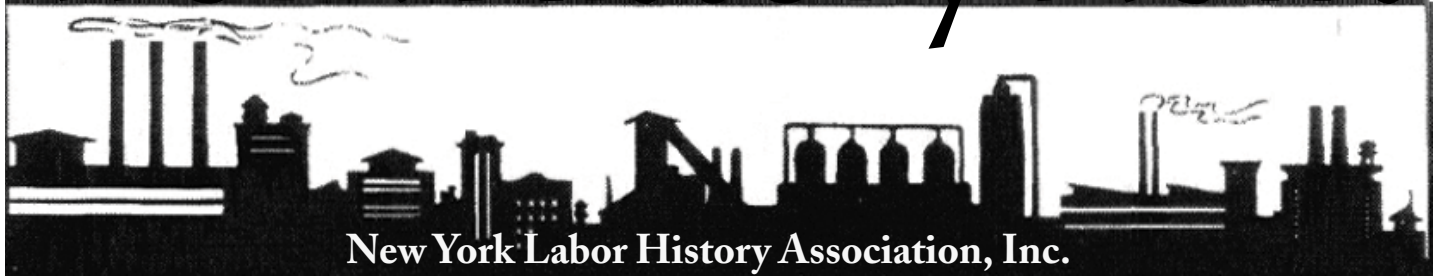


Work History News



New York Labor History Association, Inc.

A Bridge Between Past and Present

Volume 37 No 2 Summer/Fall 2020

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives

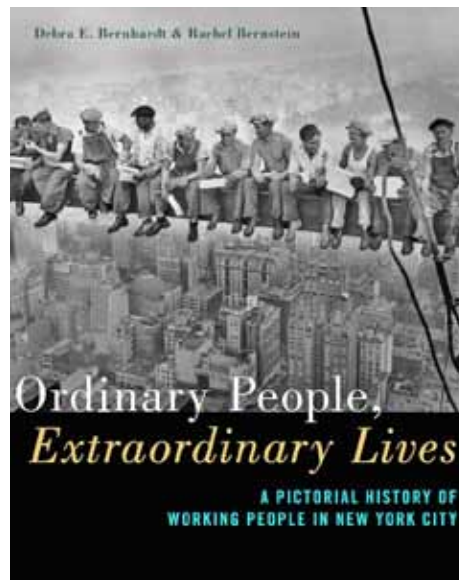
By Jane LaTour

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

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

Spotlight on essential workers

Next up was Alexander Bernhardt Bloom, Debra's son, able to take part from Galicia, Spain. He spoke about the timeliness of the book, with so much focus now on the everyday work that supports our lives. Alex centered his



remarks on a recitation of a piece written by Henry Foner. "Henry was an object of affection and inspiration, and offers a model to look to, especially at a time like this," said Bloom. Then he read some of the lyrics from *The Song of the Pennies*, written by Foner and Norman Franklin, in 1947. The theme is the department store workers — the pennies — protesting their wage slavery against the Greenbacks — the capitalists. "It takes the cleaners and stenographers / and the folks on the stockroom crew / And the thousand-and-one who make the big store run / in whatever the job they do."

Rachel Bernstein, public historian and director of LaborArts.org, spoke about her friend and co-author, Debra Bernhardt. "Debra explained that she did the work she did so that she would be able to look her children in the eye and say: I wanted

to stop this — meaning the work was done with the goal of making the world a better place." Bernstein described the path that the two historians traveled to connect to archivists and archival collections, beginning with a two-year search; two conferences; workshops; an exhibit; and eventually, the book, published in 2000.

"The work was all collaborative," she said. "To me, the most important theme in the book is about the culture of solidarity. It has taken many forms; there have been divisions and setbacks. But when culture is strong, we find the work of artists and see the power of art. Debra would be thrilled to see this book in 2020."

Activist archivists

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

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

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Green Interlude

By Molly Charboneau

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

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

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

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

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

Molly Charboneau, a DC 37 AFSCME retiree, is a member of the National Writers Union UAW Local 1981 and a licensed New York City Citizen Pruner.



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.

