhelmingly, if not entirely, on the published works of scholars for its history and contemporary newspapers, periodicals, and websites for its portrait of the US today. Little in the book will strike American historians as unfamiliar or new although some parts (as I will note below)



may strike them as odd. General, non-academic readers may be put off by the book’s length, 421 pages exclusive of notes, acknowledgments, and other features, as well as its sometimes dense prose. Let me offer just a couple of examples of language likely to discourage common readers. On p. 218, Fraser writes about the anesthetized citizen of contemporary America, “Her selfhood is that of the abstract, depersonalized fungible commodity, a homunculus of rationalizing self-interest.” And in his conclusion, he observes, “We have grown accustomed to examine all sorts of personal foibles as if they were political MRIs lighting up the interior of the most sequestered political motivations (p. 412).” Here, I fear, we have one more example of a leftist preaching to a small chorus of sympathizers.

## Little light shed

Fraser’s reading of US history strikes me as idiosyncratic. His first Gilded covers a long nineteenth century that Fraser dates from the late eighteenth century to the coming of the New Deal in the 1930s. It reads as a history of endless primitive accumulation. Primitive accumulation as explicated by Marxists, however, bears little

resemblance to how the U.S. economy actually developed. In the case of the US during Fraser’s long nineteenth century the number of independent farmers grew steadily and tenancy leases and sharecropping kept millions tied to the land. Not until the Great Depression and the New Deal were masses of agrarians forced from the land, a tale told so well by John Steinbeck. By then the US was a fully developed capitalist economy. It is equally strange to see the US on the eve of the Civil War described as almost a pre-capitalist economy with rudimentary market relations and limited free, wage labor. The American South may have prospered on the basis of slave labor, and it was indeed the wealthiest region in the nation, but its wealth derived from participation in global markets that were part of an expanding capitalist system. Before the Civil War most states had adopted general incorporation laws and the limited liability corporation became the preferred method of business organization used by nearly all transportation enterprises, financial institutions, and manufacturing firms.

Rather than birthing corporate capitalism, the post-Civil War decades led to its maturation, a process that created an oligopolistic economy and the immense fortunes accumulated by the Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, Carnegies, Swifts, Harrimans, and Guggenheims. Popular resistance to economic concentration and rising inequality, as Fraser stresses, precipitated political challenges to the existing order by Greenbackers, Populists, and socialists and to employer autocracy by workers who struck, built unions, and waged class war against their adversaries. Fraser builds a narrative of popular resistance to corporate capitalism that culminates in the New Deal. Unfortunately, he also commits a number of factual errors. The governor of Idaho who died as victim of bombing did not meet his fate as a result of breaking a strike called by the “Wobbly-run Western Federation of Miners” (p.140). The strike in question occurred in 1899; the IWW was not created

*Continued on page 12*

# Harper Lee's re-set in "Watchman"

Staughton Lynd served as Director of Freedom Schools in the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964. Work History News invited him to write an essay about Harper Lee's *Go Set A Watchman* after its publication in the summer of 2015 provoked a contentious discussion.

*Go Set A Watchman* by Harper Lee (Harper Collins 2015)

Reviewed By Staughton Lynd

**G**o Set A Watchman is a complex, honest portrait of liberal sentiment in the Deep South in the years immediately following the United States Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the period in which *Watchman* was written.

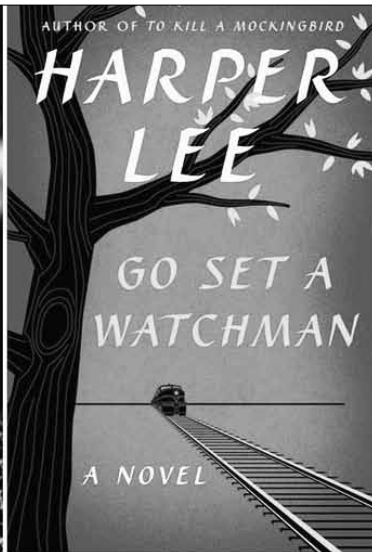
To begin with, we might wonder what is meant by the title, "Go set a watchman." The words are from Isaiah, ch. 21, verse 6: For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.

The preceding and following verses are by no means clear, but it appears that the narrator has experienced "a grievous vision;" he is filled with fear; chariots are approaching, yet "Babylon is fallen."

Perhaps it does not go too far to offer as an initial hypothesis the thought that the author perceives a time of great change and impending danger but also the possibility of hope. The text inquires, "Watchman, what of the night?" The watchman responds: "The morning cometh, and also the night." Isaiah, 21:11-12.

## The texture of place

In *Watchman*, the tomboy we came to love in *To Kill*



*A Mockingbird* as Scout is a young woman in her mid-twenties who goes by the name Jean Louise. She has been living in New York City. We meet her on the train as she returns to Maycomb, the Alabama town where she grew up, for her annual vacation.

By page 9 Maycomb has surrounded us for what proves to be the remainder of the book. Jean Louise expects to be greeted by her father, Atticus, now in his seventies and afflicted with severe arthritis. Instead, she is met by her longtime boy friend and suitor, Henry Clayton, who works in Atticus' law office and expects to take over the practice. In the end, the book will become an account of how Jean Louise confronts what she discovers to be the attitudes toward race of these two men.

The last name of Jean Louise, Atticus, Atticus' brother Uncle Jack, and his formidable sister Alexandra, is Finch. One evening Henry and Jean Louise visit Finch's Landing, "where Finch Negroes [*sic*] loaded bales and produce, and

unloaded blocks of ice, flour and sugar, farm equipment and ladies' things." When Jean Louise upbraids Henry for his compromises with the conventional, he reminds her that "there are some things I simply can't do that you can... You're a Finch." Sure enough, Aunt Alexandra frowns on the idea that Jean Louise might marry Henry because, while Henry is a fine young man, "we Finches do not marry the children of rednecked white trash."

The overpowering Southern and small town solidarity of Maycomb surrounds Jean Louise. On the one hand, she is obliged to suffer through a coffee arranged by Aunt Alexandra for former high school class mates with whom she now shares very little. On the other hand, the story contains the remembered high school Commencement Dance when, in a tangle of unanticipated consequences, "falsies" belonging to Jean Louise come to be hung on bushes near the gymnasium and are discovered by the

principal. He demands a confession by the perpetrator and threatens dire punishment. At the appointed hour Jean Louise comes to the principal's office with her signed confession. He wads it up without reading it and throws it into a wastepaper basket because "every girl in the school from the ninth grade upward" has already given him a note saying "Dear Mr. Tuffett, they look like mine." This is the incident that causes Jean Louise to reflect:

Hell is eternal apartness. What had she done that she must spend the rest of her years reaching out with yearning for them, making secret trips to long ago, making no journey to the present? I am their blood and bones, I have dug in this ground, this is my home. But I am not their blood, the ground doesn't care who digs it, I am a stranger at a cocktail party.

