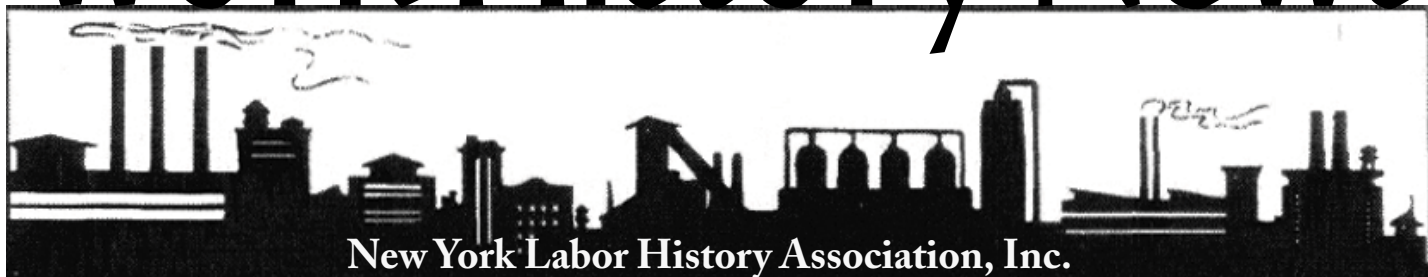


Work History News



A Bridge Between Past and Present

Volume 39 No 2 Summer/Fall 2022

LABOR HISTORY MONTH

Civil rights & labor relations issues in baseball: Past, present & future

By Keith Danish

The Labor History Month presentation by our association, held via Zoom on May 25, 2022, looked back at baseball's civil rights history (before Jackie Robinson) and examined current and future issues involving the sport's labor relations. The event featured an All-Star panel comprised of:

Peter Dreier: Professor of Politics at Occidental College, prolific scholar, activist, writer, and speaker, with a passion for baseball and sympathy for those who “have helped confront a stodgy, conservative sport, introducing it to twenty-first-century realities.”

Jean-Marc Favreau: A labor-side attorney and partner in the Washington, D.C. firm Peer, Gan & Gisler LLP, Favreau has represented many public and private sector unions in a wide range of labor law areas and is conversant with the laws, lawsuits and agreements involving major- and minor-league baseball.

Claire Smith: An African American woman, she fought with grace and grit as a pioneer on the baseball sportswriting beat, working at the *Hartford Courant*, *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and ESPN, and, in 2017, became the first woman to receive the “Baseball Writers Association of America Career Excellence Award.” Smith is now Co-



Sportswriter Wendell Smith With Jackie Robinson.

Director of the new “Claire Smith Center for Sports Media” at Temple University.

Dreier led off with a talk about the inter-connections between baseball's civil rights and labor rights movements and helped us recall the men whose careers were thwarted by Jim Crow, others who built the Negro Leagues, the black sportswriters and white Communist who were advocates for baseball integration, and a quasi-Socialist team owner who brought integration to the American League. He then was joined by panelists Favreau and Smith to opine on a wide variety of current issues including the

terms of the latest Collective Bargaining Agreement, which was concluded under the pressure of a lockout by the team owners (most of whom are billionaires). Smith was generally appreciative of the improved quality of coverage of baseball labor issues, going beyond the simplistic “billionaires vs. millionaires” trope. Dreier noted that the median lifespan of a major league career is only four years and that most players never see the super-sized contracts won by a Trout, Harper or Scherzer. Favreau and the others pointed to labor exploitation in the minors and the ongoing litigation over those

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The Lively and loving Lemlich Awards



Dolores Clara Fernandez Huerta, Kathie Sarachild, Rev. Jeanette Phillips, Dorothy Burnham and Maria Mazziotti Gillan

The annual Clara Lemlich Awards for Social Activism came to us by Zoom on May 12, 2022, honoring the memory of union and social activist Clara Lemlich by celebrating women who have devoted their lives to social justice.