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Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives

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

Advocate for immigrants

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



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

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

Donna Chen, the daughter of activist labor leader and community activist May Chen, spoke about her desire to return to her roots when she began teaching. Her comments focused on diversity, both the progress that’s been made, as evidenced



in the pages of the re-issued OPEL; “the engagement and shifts in advocacy efforts; the gains made in bi-lingual education, which is no longer called by that name; but also much more work that needs to be done.” Chen spoke about the recent report issued by a youth school diversity group, on “The Five Rs of Real Integration,” and the critical need to build solidarity with parents, to advocate alongside them. “When my mom called me, and asked me to participate in this event, it was like coming full circle,” Chen said. “I’m very gratified to be here and to have my voice and story included.”

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



having to do with working people are important.”

Successful celebration

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

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

The book can be ordered from NYUPress.org. Use this code for 30% discount; ORDINARYPPL30 R.

The 1918 Flu Pandemic

If you're in search of some historical perspectives on the last major pandemic, one of the deadliest pandemics in human history, here are two sources that take us back to that period — when World War I had ended and the influenza pandemic spread across the globe — in three waves. The 1918 — 1919 pandemic was largely forgotten, despite the terrific toll it took on the population, and the economy.

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

Sandra Bloodworth's essay, "Class War in the Spanish Flu Pandemic, March 20, 2020, (REDFLAG), starts with this compelling hook: "Lots of people are thinking about the Spanish



flu right now. That pandemic of the past didn't just cause mass death. It also led to class struggle." Find it at: <https://redflag.org.au/node/7065>

Publishing in a time of peril

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

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By Michael Goldfield

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

FEATURES

- Includes analysis of previously unexamined archival material from dozens of southern archives
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"The political and scholarly importance of *The Southern Key* can hardly be overrated. Michael Goldfield's empirically thorough and theoretically reflexive work convincingly argues that the failures of southern labor during the 1930s and 1940s are essential for understanding everything else that has happened since, in the US, and therefore also in the world at large."
—Marcel van der Linden, *International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam*

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

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Why not go ahead? Life would go on — and a new book would provide an excuse to get together for

those who could. So we did. Bert and I drove down from Cambridge; the roads were nearly deserted; people were

fleeing New York City — not coming into it. We felt good about coming home to share the city's tragedy. The launch cheered everyone up. For me, it proved essential. It reminded me that even though the book tour was cancelled, talks postponed, and reviews ditched for more timely subjects, the book hadn't just disappeared. In retrospect, I was lucky. A virus that separates people from each other, is quite different from a disaster that brings people together. I could have at least one public moment. Now, I hope for those caught in the current moment that there will be literary celebrations, written commentaries, virtual talks. We all need the feedback of friends and critics to locate ourselves in the world."

Two scholars have their say

What is it like now, after spending years researching
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Publishing in a time of peril

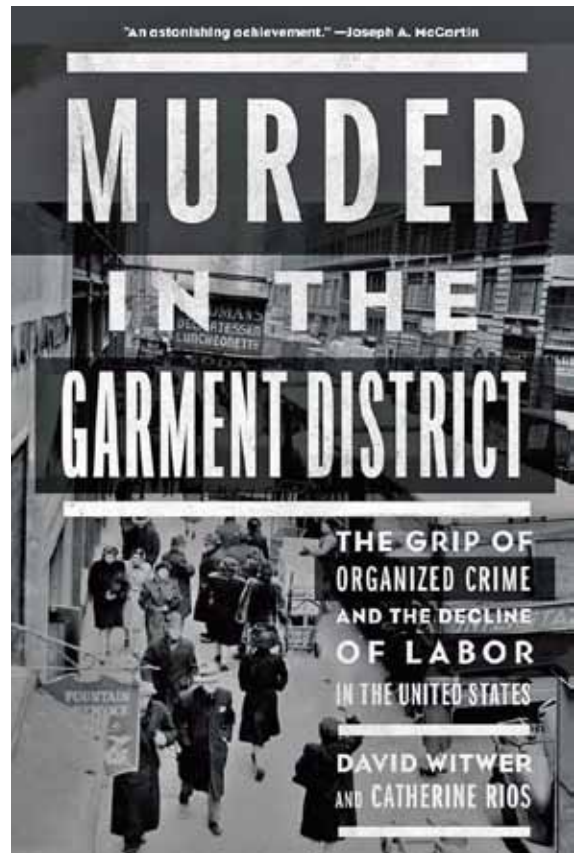
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and writing, to see your book birthed into the marketplace in a period that differs so drastically from former times. We invited scholars to share their experiences. Like Alice Kessler-Harris, they are not new to publishing. Michael Goldfield is the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

