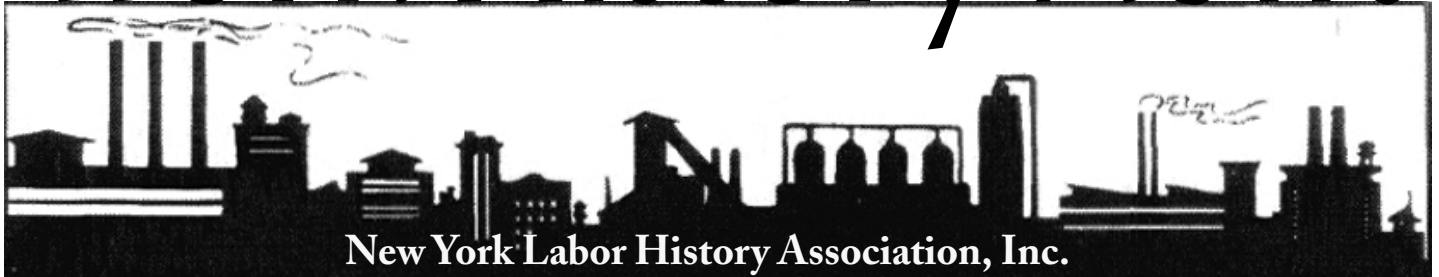


Work History News



New York Labor History Association, Inc.

A Bridge Between Past and Present

Volume 35 No 2 Summer/Fall 2018

The future of America's national pastime

By Keith Danish

The New York Labor History Association noted the start of baseball season with our program on April 10 on “Baseball and Labor Relations: Current Issues/Future Directions” at NYU’s Tamiment Library. The event explored the history of the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) and discussed issues baseball players may face on the labor front.

Your correspondent moderated the evening and began the program with an overview of baseball’s labor history (“From the Reserve Clause to Free Agency”), making the case that America’s national pastime was no model of free-market capitalism, as it relentlessly fought competition from other leagues and controlled labor costs through use of a “Reserve Clause” in players’ contracts and a take-it-or-leave-it negotiating posture. Finally, the modern-era players union, led by Marvin Miller, acted with solidarity through a string of strikes, lockouts, and arbitrations to win a fairer share of league revenues as well as other benefits. Sadly, Miller, a pivotal figure in baseball history, has yet to be voted into the Hall of Fame.

Labor issues in baseball

Next up, Dave Prouty, former general counsel to the MLBPA, focused on current issues in baseball labor relations. He discussed the range of issues subject to collective bargaining, including wearable technology, which measures a player’s body functions, pace of game issues, and domestic violence policies. And Prouty



Dave Prouty, Lincoln Mitchell, Keith Danish, and Roberta Newman talking about professional baseball’s labor history and future.

noted that the minor leagues remain mostly unorganized, with Congress trying to kill off a class-action suit seeking application of the Fair Labor Standards Act to the minors.

Lincoln Mitchell was our pick to discuss the future of baseball labor relations in view of his recent book *Will Big League Baseball Survive?* He observed that while past performance has been the standard for compensating players in the free-agency era, recent contract trends appear to devalue the over-30 player. Mitchell feels that baseball must learn how best to reward those who generate the most wealth for the league.

Our cleanup hitter was NYU Professor Roberta Newman, an expert in sports culture and business. She discussed the declining number of African-American players in major league baseball, which, she noted, may be a class issue due to the high costs and demands of high-level youth baseball in America. Newman described the abusive conditions of the



Joey Kyber on Unsplash

baseball “academies” that develop talent for the majors in Latin America, primarily in the Dominican Republic, comparing the academies to sweatshops, even though the baseball establishment has curbed some of the worst conditions.

A lively discussion followed. Topics included the controversy over baseball’s DH (designated hitter) position. We concluded on a somber note, when NYLHA board member Miriam Frank warned that major league baseball is becoming like opera: too expensive for a mass audience and overly dependent on an aging fan base.

Keith Danish gives labor history lectures and is a member of the NYLHA board and our online book review editor.