This event was organized by LaborArts and the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, and sponsored by the 21st Century ILGWU Heritage Foundation, the Puffin Gallery for Social Activism at the Museum of the City of New York, and the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University.

The music and the winners

Showing us how a Zoom event can be more than talking heads, the program blended song, drama, laughter and the life's work of five brave and strong women. "On Strike", a song and music video based on Clara Lemlich's historic words, "I've got something to say"

(which precipitated the 1909 "Uprising of the 20,000" garment workers' strikes), was produced and written by Tara Cox. The timely and topical song "You'd Better Not F... in Texas" was performed by Jill Sobule with Steve Weisberg on piano, and "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was rendered by Pastor Danita Paige and Leah Paige.

This year's awardees were: **Dolores Clara Fernandez Huerta**, co-founder of the United Farm Workers Association, a leader of the Chicano/a civil rights movement and one of the most influential labor activists of the 20th century; **Kathie Sarachild**, a theoretician and activist in the women's movement, a founder of New York Radical Women, an early Redstocking who spoke up and out about abortion in the 60's, and a co-editor of *Woman's World*; **Rev. Jeanette Phillips**, a pioneer in securing access to health care for the disenfranchised for over

five decades, who developed Hudson River Healthcare, the largest network of federally-qualified community health centers in New York and third-largest in the USA; **Dorothy Burnham**, a human rights activist, educator and political activist (who just turned 107), dating back to her civil rights work with Paul Robeson in 1941, in Birmingham; and **Maria Mazziotti Gillan**, the People's Poet of Paterson, New Jersey, who founded the Poetry Center in that city and edits the Paterson Literary Review, authored 24 books including "All That Lies Between Us", a winner of the American Book Award, and continues to enlarge the audience for poetry.

Sarachild sent us home from this evening of song and substance by reminding us that big changes come from the bottom up.

Many thanks to Rachel Bernstein and all the others who gave us this joyous event.

MILESTONES—75 Years Ago

THE TAFT-HARTLEY ACT was enacted by the U.S. Congress on June 23, 1947, overriding a veto by President Harry S. Truman. To labor, it was a "Slave-Labor Act" but to management it "restore[d] a more balanced relationship between labor and management." Modifying the Wagner Act of 1935 (known as Labor's "Magna Carta", a label also applied to the 1914 Clayton Act), the Taft-Hartley law significantly restricted the activities and powers of labor unions.

The next issue of *Work History News* will provide more historical commentary on Taft-Hartley.

Work History News



New York Labor History Association, Inc.

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

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Editor	Keith Danish

Frances Perkins Place unveiled

By Joe Doyle

A street sign, “Frances Perkins Place,” was unveiled on March 26, 2022 at the intersection of Manhattan’s West 46th St. and 9th Ave. – with speeches by NYC Mayor Eric Adams, Perkins’s grandson Tomlin Perkins Coggeshall, and NYS Dept. of Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon (left to right in the photo). The intersection is just across the street from Hartley House, a settlement house where Perkins worked as a social worker. It is also the location of a fateful meeting between Perkins and the local Tammany Hall district leader, Thomas “The” McManus – persuading Perkins (for the first time in her life) to work with entrenched political machines in order to get things done to help working people.

When the New Deal was born

This unveiling took place one day after the 111th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. An eyewitness to the fire, Frances Perkins called March 25, 1911 “the day the New Deal was born.”

As head of the NY Consumers League, Perkins investigated a 1910 fire in a Newark underwear factory that killed 26 workers. Theodore Roosevelt recommended her to head up a newly-

created Citizens’ Committee on Safety, which was instrumental in creating the NYS Factory Investigating Commission. Perkins, Al Smith (majority leader of the NYS Assembly), and Robert Wagner (majority leader of the NYS Senate) personally toured factories state-wide, documenting dangers to working people – the life-and-death need for fire inspections, fire escapes, and protective legislation. Guided through the New York legislature by majority leaders Smith and Wagner, Perkins’s four-year effort on the Committee on Safety resulted in 36 new labor laws.