## Atticus and Oedipus

Jean Louise is "color blind." She assumes that she has absorbed this attitude from her saintly father, as in the

*Continued on page 18*

# The long fight to integrate NYC's bravest and finest

*Firefight: The Century-Long Battle to Integrate New York's Bravest* by Ginger Adams Otis, Palgrave Mcmillan, 2015

*One Righteous Man, Samuel Battle and the Shattering of the Color Line in New York*, Beacon Press Boston, 2015

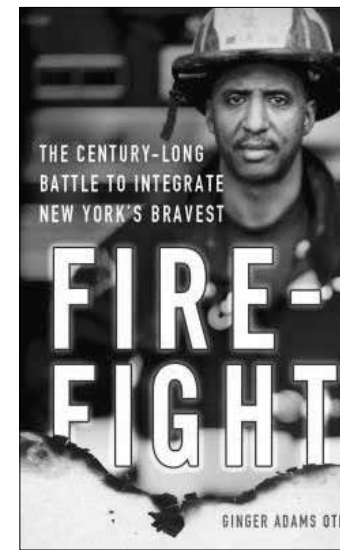
Reviewed By KEN NASH, Public Employee Press

**F**irefight: *The Century-Long Battle to Integrate New York's Bravest* by Daily News reporter Ginger Otis and *One Righteous Man: Samuel Battle* by Daily News editorial page editor Arthur Browne are two books that detail the beginning of the integration of two of New York City's best paid civil service jobs—the firefighters and police.

After Samuel Battle moved to the city from the Jim Crow South for more opportunity, he was inspired to become a policeman by many articles in the city's civil rights press. He passed the civil service test. But unlike white candidates, he needed the political pull of the civil rights community on Tammany Hall to be appointed. Entering as the sole African American in a police department known for its brutality and corruption, he was met with a cold wall of silence and non-cooperation.

## Slow steps to advancement

The tide of white hatred toward Battle slowly eroded and turned after he saved a white cop's life in a street fight with African Americans in 1919. Then he was given special



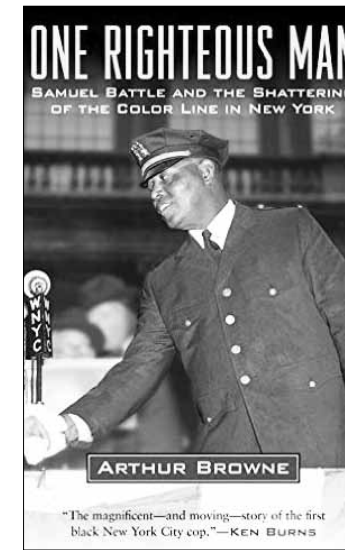
undercover assignments by the police commissioner, many involving Prohibition offenses.

But despite his high test scores, promotion came surprisingly only with the election of the new mayor, Jimmy Walker, and with it another milestone, supervision of white police.

During the Depression, African Americans increasingly protested police violence and misconduct and many blamed Battle's involvement in a system that tolerated such abuses. Under Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, the scant hiring of African American police increased. But there was still discrimination, so Battle joined in organizing the Guardians Association, a fraternal departmental organization of Black police to which he was elected president.

The New York Fire Department's situation was similar.

In 1919, Wesley Williams scored extremely high on the written and physical tests but



still needed political pull to become New York City's third African American Firefighter. In addition to a wall of silence and constant harassment, he was assigned to a Black bunk that no white fireman would use.

Williams survived his trial by fire, gaining wide but never official acclaim for his heroic rescues. Only after he won the departmental boxing championship—besting a white officer—was he widely accepted by white Firefighters.

## Similar story

Scoring high on the promotion test, he was promoted to lieutenant with supervisory responsibilities. But over the years, the number of Black Firefighters grew very slowly and conditions for new Black Firefighters resembled Williams' initiation.

Williams became president of the newly formed Vulcan Society in 1944 to fight discrimination and increase hiring on the job. Yet, by the millennium, New York City

had only about 300 Black Firefighters—roughly 3 percent of the 11,000 Firefighters in a city with 2 million African Americans—because of an unfair civil service test and a lack of recruitment efforts. This led to a courtroom showdown between Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and the Vulcans who had to battle not only city government but also an insular departmental culture that never saw their own inclusion as favoritism.

It was not until 2014 that the city settled the 98 million dollar lawsuit that increased opportunity for African American and Latino Firefighters.

Browne's and Otis' histories detailing institutionalized racism in the police and fire departments through successive city governments to the present day show the roots of problems we are still grappling with. Black unemployment is twice the national average even when candidates have similar backgrounds, and the FDNY's hiring improved only because of the Vulcans' agitation and a government lawsuit. The NYPD continues to be lacking in its recruitment procedures. And it is struggling with racialized police misconduct, which is endemic throughout the country, leading to nationwide protests that say Black lives matter.

Ken Nash recently retired as librarian of the DC 37 Education Fund Library.

—See more at: [http://www.dc37.net/news/PEP/9\\_2015/nyc\\_nypd.html#sthash.DBaMUu2i.dpuf](http://www.dc37.net/news/PEP/9_2015/nyc_nypd.html#sthash.DBaMUu2i.dpuf)

# Crossword puzzle clues

## ACROSS

1. Rosa \_\_\_\_ of the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott.

4. Brown vs. \_\_\_\_ of Education.

5. \_\_\_\_ Abdul-Jabbar, outspoken basketball player and author, who boycotted the 1968 Summer Olympics over the United States' treatment of African-Americans.

8. \_\_\_\_ Kennedy was a lawyer for the Panther 21 and a co-founder of the National Organization for Women.

9. \_\_\_\_ Rock, Arkansas, the scene of the 1957 confrontation over nine African-American high school students attempting to enroll over National Guard objections.

10. Andrew \_\_\_\_, former congressman and advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr.

13. The Amsterdam \_\_\_\_, Harlem's long-time newspaper, was founded in 1909 by James H. Anderson.

14. This famous Civil-Rights organization was founded in 1942 in Chicago and sponsored a protest in Williamsburg, Brooklyn in 1964 opposing racial discrimination by the F. and M. Schaefer Brewing Company. Six protesters were arrested. (Abbreviation).

15. Michael \_\_\_\_ was killed by police in August 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri.

16. \_\_\_\_ Clayton Powell, Jr., famous long-time Harlem Congressman.

17. Andrew \_\_\_\_, Civil-Rights Activist murdered in Mississippi in 1964.

19. \_\_\_\_ Cullen, famous Harlem poet.

20. Jesse \_\_\_\_, long-time Civil Rights Activist and head of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition.

22. Spike \_\_\_\_, director of "Do The Right Thing", "Four Little Girls" and many more great movies.

23. \_\_\_\_ Marable, biographer of Malcolm X.

25. The \_\_\_\_ Railroad was the secret network of homes used to set slaves free on their journey north.

27. The \_\_\_\_ Riots of 1863 centered on Manhattan in opposition to the Civil War.

29. \_\_\_\_ Wright, Harlem resident and famed author.

31. \_\_\_\_ Panthers, founded in Oakland in 1966.

32. Bayard \_\_\_\_, long-time gay Civil Rights Activist.

33. John \_\_\_\_, mayor of New York City who spoke at Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial rally in Midtown Manhattan in 1968, which was sponsored by District 65, Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Employees Union.

34. Long-time political activist Angela \_\_\_\_ was jailed in the old Women's House of Detention in 1970.

37. Eric \_\_\_\_ was killed by the police in Staten Island in an illegal chokehold in 2015 while selling loose cigarettes on the sidewalk.

## DOWN

2. Legendary actress \_\_\_\_ Dee, grew up in Harlem and died at the age of 91 in 2014.

3. Reverend Al \_\_\_\_, former activist with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and currently head of the National Action Network.

5. Nat \_\_\_\_ Cole, singer of "Mona Lisa" and "Unforgettable," among other great songs.

6. Founded in the 1930's, this public employees union featured Nelson Mandela at its 1990 convention (Abbre).

7. The \_\_\_\_ Club in Harlem opened in the 1920's and featured Count Basie, Cab Calloway and Billie Holiday, among others in its storied history.