SAVE THE DATES

**Debra Bernhardt
Labor Journalism Prize
TUESDAY**

October 16, 2018, 6-8 p.m.

Tamiment Library, NYU
70 Washington Square South
New York, NY 10012
Admission is free.

**32nd Annual Commerford Awards
THURSDAY
November 29, 2018, 6-8 p.m.**

32BJ SEIU Headquarters
25 West 18th Street, New York, NY 10001
Tickets are \$50. If you're a NYLHA member, you can buy your first two tickets for \$25 each. To buy tickets – and renew your membership or join NYLHA – go to www.newyorklaborhistory.org or call Loraine Baratti at 646-559-9919.

Books make life better



OUR BOOK REVIEW section keeps growing – and we have a new feature, Book Nook. Four times a year, we will be asking a few friends what they are reading, and what relevance it might have for our troubled times. Visit us at newyorklaborhistory.org and click on “Book Reviews” next time you need something new to read.

If you'd like to write a review, please contact Keith Danish, our book review editor, at keithdanish@yahoo.com with your suggestion.



Keith Danish and Jared Kofsky/Wikimedia

HONORING LABOR'S HEROES In 1913, when more than 24,000 silk mill workers went on strike in Paterson, N.J., calling for decent working conditions, the 8-hour work day, and an end to child labor, Maria and Pietro Botto opened their home in Haledon to strike leaders. Today Botto House is our American Labor Museum. On June 3, 2018, several memorial bricks were added to the museum's “Silk Walk” – including three sponsored by NYLHA's Keith Danish to honor Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America; the Haymarket martyr, Albert Parsons; and the radical activist, Lucy Parsons.



Work History News is published twice per year to keep NYLHA members informed about our organization's work and labor history events in New York. For more information, visit us at newyorklaborhistory.org.

President	Irwin Yellowitz
Vice-President	George Altomare
Secretary	Abbe Nosoff; Regina Olf
Treasurer	Peter Filardo
Editor	Leyla Vural

Lemlich awards honor activism

By Sherry Kane

“Clara Lemlich was a lifelong activist, agitator and rabble rouser... just like the women being honored here tonight.”

—Michael Miller, Clara Lemlich’s great-grandson

Over 200 people packed the Museum of the City of New York’s auditorium on May Day to celebrate the 2018 Clara Lemlich Awards. Five women, all over 80, received the honor for a lifetime of activism.

Esther Cohen and Rachel Bernstein of LaborArts (www.laborarts.org) created the award to recognize older women who embody the spirit of outspoken labor organizer Clara Lemlich, whose family always attends the event.

This year’s awardees were Westside Campaign Against Hunger’s Doreen Wohl, radical feminist author Alix Kates Schulman, civil rights activist and educator Evelyn Jones Rich, poet and literary translator Mirene Ghossein, and political and tenants’ rights activist Anne Cunningham.

Meet the honorees

Thirteen-year-old Sasha Matthews, who has raised nearly \$12,000 for the ACLU with her superhero comic series, introduced **Doreen Wohl**. By placing trust in customers, treating the pantry like a supermarket and starting a chef training program, Sasha explained, Wohl changed the food pantry into a customer cooperative.

“We don’t work alone,” said Wohl. “It’s only when we work in community...that we effect change.” The pantry currently serves more than 8,000 households.

“How do you prepare to meet a dynamic woman...someone who from the 1960s...has fought for...women’s



New Yorkers listened with rapt attention to the sage guidance and moving stories of this year’s Clara Lemlich honorees.

rights, being a feminist, finding that sexy, wearing that loud and proud?” asked writer Tanya Beltram when introducing **Alix Kates Schulman**. Schulman’s 1972 novel *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* was

inspired by protests at the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City.

“I was marching on the board walk holding a sign that said ‘ALL women are

Continued on page 4

2018 Clara Lemlich awards

Continued from page 4

beautiful,” Schulman said. “Protesting the beauty standards, the racism, the exploitation of the contestants by the corporations that sponsored that pageant, I realized that...in every high school that...elects a prom queen, girls are subject to the same beauty standards that oppress us...still.”