When Al Smith became governor in 1918, he appointed Perkins to be one of the five NYS Industrial Commissioners, then chair of the Industrial Commission in 1926. Franklin Delano Roosevelt named Perkins a labor commissioner when he became NYS governor, in 1929.

Four years later, FDR made Perkins Secretary of Labor – the first woman ever to be appointed to a Presidential cabinet.

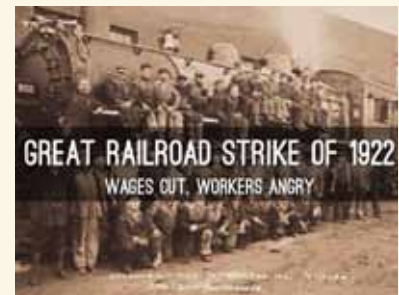


She remains the longest serving Secretary of Labor in U.S. history.

Singled out for praise from the lectern was NYLHA member Donn Mitchell, who serves on the board of the Frances Perkins Center (and wrote a book about Frances Perkins’s theology, *Tread the City’s Streets Again: Frances Perkins Shares Her Theology*). Also receiving praise from the lectern was a book, just published, *Talking to the Girls: Intimate and Political Essays on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire*. NYLHA board member Kimberly Schiller has an essay in that book.

MILESTONES — 100 Years Ago

1922 WAS THE YEAR of the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike. U.S. railroads had been nationalized during the First World War and railroad unions had made significant gains in wages and work rules, but the railroads returned to private ownership in 1920. A new “Railroad Labor Board” took pro-management actions and the carriers were aggressively anti-union. This led to a walkout of 400,000 railroad shopmen on July 1, 1922, the nation’s largest railway strike since the Pullman Strike of 1894. The federal government’s intervention, by obtaining a nationwide injunction, effectively undermined the strike, but the unions thereafter secured passage of the “Railway Labor Act of 1926”, providing them with a fairer collective bargaining environment.



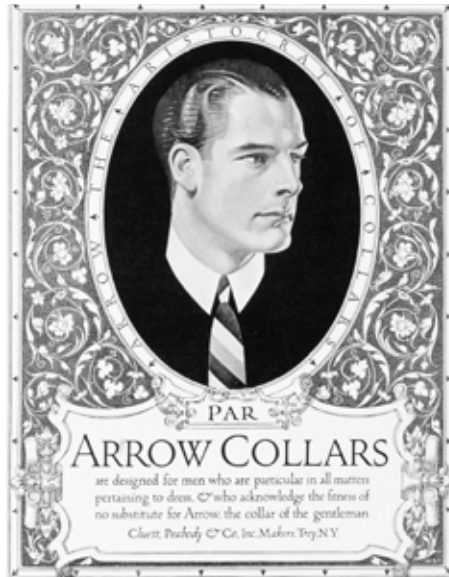
A tribute to Kate Mullany

By Joe Doyle

On March 23, 2022, via Zoom, Paul Cole regaled us with the remarkable saga of path-breaking Troy, NY labor organizer Kate Mullany. Founder of the American Labor Studies Center and retired Secretary-Treasurer of the NY State AFL-CIO, Paul led the charge to rescue Mullany – and her 1860s laundresses’ union, the Collar Laundry Union, the first female union in the country – from oblivion. In 2005, he won recognition of Mullany’s home as a National Historic Site (one of only 85 in the U.S), after he persuaded plumbers, carpenters, bricklayers and other trade unionists in the Capital Region to donate thousands of hours of voluntary labor to restore Mullany’s modest working-class home to meticulous period authenticity. Paul’s appreciative comment – echoed by everyone on the Zoom meeting – was: “God bless the building trades.”