11. \_\_\_\_ Simone, a singer and Civil Rights Activist who wrote the song "Mississippi Goddam" in the 1960s.

12. \_\_\_\_ Department Store was one of Harlem's most famous 125th Street tenants for over 80 years and the site of the stabbing of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1958 while he was on a book signing tour.

13. \_\_\_\_ Son was written by 29 Across.

15. The African \_\_\_\_ Ground was rediscovered in 1991, along with 419 bodies.

17. Danny \_\_\_\_ is a famous actor, director and political activist as well as a strong union supporter.

18. Black Lives \_\_\_\_ is the motto of the anti-police brutality movement of 2015.

21. \_\_\_\_ Dinkins was the first African-American Mayor of New York City.

24. The Village \_\_\_\_, which opened in 1935, is one of Greenwich Village's most famous jazz clubs.

26. Amiri \_\_\_\_, was one of America's most famous poets. His son is now the Mayor of Newark, New Jersey.

28. \_\_\_\_ University was the site of the 1968 student strike over the university's expansion into Harlem.

30. The \_\_\_\_ Church was the site of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech against the Vietnam War in 1967, one year to the day before he was assassinated.

35. The \_\_\_\_ Non-Violent Coordinating Committee was one of the leading groups of the Civil Rights Movement and was headed by John Lewis, Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, among others.

36. \_\_\_\_ Shakur, the late rapper, witnessed the Panther 21 Trial from inside the womb of his mother, Afeni

*Answers on page 9*

# Bernhardt labor history journalism award

By Jane LaTour

The 1st Annual Debra E. Bernhardt Labor Journalism Prize was awarded on Oct. 15 at the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, NYU. Director Tim Johnson welcomed a full house of celebrants, noting that Debra Bernhardt did an excellent job of laying a foundation for the archives, which serves as "one of the premier sources for primary research by labor journalists," and therefore, honoring both Debra and labor journalists was a fitting tribute.

Alexander Bloom spoke about his mother's legacy. "I spent a lot of time in this room," he said. He talked about what he thought labor history meant to Debra, her roots in Iron River, Michigan, and her introduction at an early age to the joys of preservation and documentation, "in the same spirit she later brought to her work as a labor historian." Public historian Rachel Bernstein said that Alex "articulated Debra's spirit better than any of us could," and then described some of the many projects Debra carried out, including the landmarking of Union Square as a national labor history site. "Debra thought that everyone would love history if only they knew about it," Bernstein said.

## Labor history matters

NYLHA President Irwin Yellowitz presented the award and spoke about Debra's intimate connection throughout her life to miners and mining communities. The fact that the first prize is being awarded to



Debra E. Bernhardt

a story about miners and the Ludlow, Colorado strike in 1914 is serendipitous, he said. "Reading about their history can only increase the sense of solidarity and community among the union members," said Yellowitz. The award winning story, "From Tragedy to Triumph: 100 Years Later, Workers Benefit from Ludlow's Legacy," appeared in *The United Mine Workers Journal*.

David Kameron, accepting the award on his behalf and that of co-author Emily Harris, spoke about the fact that so many workers don't know the history of their own union. "They aren't growing up, hearing stories about the union at the kitchen table. The generational links have been broken and consequently, the strong traditions of union miners have been weakened. In this respect, we're starting to look like other unions," he said. "Ludlow is a good example of how a slice of history can get out and make our story compelling. Nobody speaks for labor better than workers. It's important for labor journalists to give voice to people who would otherwise be voiceless," he said.

A discussion on "Labor History in Workers' Stories," featured panelists Tom Robbins, Investigative Journalist in Residence at CUNY; Richard Steier, Editor of *The Chief-Leader*, and Esther Kaplan, Editor at *The Investigative Fund* at *The Nation* Institute. Lending their years of expertise to the lively discussion, each panelist shared examples of stories which were made stronger and clarified by including the background—the labor history—and thus providing a meaningful context. Robbins, who moderated the panel, described his recent coverage in *The New York Times*, about the brutalization of prisoners who are serving their time in New York state prisons, by members of the Correction Officers' union, and the history of the collective bargaining contract that allows them to escape culpability for their brutality. One example provided by Richard Steier cited the importance of including the historical dimension when politicians begin lobbying to change the pensions of public

employees. "It becomes critical to understand the history and evolution of that system," he said. Esther Kaplan noted that there are many issues that constitute attacks on civil servants where people don't understand what has happened over time. One compelling example she offered where history made a critical difference was in editing a cover story for *The Nation* on children working in tobacco fields. Without including the history of agricultural workers' organizing efforts, the story would be incomplete. A question and answer session followed.

Co-sponsors of the event included: the New York Labor History Association; LaborArts; Metro Labor Communications Council; the New York City Central Labor Council; and the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at the Tamiment Library, New York University. For information about the contest and submitting entries to the 2nd Annual Bernhardt Prize, visit the website of LaborArts.org.

## Save the Date

**New York Labor History's  
Annual Conference  
May 5-7, 2016**

## Gilded Ages in comparison

Continued from page 3

until 1905. The Political Scientist Louis Hartz held a professorship at Harvard not Columbia (p. 175), and the president of the UMW in 1977-78 was **Arnold** not Arthur Miller (p. 355).

What about the contemporary scene? Does Fraser's analysis of the creation of a second "Gilded Age" and an era of unprecedented inequality in which the top one percent of Americans have grabbed all of the total increase in national income while the mass of citizens, the 99 percent, have experienced income loss or wage stagnation enlighten readers? The tale he tells is pretty much the standard one in which complacent labor leaders eagerly cooperate with government and corporations to effect their institutions undoing.

Suddenly faced with hostile political leaders and intransigent corporate "partners" amid a rising tide of globalization in which capital moved freely and workers grew immobile, labor leaders watched helplessly as their union empires shriveled—by the turn of the new century union density had fallen to under seven percent in the private sector—and the traditional industrial heartland became a rust belt. In this new, non-union universe, workers lost job security, fully paid company health

insurance, and defined benefit pensions. In a new world of contingent work and intermittent employment eerily reminiscent of the first "Gilded Age," workers assumed all the risks and employers reaped the benefits. Independent contractors shifting from gig to gig and temp workers employed by agencies and not the firms for whom they worked grew into large segments of the labor force. Fraser bemoans the absence of mass resistance prior to the rise of Occupy Wall Street (OWS), and its condemnation of the one percent that exploited the 99 percent. Fraser fails to explain satisfactorily why the 99 percent acquiesced in its own subjugation for nearly three decades. In a book of more than 400 pages no ordinary citizen or worker comes to life. We never learn why working people who became Reagan Democrats, or devotees of evangelical Protestant faiths, or the audiences for Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck behaved as they did.

### Analysis misses mark

By some strange alchemy family capitalists from the sunbelt—the Waltons, the Kochs, Sheldon Adelson—turned the nation neoliberal, defeated the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and spread the gospel of "right to work." But the Waltons,

Kochs, Adelsons, and even Warren Buffett are not the family or merchant capitalists of early capitalism; they may control the finances of the modern limited liability corporations their names conjure but they use the most sophisticated business methods implemented by university-educated professional managers. Instead of focusing on the concept of family capitalism, Fraser might have highlighted the financialization of the economy in which shareholder value and returns became more important than the longer term health and growth of business enterprises. He might also have noted how mergers and consolidations in key sectors of the economy had created a form of concentrated corporate economy that surpassed that created by J.P. Morgan and his generation of financiers between 1897 and 1907.