Mike Goldfield: My book was delayed in its publication. It was originally supposed to be out by the first of the year; then in early February, I showed up for a book signing in Washington, D.C., but my book did not show. I gave a talk at Harvard on March 4, and at the Citadel in Charleston, SC, March 5 (by which time copies were available). Then things got scary. So, my wife and I have been sheltering in place in Michigan since then. All my immediate talks and conferences were cancelled, postponed, or put on hold. To top things off, the warehouse that my publisher ships from was shut down as a nonessential business, although it is now open. Fortunately, I had several

radio interviews and podcasts that preceded all this. My publisher has done a number of good things (e.g., I like the cover design that they did; the endorsements; etc.). But for promotion, I have basically been on my own. With my previous books, I paid little attention to promotion; reviews seemed to happen, or not. But this time, I sent out emails to a lot of my friends and contacts. I am fairly new to Facebook, but several of my friends and colleagues have large followings there and on Twitter, and have been reposting interviews and podcasts, helping to publicize the book.

Sharing the stories

I was also fortunate to have a number of articles published related to the book research. The first was an article in *Labor* on “The Myth of 7a,” which argued that the coal miners were fully organized before any enabling legislation was actually passed, contrary to what most commentators suggest. I was also invited to publish several articles, a number before the shutdown. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American History* has invited me to write a piece on Operation Dixie and southern labor organizing, which fortuitously came out at the beginning of 2020. Both of these articles were co-authored with Cody Melcher. I was also asked to write a piece for *Jacobin* on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the U.S. Communist Party, which drew on material in the book. A number of magazines and blogs have written



<https://bookshop.org/books/murder-in-the-garment-district-the-grip-of-organized-crime-and-the-decline-of-labor-in-the-united-states/9781620974636>

summaries of the book. So, I have been fairly busy, writing and doing on-line events. This has been something of a surprise. My book has also put me in touch with a number of labor organizers (who I did not previously know) who are organizing essential workers in relatively unsafe conditions, many of whom are in the South. So, aside from the general distress we all feel, both for ourselves, and the millions of people in this country, but especially in less developed countries, I have been able to plug along a bit.

Past meets present

My book has several dimensions. The first, of

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

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Publishing

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of most interest to a broad audience. A third theme of the book is the importance in understanding the deepest issues surrounding labor and race is the need to examine questions comparatively, both comparing various organizing experiences across industries, but also looking at questions internationally; i.e., doing comparative labor analysis. To not do this, I believe, leaves one to rely on lots of provincial and misleading conclusions, particularly the myths that southern culture holds back southern workers from organizing. Finally, there are many lessons to be learned that are relevant to today's more radical organizers, including how to assess the type of leverage that workers have in particular settings, how to enlist allies, and what are some of the best ways to organize.

Support for front lines

I have a few more things lined up related to the book, but as more and more events get cancelled, I am running out of options, and am, of course, open to suggestions from others,
mhgoldfield@gmail.com
Aside from my academic work, I have a lengthy career as a labor organizer and agitator, but find myself irritated in the current environment, so I am trying to do what I can to support those who are on the front lines of the struggle. I am including a discount

coupon for those who might be interested.

David Witwer and Catherine Rios:

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

Definitely, our publisher has a very helpful and active publicity division. They have been actively involved in helping to set up book talks, like the one later this month and promoting book reviews in mainstream publications, such as *The New York Times*. We think that, in time, there will be more public presentations, especially via

the Penn State Laureate. But having spent the last few weeks conducting classes and meetings via Zoom, we have to say that we find such on-line interactions to have real benefits and the potential to reach audiences in important new ways.

Beating labor back

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

offering an effective political rebuttal to the political use of this issue.

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

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

Luckily, we have an old and valued friend at the New York Labor History Association. We are drawing on similar connections with other labor historians to try to arrange book talks/virtual book talks at venues such as the Tamiment-Wagner Library and the Special Collections Library at the University of Maryland, both sites that hold record collections that we used in the research for this book.