Natatia Griffith met Evelyn Jones Rich, a founder of Labor Arts, at the New York Coalition of 100 Black Women and described her as “unapologetically intolerant of injustice.”

“My father used to say that my problem was that I reached for the stars and ignored the limits of sex, race, and social class,” Rich said. “I told him that there are no more powerful limits than those we put on ourselves and I wasn’t going to let sex, race, or social class hold me back.”

Mirene Ghossein’s support of young Middle Eastern activists and artists deeply affected poet Kayhan Irani. “My experience of Mirene has been like finding a long lost aunt who shows up just when you need her and showers you with love and kindness and who feeds your body and spirit so that you have the strength to move forward one more day...and maybe even one more day after that,” she said.

The final honoree was introduced by Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, who believes that she never would have been elected to the City Council without the support of tenant rights’ activist Anne Cunningham.

Reflecting on her childhood in foster care, Cunningham explained, “I was the little foster mother, at 10 years old, to other foster children.” As an adult, Cunningham went on to help create a battered women’s shelter in Staten Island and the New York Feminist Credit Union, which enabled women to get loans. “I believe in giving women credit, don’t you?” she asked.

Active in the civil rights, peace,



Campaign Against Hunger activist Doreen Wohl



Political and tenants’ rights activist Anne Cunningham



Poet and literary translator Mirene Ghossein



Radical feminist author Alix Kates Shulman

women’s, and housing movements, Cunningham encouraged the audience to stay active. “I believe in moving,” she said. “Keep on moving.”

The Lemlich Awards ceremony is hosted by Labor Arts, the Puffin Foundation, the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, and the Museum of the City of New York. The New York Labor History Association is one of the awards’ long-time co-sponsors.

Sherry Kane coordinates an adult education program for the Consortium for Worker Education and helps organize the Lemlich Awards with Labor Arts.



Civil rights activist and educator Evelyn Jones Rich

All photos by Gary Schoichet and Peter Odabashian

Labor of Love

Creativity + Action + Hope = CHANGE

By Leyla Vural

Struggle is alive and well in New York City and on February 13, three of our city's activist stalwarts – Tomie Arai, May Ying Chen, and Bhairavi Desai – came together to talk about a lifetime of staying on the frontlines. As the event curator, Minju Bae, noted, “These are women who question America, celebrate resistance and activism, and lead in the fight for collective liberation.”

Tomie Arai is a public artist. If you don't know her work, look it up. It's beautiful and probing and held in several major institutions, including the Library of Congress, the Japanese American National Museum, MoMA, and the Whitney. But Arai's work isn't rarefied; it's about cultural equity and it's often community based, collaboratively created, and site specific. In 2015, she cofounded the cultural collective, The Chinatown Art Brigade (with artists Betty Yu and ManSee Kong), which partners with the Chinatown Tenants Association to bring the injustice of gentrification into the street. If you're in Chinatown one night, you might well see the mobile projections lighting up the sides of buildings with “Chinatown in not for sale” and “Housing is a human right.”

Arai said she was “encouraged and grateful” that cultural activism was being included in the Feb. 13 discussion. “It's rare, and it's exciting,” she said. For Arai, art and culture are a means to amplify social justice campaigns. Quoting a housing activist, she said, “Folks don't need to be educated; they know the problem. They need to be organized.” And with that, Arai called on artists not to make political art, but to become political organizers *with* communities.

May Ying Chen, who first began working with Chinese women garment workers when she moved to New York City in the late 1970s and got a job with



Tomie Arai and May Ying Chen (top row) and Bhairavi Desai (bottom left) shared the joy of sisterhood and solidarity, even in hard times, and event curator Minju Bae (bottom right) led a thoughtful Q&A.

Local 23-25, the ILGWU's Chinatown local, talked about the collective action that enabled women to fight successfully for change. The 1982 Chinatown strike, for instance, resulted in health care and a day care center. Chen talked about the lifelong friendships and sisterhood that came out of shared struggle. That's important, she said, because, clearly, we need to fight again. “Nothing,” Chen noted, “replaces people-to-people, grassroots organizing.”