It remains unclear how Fraser expects massive citizen resistance to the power of organized wealth in the United States to arise when the deck is stacked against "the people" and he denigrates the alliance between the leaders of organized labor and the professional class of liberal reformers who created the New Deal order. Instead Fraser disdains what remains of "big labor" and dismisses contemporary "limousine liberals". He hyperbolically characterizes John Maynard Keynes as a high priest of "limousine liberalism" (p. 378) instead of crediting the English economist as a prescient critic of corporate capitalism and the financiers and executives who dominate it. Readers who seek to understand how and why the second "Gilded Age" arrived and why material inequality has reached epic proportions would be better served by reading Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, an even longer tome than *Age of Acquiescence* and with a heavier scholarly apparatus.

And for those who want to understand why ordinary citizens think and behave as they do, I would suggest reading Steve Greenhouse's *The Big Squeeze* and George Packer's *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America* in which real people occupy center stage and suffer the slings and arrows of our new "Gilded Age."

## Union Democracy pioneer Herman Benson turns 100

October 23, 2015 / Mark Brenner, Labor Notes

Labor activists from around the country gathered October 3 to celebrate Herman Benson's 100th birthday and pay tribute to the organization he founded, the Association for Union Democracy, which has been advancing the cause of "lonely union reformers" for more than half a century.

From combating corruption and mob influence to making sure rank-and-file members could get an honest union election, AUD has helped thousands of unionists over the years—offering organizing, education, and legal assistance in person, over the phone, and through its books, pamphlets, and newsletters.

Benson described it as "essentially a civil liberties organization that focuses on the rights of members in their unions to free speech, fair elections, due process in trials, and fair hiring."

Although it has rarely grabbed headlines, AUD's push for union democracy has helped shape today's labor movement.

Larry Hanley offered one of many examples. In the 1980s,



Herman Benson

when he was a young bus driver on Staten Island, his local's membership meetings were known as the "Friday night fights." He was assaulted and brought up on internal charges for speaking out.

That's when Hanley first climbed the stairs to Benson's tiny office. With AUD's help, he

beat the slander charges leveled against him.

But when he mentioned his plans to move up and become a supervisor, Benson cursed him out: "You s.o.b.! You've told me the leadership is lousy, the members don't know what to do, you just took up two hours of my time helping you, and

now you're telling me you're going to leave the union?"

So Hanley decided to stick with it. "I probably would have left if it wasn't for you, Herman. So I've got one thing to say to you—you s.o.b.!" said Hanley, now the international president of the Amalgamated Transit Union.

### "Keep It Up, Buddy"

Dan Boswell, a former executive board member in Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 164, shared a similar story. With AUD's assistance, he defended his free speech rights and in 1981 forced changes to the international union's constitution to give members the right to criticize their officers, meet in caucuses, run for office, and not be disciplined and fined for exercising their rights.

How do you clean up corruption in the labor movement? One approach might be top-down oversight. But as Teamsters for a Democratic Union Organizer Ken Paff noted, AUD promoted a better way: democracy.

That perspective helped shape the 1989 federal consent decree that introduced one-member,

*Continued on page 15*

“ Issues of union democracy are posed in a much different way—but there's still a need for the defense of civil liberties and democracy within our unions. ”

## DO YOU KNOW AN UNSUNG HEROINE?

NOMINATE A LIFELONG activist for the 6th Annual Clara Lemlich Awards, to be held in spring 2016. Last spring LaborArts, the Museum of the City of New York, and the Triangle Fire Coalition honored seven unsung women who have devoted their lives to the greater good, in the tradition of Clara Lemlich following the Triangle Factory Fire in 1911. See inspiring interviews with 2015 honorees at LaborArts.org.

Nominations are now open for 2016. Honorees need to be able to attend the ceremony (thus most will live near NYC), and should have at least six decades of activism behind them. To nominate someone send the name, a brief description of the activities that qualify her for this award, together with your own name and contact information, to info@laborarts.org.



## Crossword Answers

Shakur.

ACROSS

1. Parks
4. Board
5. Kareem
8. Flo
9. Little
10. Young
13. News

14. CORE

15. Brown

16. Adam

17. Goodman

19. Countee

20. Jackson

22. Lee

23. Manning

25. Underground

27. Draft

29. Richard

31. Black

32. Rustin

33. Lindsey

34. Davis

37. Garner

DOWN

2. Ruby

3. Sharpton

5. King

6. AFSCME

7. Cotton

11. Nina

12. Blumstein's

13. Native

15. Burial

17. Glover

18. Matter

21. David

24. Vanguard

26. Baraka

28. Columbia

30. Riverside

35. Student

36. Tupac

# Lucy and Gloria considered

*Lucy Stone, An Unapologetic Life*, Sally G. McMillen, Oxford University Press, 2015

*My Life on the Road*, Gloria Steinem, Penguin Random House, 2015

Reviewed by Bette Craig

What is it I don't like about Sally G. McMillen's *Lucy Stone: An Unapologetic Life*? Well, somehow, Sally McMillen has made Lucy Stone's life seem boring. There's no grand sweep of the big picture, but lots of tedious detail.

McMillen, Mary Reynolds Babcock Professor of History at Davidson College, tells us that she wrote the book to try to restore Lucy Stone to the pantheon of woman suffrage heroines, in the company of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott. She points out that Lucy's self-effacement and dislike of being written about contributed to the "who is Lucy Stone?" issue.

## Bowing down no longer

When Stanton and Anthony and their collaborator, Joslyn Matilda Gage, were working on a history of the women's suffrage movement (first volume published in 1881), Lucy didn't want to be in a history "written by the other wing."

"The other wing" consisted of Stanton and Anthony's National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), which was formed when the suffrage movement split after the Civil War. Stanton and Anthony opposed the 15th Amendment because it left out women.

Stone was committed to finishing the project of giving

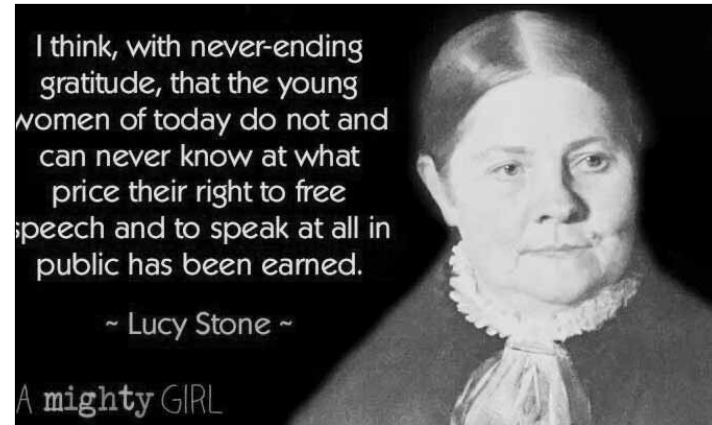
the vote to black people and helped found the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA).

Lucy Stone was born in 1818 and grew up on a farm in West Brookfield, Massachusetts (about 20 miles from Worcester). She was expected to work hard as a child. Education was respected in her family, but not for girls. Her father, Francis Stone, ruled the family with an iron hand and a tight fist, but subscribed to William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*. The abolition cause was what impelled Lucy Stone toward her life-long struggle for women's rights.