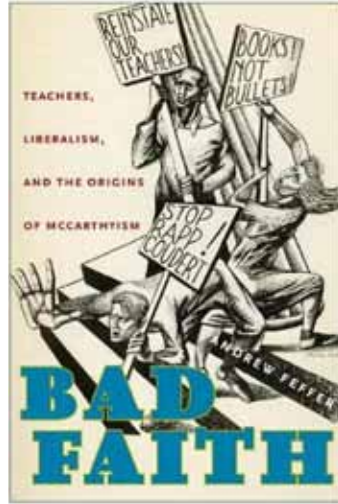
Bad Faith – Book launch

ON FEBRUARY 12, the New York Labor History Association, The Tamiment Library, and the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee co-sponsored a book launch and discussion of Andrew Feffer's *Bad Faith: Teachers, Liberalism, and the Origins of McCarthyism*. The book was published in 2019 by Fordham University Press, and has generated a number of interesting reviews.

Rather than report on the discussion at Tamiment, we are excerpting some selections taken from two reviews. The first, by NYLHA board member, historian and member of the PSC Steve Leberstein, was published in Cornell's *New York History Journal*.

First full study

“Despite the notoriety of the Rapp Coudert Committee in its time (known by the name of its dual chairs, Herbert Rapp and Frederick Coudert, Jr.), no full-length



study of it appeared before the recent publication of Andrew Feffer's book ... Feffer has done an excellent job of explaining the history of this attack on the faculty of New York City's municipal colleges, mainly Brooklyn and City College. While we might ascribe the purge that resulted to reactionary political forces, he shows how it was liberal intellectuals and politicians who took charge of this attack, claiming that left-wing faculty were guilty of 'bad faith' for their supposed radicalization

of *their* students. ... If that purge succeeded in its aim of ridding the public colleges of their troublemakers, it did so by substituting the judgment of politicians for the professional autonomy that is the indispensable mainstay of academic freedom. ... The distinction between academic freedom and the Constitutional freedoms of speech and assembly, however, deserve some further examination. And placing Rapp Coudert in the broader context of failure of the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Association of University Professors to stand up against the toxic tide of anti-Communism, would provide a broader context for the purge.”

The second selection, by Robin Marie, is from the U.S. Intellectual History Blog, Sept. 8, 2019 (the Society for U.S. Intellectual History).

“Historian Andrew Feffer challenges us to rethink both our standard narrative about the emergence of

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

COLLECTING IN THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC

A Wagner Labor Archives project

THE TAMIMENT LIBRARY and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives seeks to create a record for the long-term understanding of the lives of New Yorkers, especially the working-class in New York, during COVID-19. In addition to archiving labor movement and COVID-19 activism websites and online content, the Tamiment-Wagner Collections invites you to document your experience during the COVID-19 crisis. Keep your letters, your photographs, your journals; perhaps you are working collectively to organize your colleagues: the

meeting minutes, agendas, flyers you are creating are significant. If you're interested in finding an archival home for those documents that you are producing, please contact **Shannon O'Neill**, Curator for Tamiment-Wagner Collections at smo224@nyu.edu. Though the Tamiment-Wagner Collections are temporarily unable to accept donations of materials at this time, due to working remotely and the constraints of social distancing, Shannon would love to have a conversation with you about the long-term preservation of your records. Shannon O'Neill.

Profiles in Activism

Since 1976, the New York Labor History Association has relied on the talents of many individuals. In an all-volunteer organization, a wide variety of skills and expertise has sustained the work of promoting labor history and

bringing our programs to the public. We offer these interviews of two new board members — Kyle Friend, 24, and Marcia Newfield, 84 — both of whom bring fresh voices and a terrific range of talents to the NYLHA.



Marcia Newfield

Q: *Are you a New York City native?*

I was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, but was raised in the Bronx from two months old, so I guess I can be considered a native.