Collar City

Paul backgrounded the story of Kate Mullany by describing Troy when it was famed across the country as “Collar City.” The catchphrase “white-collar workers” was born in Troy. Ads for Arrow Collars and other brands showcased clean, detachable white collars intended for middle class consumers. But the collar industry’s “blue-collar workers”, 85% women, stitched, washed, ironed, and packaged those collars in Dickensian conditions. Kate Mullany, born in 1845, immigrated to the U.S. in 1853, became her family’s breadwinner on the death of her father, and found herself working 12-14 hour days for \$3 or \$4/week as a laundress. Caustic chemicals, hot water, and bleach burned her hands and lungs. In 1864, Mullany organized her fellow laundresses into the Collar Laundry Union. Paul Cole calls the C.L.U. “the United States’ first sustained women’s trade union.” In February, 1864, she brought all 14 Troy laundries in the collar trade out on strike for 5 ½ days – winning a



25% raise in pay. Mullany’s laundresses’ union won a second strike in 1866, winning a \$6 raise in pay to \$14/week. In March 1869, Mullany led laundry starchers to a strike victory.



In May of 1869, however, when Mullany led a strike of collar ironers, the moneyed interests of Troy lashed back decisively. Cluett, Peabody & Co. and the giants of the collar industry agreed among themselves to refuse to trade with any Troy factory/subcontractor that employed unionized workers. Manufacturers said they’d pay higher wages – but ironers must give up their union. Mullany enlisted a \$500/week strike fund pledge from Troy iron molders, but the ironers were outflanked at every turn in the city of Troy. They lost their strike. The Collar Workers Union collapsed in September 1869.

Going Co-op

In 1870, Mullany reinvented herself, forming a workers’ cooperative, the Union Line Collar & Cuff Manufactory Cooperative. When the Troy cooperative

failed, Mullany relocated to Buffalo and in 1871 started a new model laundry – advertising 27 “skillful laundresses” for “best wages,” “garments are done up in superior style and without injury.” “The neatest and best arranged factory in the country” (with annual revenue of \$20,000/year).

In 1886, Mullany organized the Joan of Arc Assembly of the Knights of Labor, modeled on her Collar Laundry Union. NYLHA President Irwin Yellowitz noted that the core constituencies of the Knights of Labor in its founding years, across the United States, were workers’ cooperatives. It wasn’t until the 1880s that labor unions came to dominate membership in the Knights of Labor.

Kate Mullany blazed the way for women in the labor movement. She was elected a 2nd Vice President of the National Labor Union (an honor she declined – but she accepted an appointment as an assistant secretary of the N.L.U. – the first time a woman had been appointed officer of a national union). She died in 1906 and is buried in St. Peter’s Cemetery in Troy. In 1999, to pay tribute to Kate Mullany, labor enthusiasts erected an enormous Celtic cross at her graveside. One of its inscriptions reads: “Don’t iron while the strike is hot.”

The Kate Mullany National Historic Site is to be the home of a “National Trade Union Women’s Memorial”. Donations are requested. See “katemullanyrhs.org”.

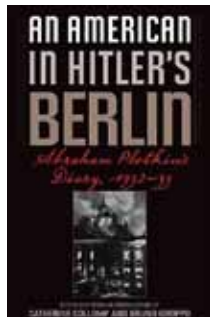


An American in Hitler's Berlin: Abraham Plotkin's Diary

By Keith Danish

An American in Hitler's Berlin: Abraham Plotkin's Diary, 1932-33 (University of Illinois Press, 2009)

Abraham ("Abe") Plotkin, a democratic Socialist and organizer for the ILGWU, was out of work in the fall of 1932, so he took a freighter to Europe with a letter of introduction from union president David Dubinsky, hoping to meet German trade union leaders and observe social conditions in that turbulent country. His diary, which would not be published until well after his death in



Weimar Republic fell and the Third Reich arose during the months that Plotkin spent in Germany.