She was much influenced by abolitionist Abbey Kelley Foster who spoke in Lucy's hometown. Stone also witnessed the censure of Sarah and Angelina Grimké by Massachusetts Congregational ministers for lecturing on anti-slavery and women's rights in 1838.

It seems that these days, Lucy Stone is remembered most for keeping her maiden name after she married. People who follow this practice are still sometimes called "Lucy Stoners." But the original Lucy Stone was extraordinary. She was the first woman to speak full time for women's rights, the first woman from the State of Massachusetts to earn a college degree. (But she wasn't allowed to read her senior essay from the platform on that occasion because it wasn't considered seemly at Oberlin, even though the institution was admitting women as well as black students.)

Lucy Stone began her public speaking career when

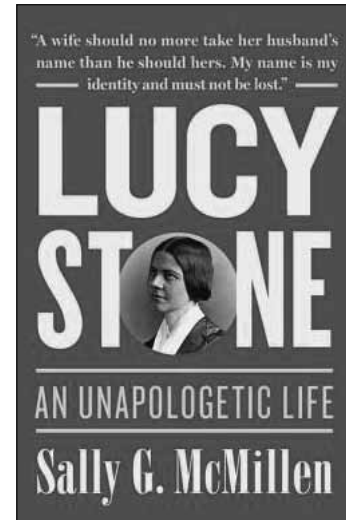


the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society hired her as a lecturer in 1848, the year after she graduated at age 29 from Oberlin. Gradually, she incorporated more and more of her thoughts about women's rights in her abolition speeches and was able to set up her own speaking engagements and make a living at it. As she said in 1855 in a Cincinnati speech to 2,000 people, "From the first years to which my memory stretches, I have been a disappointed woman....

In education, in marriage, in religion, in everything, disappointment is the lot of woman. It shall be the business of my life to deepen this disappointment in every woman's heart until she bows down to it no longer."

## Against all logic

This year has also seen the publication of a memoir by one of our current feminist icons, Gloria Steinem. In *My Life on the Road*, Steinem details her itinerant childhood where she absorbed her father's love of independence and life's possibilities. She tells how she went on the 1963 March on Washington "against all logic,

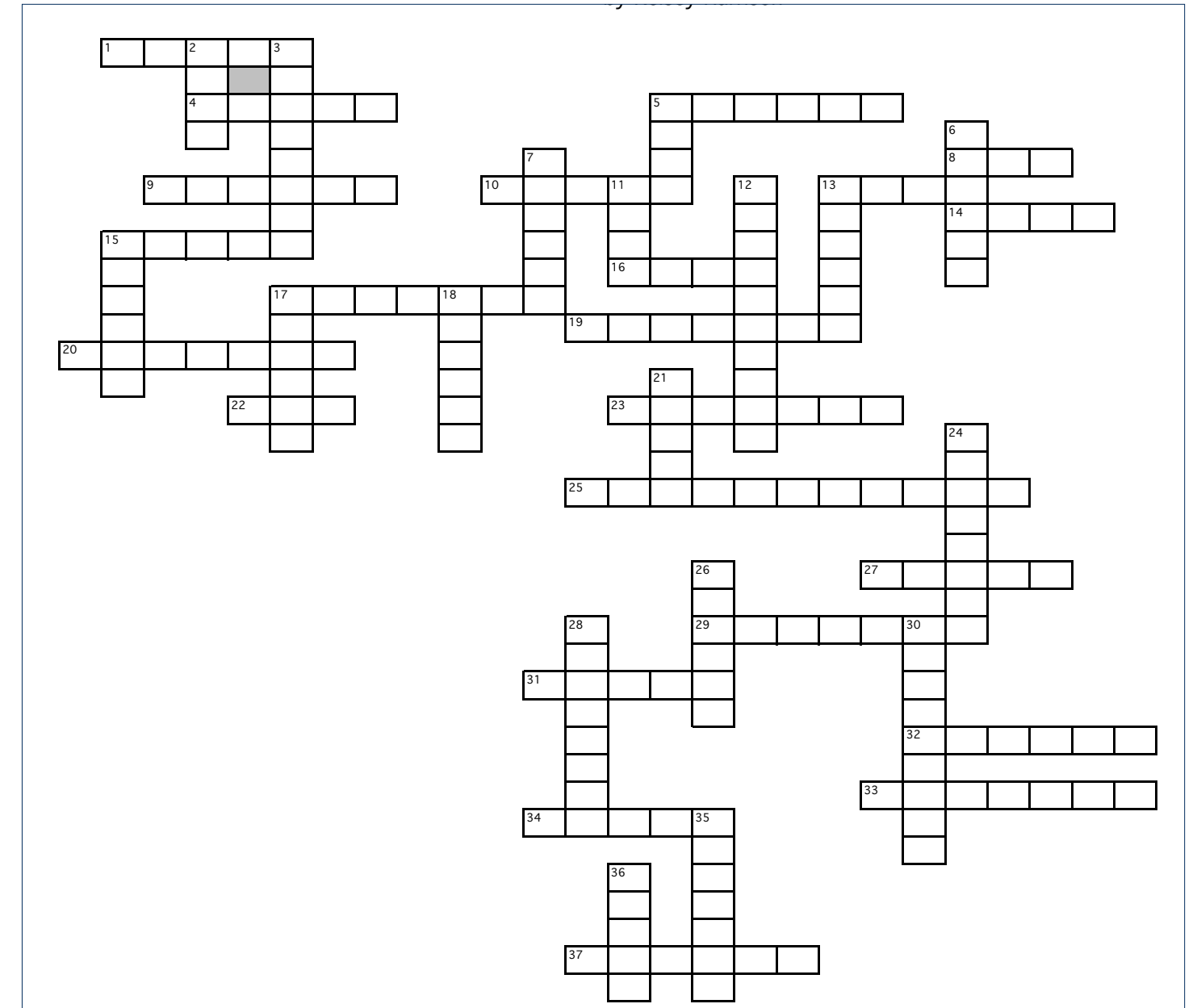


marching beside a Mrs. Geene who pointed out that Dorothy Height was the only woman on the speakers' platform and she isn't speaking. And where is Ella Baker, who trained all of these SNCC youngsters? And where is Fanny Lou Hamer?"

So, it seems that Gloria Steinem's progression of consciousness was very similar to Lucy Stone's. Like Lucy Stone, who ventured out to speak in public, sometimes to crowds of thousands when the going was much more difficult, Gloria Steinem believes in the power of being in the same room—especially when it can include a talking circle where

*Continued on page 16*

# African-American Crossword Puzzle



## Union Democracy

*Continued from page 9*

one-vote for top Teamsters offices, provided federal oversight of national elections, paving the way for reformer Ron Carey to become the union's first directly elected president.

AUD influenced several defining moments in labor history, including the Miners for Democracy movement of the early 1970s and reform efforts inside the Steelworkers later that decade.

When California health care workers were fighting off trusteeship, and recently when bedside nurses in New York were

pushing to shed a century of union domination by nurse managers, AUD backed them up. Today it defends free speech on social media too.

Above all, Benson said he told each reformer, "You're doing the right thing. Keep it up, buddy." Sometimes this encouragement was the best thing AUD could offer: "There was often very little we could do for them. But that little loomed as an enormous mountain in their lives."

In his closing remarks, Benson summed up the enduring need for union democracy.