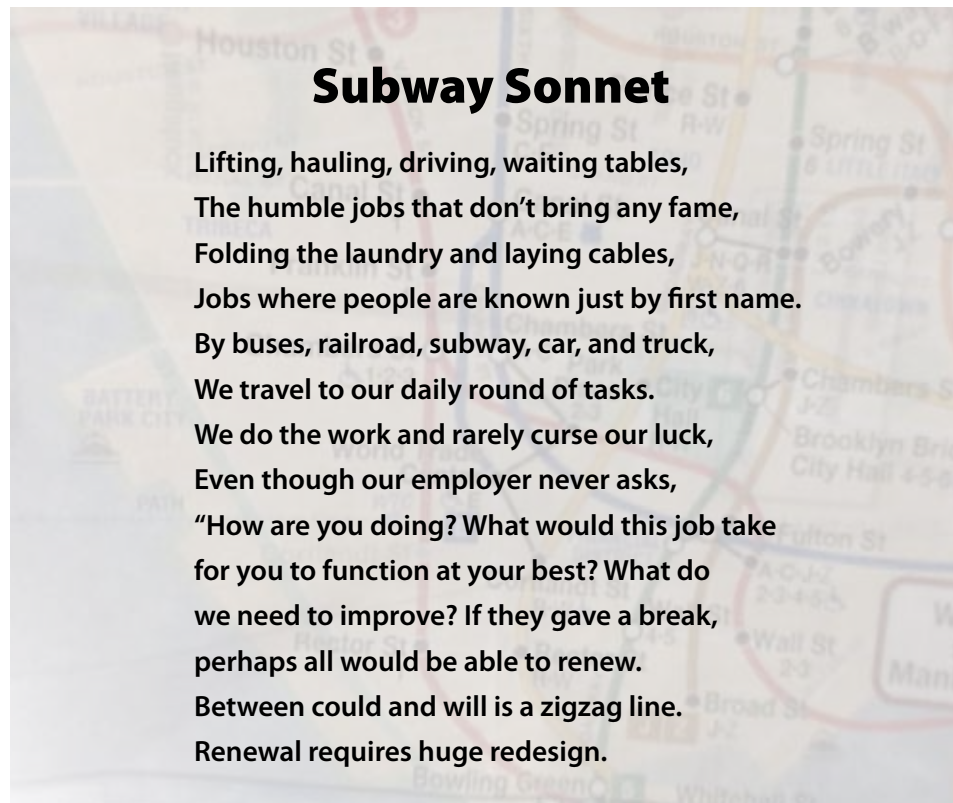
Q: *Your early writing career is so interesting. What are some of the things you wrote that you particularly like or feel proud of having written?*

I guess that my poems are closest to my heart...both they and my children's books came out of intense reflection and persistence.

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

Q: *With so many union members apathetic, what led you to become an activist and then take on ever-escalating roles of leadership in the Professional Staff Congress (PSC)?*

I began teaching English as an adjunct at CUNY in 1988. My involvement grew by leaps and bounds as I fought for



representation, better health insurance, salary increases, better pensions, office hours, promotion and respect. I served as vice president of the PSC part-time personnel from 2002 to 2015. I was teaching at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and Long Island University. I also served as an adjunct grievance counselor, and member of the Executive Committee and the negotiating team. I became an active member of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) in its formative years; I coordinated the COCAL XI Conference in New York City in 2014, and served as the co-editor of the September 2015 *Working USA* issue on *Contingent Academic Labor: The Way Forward*.

I started teaching concurrent with an involvement in the civil rights movement, self-help, and feminism. As I became

more and more aware of the inequalities in the academic community and found others who, like me, wanted to change things, momentum built. Simultaneously, there was a movement of full-time activists in the PSC, the New Caucus, with whom the adjuncts bonded, and we went on together to achieve the union leadership in 2000.

Q: *Contingent academic labor — as the number of adjuncts has grown, did their leverage increase and what are some of the gains that especially improved their lives?*

We made some significant gains in terms of roles in leadership as well as increased adjunct membership in the union. We have made salary gains, received dedicated funds for professional development, have more access to insurance, and receive pay for office hours.

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Kyle Friend

Q: *Tell me about your home town?*

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the untrained eye, the issues we’re collectively facing today may seem novel. But, armed with a background of labor history, it’s clear that these contemporary issues are the exact same issues we’ve been working on for decades. There is nothing new about a lack of care for workers’ rights among employers and the political class. There’s nothing to suggest

continued on page 12

Ninth Annual Lemlich Awards

The strike that catapulted Clara Lemlich to the forefront in 1909 shook the garment industry and disrupted the pattern of paying sub-survival wages to the workers, mostly women, employed in the city's sweatshops. "I've got something to say," shouted the 23-year-old Lemlich at a meeting at Cooper Union — and she kept saying it for decades. The Clara Lemlich Award Ceremony and reception honors the lives of women in their 80s, 90s, and 100s, "whose brilliant activism has made real and lasting change in the world."