Bhairavi Desai, head of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA), described the steady decline of industry standards and workers' rights that's devastating the lives of taxi and other drivers. “Where does the poverty end?” she asked. “What happens to the public space we share?”

The answer, all three speakers agreed, is in our actions. Reclaiming the public sphere and workers' and immigrants' place in it demands that all of us step up. It's about things like the NYTWA's Unity Platform, which brings workers together. And it's about putting people's stories on the record – whether that's documenting workers' stories so they're not erased or saving the records of people and organizations who live on the ramparts. Arai, Chen, and the New York Taxi Workers Alliance have each given their papers to archives at NYU for posterity, but they're not standing down anytime soon. When you're in the street demanding social justice, they are sure to be there, too.

Leyla Vural is an oral historian and a member of the NYLHA board.

Photos courtesy of the Asian/Pacific/American Institute, NYU

Electoral politics, unions, and the working class in the age of Trump

By Steve Leberstein

A capacity audience filled Tamiment's meeting room on May 9 for a panel discussion on electoral politics from a working class and labor perspective in today's fraught context. Panelists included Bill Fletcher, Jr., long-time labor activist, former senior staff at the AFL-CIO, and past president of TransAfricaForum; Camille Rivera, national political director, RWDSU; and Mike Zweig, economics professor emeritus and founding director of the Center for the Study of Working Class Life at SUNY Stony Brook. Irwin Yellowitz, NYLHA president, moderated.

Looking for answers

The largely unexpected election of Donald Trump framed the wide-ranging discussion about the limits and possibilities of electoral politics for progressive change, especially for the working class and organized labor.

For Fletcher, immigration and terrorism drove white workers to Trump, along with the Democrats' attention to identity politics. Fletcher argued that we can't fault unions for their ties to the Democratic Party. That goes back to Samuel Gompers, who rejected the need for an independent political party to advance labor's aims, and to the effects of rabid anti-Communism on American politics. Strong labor politics, Fletcher contended, requires class consciousness, but labor seems afraid to take on right-wing white "populism." At last year's AFL-CIO convention, for example, Trump's name was never uttered.

Camille Rivera discussed her experience in the 2016 elections. Absent the organizing strength of progressive grassroots organizations like ACORN (which Breitbart destroyed), mobilizing workers varied a lot geographically. In Colorado, where Rivera helped turn out Latina voters, labor ran a campaign based on issues relevant to workers.



Florida was devoid of issues that could galvanize workers, and the only active labor group in Detroit was the Fight for \$15. Rivera noted that she saw no labor message on race and she called out the Clintons' record on mass incarceration and the end of welfare in understanding why Trump won.

A way forward?

Mike Zweig argued that there is no white working class, but instead, there is one working class, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-gendered, and it must be understood in that way. From that point of view, it is not true that Trump won the election because he won over the white working class, nor was it that economic distress turned white workers who had previously voted for Obama to Trump. Zweig contended that it was white fear of the threat to white supremacy, of immigrants, and racism that drove them to Trump. The only way forward, he concluded, is by building a multi-racial, multi-ethnic working-class movement.

Irwin Yellowitz posed this question as a frame for discussion following the presentations: how did the Confederacy

manage to recruit impoverished white farmers in the South to fight for slavery?

Clearly engaged by the panel, the audience was animated in its response. Some sought to explain Bernie Sanders's appeal, while others critiqued him. Others looked to the recent teachers' strikes in red states as examples of a growing class consciousness. Still others asked what lessons can be found in the 1964 Democratic nominating convention. The audience was still at it at Tamiment's closing time, and the evening's ferment continued on Washington Square South as people left.

*Steve Leberstein is a social historian, member of the PSC's Executive Council, and NYLHA board member.
By Jane LaTour*



A night at the movies

Since its inception, the Workers Unite Film Festival has been making a tremendous contribution to the labor movement in New York City by highlighting films that focus on the lives of working people. This year, the New York Labor History Association sponsored opening night (May 4) with a program of films and speakers that examined current struggles over who has the right to control space in the city and the physical price construction workers pay for their jobs.