In a half-century, he said, "the labor movement has become weaker, there's no question about that. But it's vastly improved in many ways, and it's more prepared for the years to come—in its attitude toward immigrants, toward the lower-paid, toward rallying support from the public.

"Issues of union democracy are posed in a much different way—but there's still a need for the defense of civil liberties and democracy within our unions. So I'm hoping that some of you will be inspired by what you heard today to join this great cause."

# Struggle to dismantle school segregation

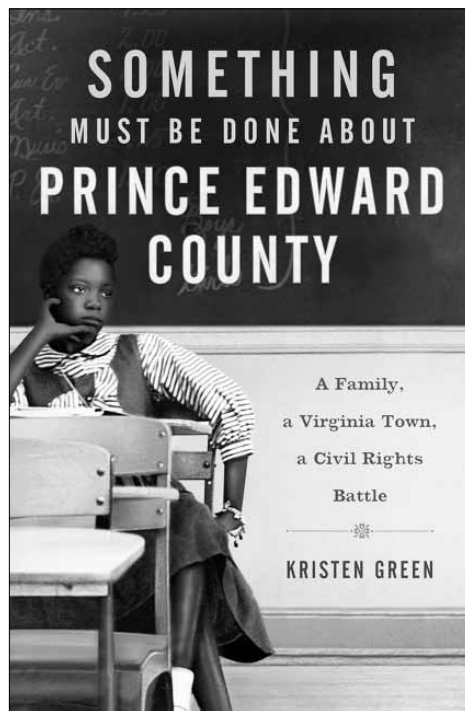
*Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County: A Family, A Virginia Town, A Civil Rights Battle* by Kristen Green. HarperCollins, 2015

Review by Kelsey Harrison

This book is about a very unique response by the racist residents of Prince Edward County in Virginia to the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court desegregation decision. The case was brought by the NAACP and actually consolidated five different cases, including one brought by the NAACP in Prince Edward County. Students and parents of the inferior, segregated African-American High School had been complaining for years about how inadequate the building was: No gym or cafeteria, a lack of heat, too few buses to get students to school on time and old and torn school supplies.

## Deep roots of inequality

Nothing was ever done until a single student, Barbara Johns, organized a student strike (and this was before Facebook!) and held a meeting in the school auditorium with the entire student body. This occurred after tricking the principal of the school to go downtown to chase some imaginary students that were causing problems in local stores. The students went on strike for two weeks and then met with the NAACP to consolidate a case against the county. Ironically during this time period the racist Whites, who for years had refused requests to build a new school for African-Americans, changed



their minds and miraculously found the money that they had always said wasn't available to build it. However, the NAACP convinced the local parents and students that a "separate but equal" school was not what the African-American community needed but instead must demand one integrated high school for all of the races.

In 1954 when the Brown vs. Board of Education decision was announced there was rejoicing in the African-American community, who thought they had won the right to integrated schools. Instead, the White community organized against the decision, closed all twenty-one public schools in the county, and opened Whites-only private schools with desks and supplies taken from the closed public school system. This situation of no schools for African-Americans would last for five years, prompting Attorney

General Robert Kennedy to say in 1963: "The only places on earth not to provide free public education are communist China, North Vietnam, Sarawak (part of Malaysia), Singapore, British Honduras—and Prince Edward County, Virginia." Some students were sent to other cities to go to school but most African-American students received no education during this time:

some never graduated and the illiteracy rate in the county quadrupled. The original racist Whites-only private school is still open today under a new name and didn't integrate until 1984.

Ms. Green alternates the narrative of the fight to get integrated schools with her own personal story as she grew up in the county and then returned after getting married to raise her children. She discovers that her grandfather, who never said much about this disgusting situation, was on the board of the racist Whites-only school and active in the original group that created the school. Ms. Green interviews current residents who lived through the integration battle and chronicles how separate the races still are today and that in some ways nothing has changed in this sleepy, southern small-town community. Ms. Green also follows the story of

her family's African-American maid, who sent her daughter to another city to get an education and who subsequently never came back to live with her own mother again.

## Separate and unequal

The older 1950s and 1960s history is very interesting but overall the more personal narrative story slows down the flow of the book and it could have been shortened. When you think back to this era you say this couldn't possibly happen today but the situation reminds you of America today in many ways. Ridiculous arguments supporting segregation by politicians, judges and newspaper publishers in the Civil-Rights Era remind me of the exact same nonsense spewed today by Republican presidential candidates when talking about race, police brutality, climate change, Planned Parenthood, immigration and other issues. And speaking of the Supreme Court, Justice Scalia's recent ludicrous statements opposing affirmative action are almost word for word taken from the arguments of racists of the 1950s (segregation is good for African-Americans and only helps them).

Looking back at this horrible situation you would think that setting up a separate school system today would be impossible and is something only done over sixty years ago. Yet, with a different purpose, in the 2010s the hedge-fund-owned, union-busting charter schools are thriving in setting up a separate school system.

# Teamster power

*Continued from page 5*

produced a sharp national reaction, particularly as it paralleled the rise of Jimmy Hoffa. After Gibbons skillfully managed his election to the Teamster presidency in September 1957, Hoffa made him his executive assistant. Now the heir apparent to Hoffa, Gibbons appeared destined to reach the top of the Teamsters.

However, coinciding with Gibbons' ascent within the IBT was the creation of a United States Senate committee chaired by John McClellan of Arkansas to investigate union corruption. As Bussel describes, thus began a series of setbacks for both Hoffa and Gibbons, including the latter's appearance

before the McClellan Committee that revealed moral if not criminal corruption on his part. Wounded but not fatally injured, Gibbons would remain a Teamster regional vice president, and incur the wrath of President Richard Nixon as well as Hoffa over his opposition to the Vietnam War, but also continue to support the cause of civil rights with Ernest Calloway.

Though sympathetic to Gibbons' and Calloway's efforts to bring social justice to St. Louis, Bussel does not conceal the downside. Gibbons emerges as a labor leader with a noble agenda, but too willing to compromise ethics for the sake of ambition and personal power. Calloway, besides

sharing the campaign for "total person unionism," remained a life-long fighter for the interests of African Americans and the working class in general.

Nevertheless, Bussel notes, both activists engaged in "questionable behavior" and were not above sidestepping "democratic processes" to bring about "working-class citizenship." In view of organized labor's current decline and the nation's continuing racial turmoil, he considers the relevance today of Gibbons' and Calloway's reform vision. After observing that it has not disappeared, he suggests that it "will ultimately be needed to help re-establish labor's social relevance." He may very well prove to be prophetic.

# Book Party

The NYLHA invites you to celebrate Saint Patrick's Day at a Book Party!  
**THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 17, 6:00-8:30 P.M.**

Tamiment Library, 70 Washington Square South, 10th Floor, Bobst Library

***Fighting for Total Person Unionism: Harold Gibbons, Ernest Calloway, and Working-Class Citizenship* by Robert Bussel, professor of history and director of the Labor Education and Research Center, University of Oregon.**

Co-sponsored by the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives and The Worker Institute at Cornell.