Honoring women's lives

This spring, a public gathering for the 9th reception was not possible, but LaborArts, the sponsoring organization, brought together an inspiring group of five honorees to celebrate—virtually. As the Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer noted, "In these times, we are reminded of the legacy of Clara Lemlich, which

lives on in the work done by the essential workers and medical professionals on the front lines of this crisis. Both groups are predominantly female, bearing the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic as they shepherd us through it. Congratulations to all the honorees of this year's Clara Lemlich Awards, and to the awards themselves for moving to a virtual format in response to this pandemic."

Visit <http://LaborArts.org> for biographical information on the honorees, and the introductions and acceptance speeches you would have

heard at the virtual ceremony. LaborArts.org, In addition to LaborArts, the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition

co-sponsored this program. Funding was provided by the 21st Century ILGWU Heritage Fund.



Arlene Goldsmith



Sister Mary Lanning



Madeline Anderson



Kitty Weiss Krupat



Gloria Miguel

Profiles in activism – Marcia Newfield

continued from page 8

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

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

It is more precarious than ever. Adjuncts have to

adjust to new techniques on their own time; they are scared. There is also a growing momentum for change in higher education that is mirrored throughout the United States, in both public and private institutions. CUNY graduates, and that includes many adjuncts, make their livelihoods in the city and contribute to the culture and the tax base. What kind

of education will further their lives? What kind of jobs will be available to them?

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

Connecting to the NYLHA has brought me in touch with people whose life-long activism and scholarship I greatly admire. Their work sheds light on how we got to where we are, the politics and

possibilities of working people. That light becomes a rainbow path to change. It is always stimulating to get in touch with your roots. It can give you courage, even though you realize that there has always been struggle and defeat. History as viewed through periods and people who have otherwise been stereotyped can be transformative. Art that has given voice to labor is inspiring.

"Silk Walk" bricks honor the memory of Philoine Fried and Bessie Abramowitz

By Keith Danish

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



Philoine Fried



Sidney Hillman



Bessie Abramowitz



"Silk Walk" Photos: Keith Danish

2020 Workers Unite! Film Festival

That's a wrap on our First Virtual Film Festival (May)!

Thanks to everyone who made it a success.

Another one tentatively set for July.

(in-person NYC festival postponed to Sept 25th, 2020)

Check out our website for further updates
<http://workersunitefilmfestival.org>

The New York Labor History Association is proud to be a sponsor of the Workers Unite! Film Festival.



Crossword Answers

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 7. Baldwin | 25. Works |
| 9. Steel | 28. Theron |
| 12. Sanitizer | 29. Lowell |
| 17. Ocasio | 31. Rent |
| 18. Hillstrom | 33. Whitman |
| 21. Amazon | 35. Boom |
| 25. Wolf | 36. Tubman |
| 26. Sondheim | 38. Lowery |
| 27. Pettibone | 39. Frank |
| 30. Henrietta | Down |
| 32. Textile | 1. Macy |
| 34. Mime | 2. Walker |
| 37. Andrew | 3. Sanders |
| | 5. Rhode Island |
| | 6. Freeman |

- | | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Across | 4. American Factory |
| | 8. Early |
| | 10. Lilly |
| | 11. Peter |
| | 12. Stokes |
| | 13. Ska |
| | 14. Otis |
| | 15. Nixon |
| | 16. Sloan |
| | 19. Mint |
| | 20. Fast |
| | 22. Dyson |
| | 23. Laundry |
| | 24. Crozier |

Profiles in activism – Kyle Friend

continued from page 9

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

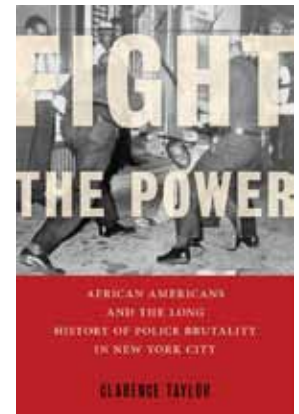
Read Kyle's story *Local 100 Member Reflects on Mother's Groundbreaking Legacy* about Florida's first school to become integrated. Courtesy of OPEIU Magazine, *White Collar*, February 2020. <https://www.opeiu.org/Portals/O/whitecollar/2020/542%20englishpdf?ver=2020-03-16-143646-800>. [pages 16-17]

Fight the Power!