Bullies, a short, animated film about the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY), brought a global analysis to the evening's theme. Afterward, labor organizer Ray Rogers discussed the harm REBNY inflicts on New Yorkers and the campaign against REBNY. "Their actions are at the heart of the city's lack of affordable housing and homeless crisis," said Rogers, "the thousands of small businesses that are being displaced and shut down, the loss of local jobs, disappearing neighborhoods, increasing construction worker injuries and fatalities, and the compromising and corrupting of our political system."

Struggles on the big screen

Filmmaker and community activist Zishun Ning's short film, *83-85 Bowery*, looks at the tenants' fight at this Chinatown building to save their home and protect their community. After the film, Ning and several fellow activists spoke about the issues and their group's efforts to resist policies that displace tenants, make the city unaffordable for young people, and clear space for luxury high-rises.

The Iron Triangle, a documentary by filmmakers Prudence Katze and William Lehman, looks at the displacement of hundreds of small auto repair shops in the Willets Point section of Queens. The film shows the uneven contest between the auto shops, the city's Economic Development Corp., and the developer, Sterling Equities, which envisioned high-end shops and luxury



residences for this area near Mets stadium. Marco Neira, the president of the Sunrise Cooperative (organized by 50 percent of the auto shop tenants), spoke about the strategy of the immigrant-run businesses to find a solution and re-locate, and how they ended up in the street. "It's a depressing story," said filmmaker Prudence Katze, "but it's also about solidarity – about working together with others for the long haul."

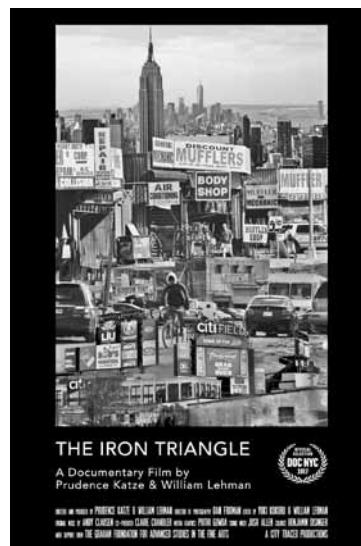
Columbia University Professor David Eisenbach, an expert on the issue of small business closures and a leader in the fight to pass the Small Business Jobs Survival Act (which would bring commercial rent control to the city), described what's happening in the city as "a house of cards that's being formed right before our eyes... a city of haves and have nots."

The last film of the evening, *The Cost of Construction*, examined the race for profits at the expense of the lives

of construction workers. This harrowing film looks at the string of controversial deaths in Las Vegas, Nevada during the construction of MGM's CityCenter, at that point the most expensive private construction project in U.S. history. After the film, a Local 3 IBEW apprentice joined the discussion about conditions in New York City's building trades industry and the on-going fight at the Hudson Yards project, the biggest project in the city since Rockefeller Center.

NYLHA board member Joshua Barnett, an activist in his union and in the fight against gentrification, organized the program, along with WUFF director, Andrew Tilson, and NYLHA board member Jane LaTour.

Jane LaTour, NYLHA board member and author of Sisters in the Brotherhood, is writing a book about union insurgents.



NEW YORK LABOR HISTORY ASSOCIATION
Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives
70 Washington Square South, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10012

Inside

- ▶ The future of baseball
- ▶ Clara Lemlich honorees offer inspiration
- ▶ NYC activists on making change
- ▶ Making sense of the 2016 elections
- ▶ Movies by and about working people
- ▶ NYLHA's new online feature: Book Nook
- ▶ Save the date: Commerford Awards, Nov. 29

Work History News



The New York Labor History Association was founded in 1976 to bring together New Yorkers interested in the history of working people, their organizations, and their struggles for a better life and a more just society. Too often this history is left out of textbooks and

classroom education. We organize discussion panels and conferences, book talks and movie nights. We celebrate long-time activists and new labor journalists. **Learn more about us at newyorklaborhistory.org — and if you're not a member yet, please join us!**



Like us on Facebook / New York Labor History Association