**"A thoroughly researched, elegantly constructed, and marvelously engaging study of two long-time labor activists. But it's more than that, really. Through the braided story of Harold Gibbons and Ernest Calloway, Bob Bussel re-creates the social vision that animated so much of the post-World War II labor movement—and reminds us how much we've lost in our age of rampant individualism."**

**—Kevin Boyle, author of *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights and Murder in the Jazz Age***



# Making history personal

LONGTIME NYLHA supporter Debra E. Bernhardt (1953–2001) was an activist, an archivist and a labor historian dedicated to documenting the undocumented history of workers in New York City. LaborArts, which she helped to found, carries on her mission in a small way; she left it, along with a wealth of other initiatives, to carry forward her inspired and inclusive work. A new online exhibit can now be found at LaborArts.org, with photos of Bernhardt and a sampling of her myriad projects. *Work History News* readers are asked to consider contributing links to resources and documentation projects that Debra helped inspire. Let's document the documentarian!



## Lucy and Gloria considered

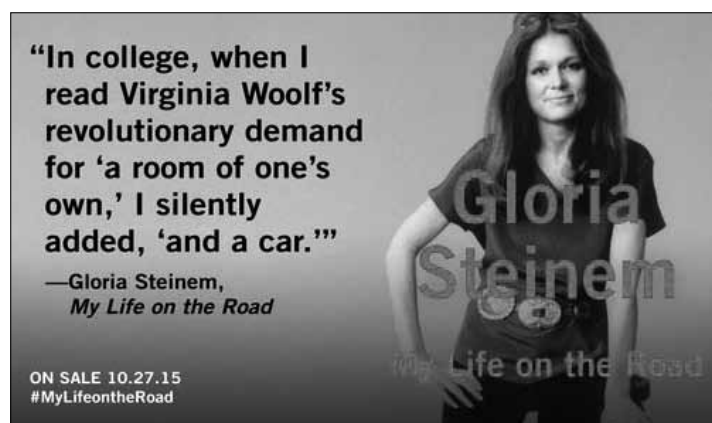
*Continued from page 6* she can hear back from the people who come to listen to her.

She writes of the inspiration she received from the village women she met in the two years she spent in India after graduating from Smith College in 1956 and the Native American women she came to know later, both groups sharing the tradition of the talking circle and consensus building. Her background as a journalist has led her to seek the truth that only her own eyes and ears can tell her.

I was put off on page 95 of McMillen's book because in the

brief biographical introduction of Susan B. Anthony as an interactor, McMillen says she was born in 1820 in Rochester, New York. While it is true that Anthony moved to Rochester with her family later in her life, it wasn't until 1845. I happen to be sensitive to this because I am a part-time resident of the Berkshires in a neighboring town to Adams, Massachusetts, which claims Susan B. Anthony as its own and has created a museum in the house where she lived until she was six years old. Even Wikipedia has this information.

If you're looking for a more exciting approach to Lucy



Stone's life, you might want to take a look at Andrea Moore Kerr's *Lucy Stone: Speaking Out for Equality*, published by Rutgers University Press in 1992. It starts out "Extra! Extra! Lucy Stone Is Dead!"

Kerr states that *The New York Times* ran a 10-paragraph obituary when Lucy died in October 1893. *The Washington Post* printed a five-paragraph notice on its front page. Lucy Stone was not obscure in 1893.

# Teamster power through a different lens

Robert Bussel, *Fighting for Total Person Unionism: Harold Gibbons, Ernest Calloway, and Working-Class Citizenship* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015

Reviewed By Robert D. Parmet  
York College, The City University of New York

Though Samuel Gompers preached "pure and simple unionism" and David Dubinsky identified with "social unionism," neither labor leader advanced a vision of what Ernest Calloway and Harold Gibbons called "total person unionism," a "trade union oriented war on slums." Calloway, an African American, and Gibbons an Irish American, were both coal miners' sons who sought in St. Louis through the "community service" program of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 688 to create "worker-citizens," "new kinds of unionists whose workplace and civic lives were seamlessly integrated."

### Dual biographies

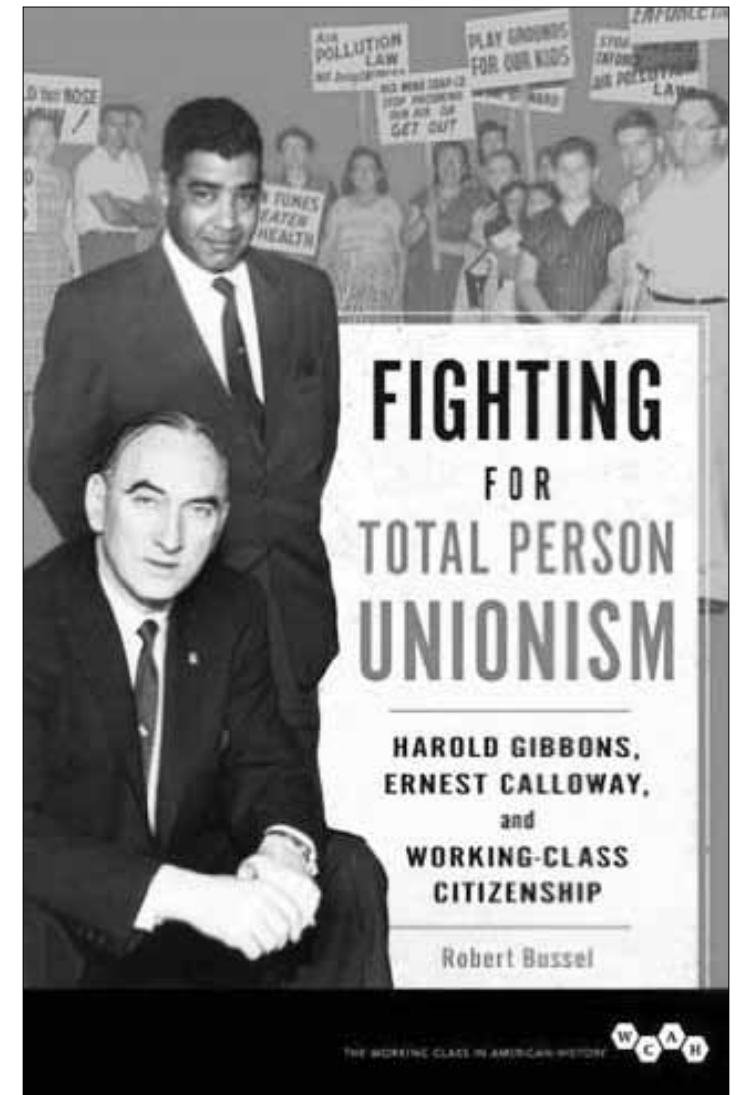
In *Fighting for Total Person Unionism*, Robert Bussel brilliantly follows Calloway and Gibbons as they combined to transform workers into activists who would bring about political change that would benefit them as well as their city. The idea was to integrate the unionists' workplace and civic lives. Using the first part of his book for dual biographies, Bussel describes how the two leaders overcame "hardscrabble" early lives to work together when Gibbons invited Calloway, whom he had first met in Chicago in 1937, to

join him in St. Louis thirteen years later.

Both had labor education backgrounds and firm anti-communist views, with Gibbons having union positions with the American Federation of Teachers, Congress of Industrial Organizations, and Textile Workers Union before becoming a Teamsters vice president and the leader of the St. Louis Teamsters' local. His career with the latter then took him to the side of President Jimmy Hoffa, to whom he became a trusted aide until he criticized the Vietnam War, which brought about the temporary loss of his vice presidency.

Calloway's odyssey included battles against racial segregation and organizing Chicago railroad station porters. Committed to his beliefs, in 1940 he fought a successful battle to avoid serving in the segregated United States Army. Following a losing contest with communists for control of the United Transportation Service Employees in North Carolina, he joined Gibbons in St. Louis, thus beginning the partnership to bring about "total person unionism."