Demonstrations across the country continue with hundreds of thousands of citizens calling for change in policing practices. George Floyd's name now joins those of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Laquan McDonald, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray and so many more — Black men murdered by police. While Black Americans account for less than 13 percent of the population, they are shot and killed by the police at a disproportionate rate that is twice

as high as for white Americans. (In Minnesota, black people are four times as likely to be killed by law enforcement as white people.)

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



DEBRA E. BERNHARDT LABOR JOURNALISM PRIZE 2020 CALL FOR ENTRIES

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

The 2019 prize went to **Jaeah Lee** for "The Real Cost of Working in the House of Mouse," *Topic Magazine* (online), September 2018.

TO ENTER: visit <http://LaborArts.org/Bernhardt>

DEADLINE: SUNDAY AUGUST 30, 2020

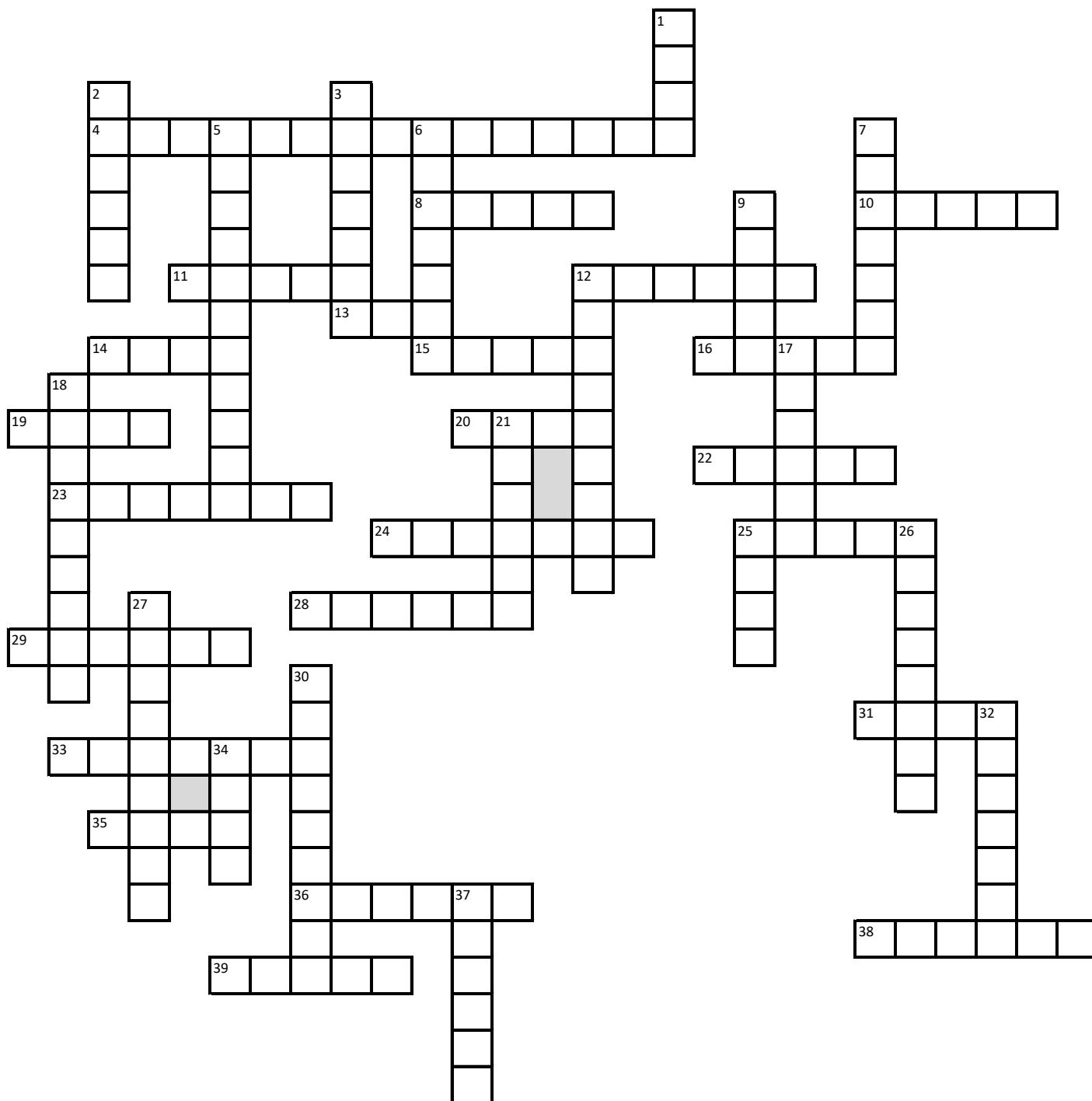
The winner will be announced at a virtual forum on labor journalism with NYU's Bobst Library on **Tuesday October 13, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.**

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



Progressive Crossword Puzzle

by Kelsy Harrison



ACROSS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16. Socialist Party Member John _____ painted the 90-foot backdrop of the Paterson Silk Mills at the Paterson Pageant of 1913.