At a January 1952 conference, Gibbons and Calloway stated their theme. "The union member is also a citizen and his interests as a citizen coincide with those of his fellow citizens. Accordingly, they enlisted members of Local 688 in a program to make productive use of the "other sixteen hours" when they were not doing their regular work. Calloway also continued his civil rights activism and



became president of the St. Louis National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Together they and others in Local 688 waged campaigns dealing with such concerns as public transit, juvenile delinquency, racial discrimination in public housing, downtown redevelopment, rat control, and higher education. Along with the National Urban League, they attacked racial employment inequality at Coca Cola. Against the backdrop of a wildcat strike that Calloway and Gibbons opposed, they successfully

integrated the St. Louis taxi industry. Stirring the most controversy, in 1957 they led a labor-civil rights coalition that defeated an attempted revision of the St. Louis city charter. Business and civic groups had wanted to restructure the city government so as to lessen the "growing influence [of labor and civil rights organizations] and grant the city's power elite a free hand to make critical economic and social decisions."

### Teamster 'troubles'

The demonstration of Teamster power in St. Louis

*Continued on page 13*

# Review and NYLHA book launch

Sheila Collins and Gertrude Goldberg, *When Government Helped: Learning From the Successes and Failures of the New Deal*. Oxford University Press, 2013

Reviewed by Steve Leberstein

As Depression loomed over the country at dawn of the New Year 1930, how likely was it that the federal government headed by President Herbert Hoover could “help” those afflicted? After a decade of the Open Shop, political repression, and financial speculation, there was little hope for fundamental change in the nation’s social, economic and political culture until FDR took office in March 1933 and quickly came to see the magnitude of the crisis.

Sheila Collins and Gertrude Goldberg in their new book, *When Government Helped: Learning From the Successes and Failures of the New Deal* (Oxford University Press, 2014), did excellent work in putting together a comprehensive overview of government’s response to the crisis and the context which shaped it. Of the volume’s 11 chapters, six were the work of the two editors with others drawn from participants in the Columbia University Seminar on Full Employment, Social Welfare and Equity.

## Festering problems

The book is a collection of essays on key aspects of the New Deal, the social and economic conditions that it hoped to address, and the political environment that shaped it. The authors were clearly inspired by the contemporary economic crisis, now generally referred to as the Great Recession.

In today’s political environment, with sometimes violent challenges to the authority of the federal government, it can be difficult to imagine how the state could address our festering problems of profound inequality, political corruption, a shrinking “middle class” with stagnant or falling wages, and other looming crises, any more than FDR could in 1933.

Collins and Goldberg did excellent work in exploring this terrain. Their



introduction and Collins’ first chapter were especially useful in setting the context, pointing out that the threat of another crisis of similar proportions is still with us, as the “The Great Recession” of 2008 showed. Not to be lost in this regard is that the New Deal, however much it ameliorated the consequences of an unbridled capitalism, did not result in a deeper social transformation.

While the authors/editors credited New Deal programs with sorely needed reforms in the relation of the state to society, they did not hesitate to see their flaws and shortcomings. Nor did they lionize FDR unduly, instead seeing mass social movements and labor unrest for making workers’ rights, social insurance (welfare), and agriculture and the environment urgent issues for government action. The unfortunate domination of the Senate by Dixiecrats, however, led to the shameful exclusion of many Black Americans from coverage under various New Deal programs, especially the National Labor Relations Act. And at no moment in Roosevelt’s presidency was he willing to put an Anti-Lynching bill before Congress, even in the face of resurgent Klan activity in the ‘30s.

In the hope that this volume would spur wider interest in the relevance of the New Deal to contemporary American social problems, the NYLHA along with the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, NYU, co-sponsored a book launch on September 17th at the Tamiment. The audience was small, but the discussion was lively with a healthy exchange between Professors Collins and Goldberg and audience members.

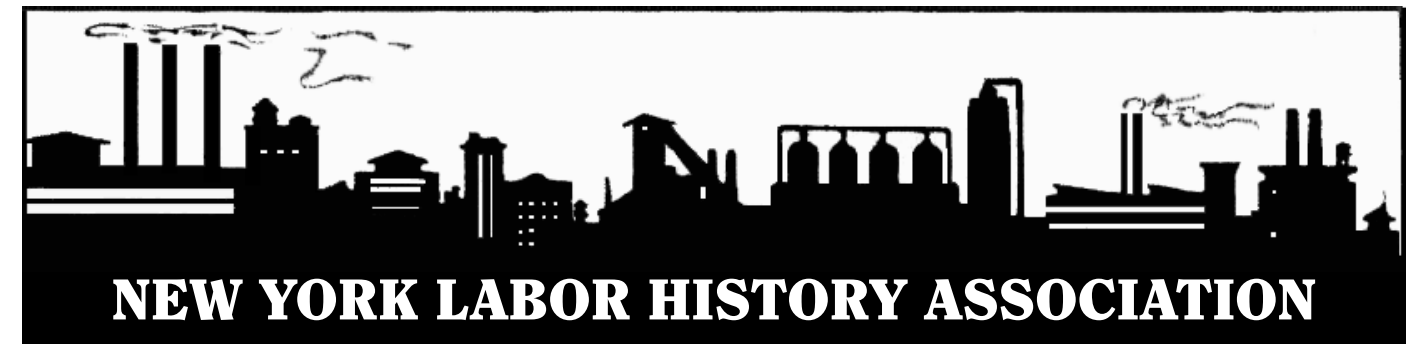
What was striking in some of the response to their presentation was a critique of the role of organized labor for its hesitancy to support some New Deal measures and what some saw as unions continuing failure to embrace universal measures to tackle the gaping inequality of 21st century American capitalism.

## New Deal benefits

The event might have been of special interest to public school social studies teachers as well as college faculty in U.S. history and political science. Several teachers did attend, including NYLHA board member Kimberly Schiller.

One participant, Kimberly Finneran, a secondary social studies teacher, said that the program would be valuable to her in teaching about the New Deal. About the program, she said “I was able to enrich my understanding of the long-term benefits of FDR’s New Deal and can plan an even more engaging unit for my students,” particularly noting FDR’s proposal of an Economic Bill of Rights, the Visiting Nurse Program’s child health study for giving a realistic picture of the nation’s strength and weaknesses, the New Deal conservation programs confronting climatic challenges, and arts programs that helped democratize American culture as well as revitalize a traumatized population.

This is a well-researched and well-written book that is timely and deserves a wide audience.



A bridge between past and present

## NYLHA Membership Form

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT CLEARLY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Institutional Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

New Member? Yes

### ANNUAL DUES:

Regular / Individual: \$20.00

Student/Senior/Low Wage: \$10.00

Send completed form with a check plus any additional tax-deductible donation you would like to make payable to the New York Labor History Association (NYLHA) to the address below or join on-line by visiting our website – [newyorklaborhistory.org](http://newyorklaborhistory.org)

Peter Filardo, Treasurer  
340 W. 28th Street, #18A  
New York, NY 10001-4765

### ABOUT NYLHA

Founded in 1976 by trade unionists, academics, students, archivists, educators, labor editors, attorneys, and retirees, mostly from New York State, NYLHA encourages the study of workers and their organizations.

It serves as a bridge between the past and the present, between trade unionists and academics.

Our members include a wide range of individuals and unions interested in retrieving workers’ history and relating it to present problems and challenges facing workers.

**JOIN US!**

Thank you for your support!