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

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

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

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

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

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

28. Actress Charlize _____ starred in the 2005 movie *North Country* about sexual harassment in the iron mines of Minnesota.

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

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

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

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

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

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

39. Professor Miriam _____ wrote *Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America*.

DOWN

1. Beth _____ wrote *Factory Man* about the southern United States furniture industry being destroyed by cheap foreign imports.

2. Union-buster Scott _____ lost his Gubernatorial re-election bid in Wisconsin in 2018.

3. Presidential Candidate Bernie _____ received endorsements from the Postal Workers Union, National Nurses United and the National Union of Healthcare Workers.

5. The Pawtucket, _____ (state) cotton mill strike of 1824 was the first known strike in this state and the first strike in the United States led by women.

6. Professor Joshua _____ is the author of *Behemoth: A History of the Factory and the Making of the Modern World*.

7. Tammy _____ was the first openly gay person elected to the United States Senate.

9. Over 400,000 workers of the United States _____ Workers of America went on a 116-day strike in 1959.

12. Bottles of hand _____ were selling for over \$130 online during the height of the Corona Virus Epidemic.

17. Alexandria _____-Cortez scored a major upset of the Queens Democratic Party in 2018.

18. Labor martyr Joe Hill's real last name was _____.

21. _____ pulled out of a deal with New York City in 2019 to add 25,000 jobs because they refused to negotiate with local unions or community groups.

25. Norman Mailer, Ed Fancher and Dan _____ founded *The Village Voice* in 1955.

26. Broadway Composer Stephen _____ wrote the theme song for the movie *Reds* after Warren Beatty rejected his original score for the movie.

27. Big Bill Haywood, Charles Moyer and George _____ of the Western Federation of Miners were charged with killing former Governor of Idaho Frank Steuneberg in 1905. All three would eventually be released.

30. _____ Rodman founded the Feminist Alliance, was on the executive board of the Women's Peace Party and led Heterodoxy and the Liberal Club.

32. The United _____ Workers of America led 400,000 workers on strike in 1934 with 13 picketers being killed.

34. One of Charlie Chaplin's many talents was _____ work (hint: very quiet).

37. _____ Yang ran for president in 2020 and advocated a universal payment of \$1,000 per month to every adult American.

Answers on page 12

Triangle Shirtwaist Fire commemorated in chalk

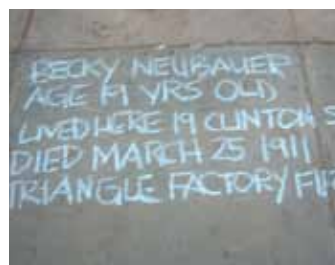
By Kimberly Schiller, English Teacher, J. Taylor Finley Middle School, and NYLHA Board Member

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

History takes root

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

The name that was sent to me by Ruth Sergel was



Josie Del Castillo, who was the cousin of former Finley School Guidance Counselor Cathy Cain. Just prior to the 102nd commemoration in 2013, Mrs. Cain learned that her cousin had died in the fire, age 21, and was one of the “Cherry Street girls.” When Ruth asked me to chalk for her, I was honored to do so. Two of my former students chose to chalk for victims that were the same age as they are now. HHS graduate James Vicari chalked for Nettie Liebowitz, who was 23 years old when she perished, and HHS freshman Yorimilet Rodriguez chalked for Kate Leon, who was only 14 years old. Senior Gabriel Medina-Jaudes and his sisters Naomi and Elisa (HHS graduates

and former students) chalked a poignant recreation of the Triangle building with “109th Anniversary. Remember the Triangle” written above it, and senior Robert Jean-Gilles chalked in remembrance for all those who died. Their photos and sentiments flooded my phone and I was overwhelmed. I am happy to share the thoughtfulness of these amazing kids.