Plotkin did have many contacts with labor leaders, and he studied the German social democracy's response to the Great Depression.

1988 at the age of 95, gives us an intimate view of a fateful moment in history, as the

He witnessed the rallies and street battles of the Nazis, Communists and Socialists. He reported on the tragic living conditions of the poor and working class, and experienced anti-Semitism at first hand. Upon returning to the USA in July, 1933, Plotkin was sent by Dubinsky to organize garment workers in Kansas City, but he also wrote and spoke about the destruction of the German labor movement and took important steps to help labor leaders escape from Nazi Germany. Such work would be magnified and

institutionalized once the Jewish Labor Committee was formed in February, 1934.

On a personal note, I am proud to say that I knew Abe Plotkin from my childhood until his death, as he was a dear comrade of my father in the "ILG" and was like a third grandfather to me. I cherish the memory of this brave but gentle man, who dedicated his life to the betterment of his brothers and sisters in and out of the labor movement, and encourage you to walk the streets of Berlin with him when he was an eyewitness to history.



WANT TO LEAVE A LABOR LEGACY?

Consider making a bequest to the New York Labor History Association



MILESTONES — 50 YEARS AGO

IN 1972, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) was founded at a meeting in Chicago attended by more than 1200 African American



union officials and rank-and-file members, and guided by the labor leaders William Lucy, Nelson Edwards, William Simons, Charles Hayes and Cleveland Robinson. The CBTU has brought attention to human rights issues such as black advancement in labor, rights of women workers, and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. With 50 chapters nationwide and one in Canada, it challenges organized labor to be more relevant to the needs of black and poor workers. Today, the CBTU is a "constituency group" of the AFL-CIO (as is the CLUW, the Coalition of Labor Union Women).

U.S.-Canada Labor History Network teaches us “Why it’s vital to teach labor history in schools”

By Keith Danish, NYLHA liaison to the U.S.-Canada Labor History Network

On January 27, 2022, the U.S.-Canada Labor History Network presented (through Zoom) the second public program since it was formed in 2020 in order to bring together organizations dedicated to preserving and promoting labor history. Why and how we must teach labor history, both inside and outside the schools, was the evening’s focus.

Tools for educators

The moderator was Ken Germanson of the Wisconsin Labor History Society, who also told how his organization sponsored essay contests and labor history projects for students, with prize money donated by unions.

Paul Cole, Executive Director of the American Labor Studies Center, whose website offers many relevant educational resources, gave a broad overview of the available tools and



methods useful in teaching and promoting labor history.

Evelyn Hershey, Education Director of the American Labor Museum/Botto House, in Haledon, NJ, described the many tours and learning programs offered to students, with outreach programs like “Museum in a Suitcase”.

Larry Kuehn, former Director of Research and past president of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, gave us a Canadian perspective with details of oral

history programs, lesson plans, podcasts and other teaching tools

Joanne Ricca, a retired staff representative for the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, recounted the successful effort to incorporate labor and collective bargaining history into Wisconsin’s public school curricula, and Ken Germanson discussed the difficulty in implementing the law when the state’s Governor was hostile to organized labor.

The program brought home the message that the right to organize is a human right and only in a democracy can workers’ rights be protected, so the effective teaching of labor history is a vital bulwark of democracy.

Any institution interested in joining the U.S.-Canada Labor History Network is invited to contact Ken Germanson: kagermanson@wisconsinlaborhistory.org.

In Memoriam

HAROLD “SONNY” HALL (age 89): Son of a Bronx bus driver, he rose from a bus cleaner in 1953 to become Transport Workers Union Local 100 President and later TWU International President.

At Local 100, Hall negotiated three major contracts with the MTA, created a bargaining unit protection program to preserve union work from being contracted out and established career ladders within the union to train workers for higher paying jobs in the industry. As International President he



expanded the union’s scope in organizing, adding 30,000 members and, in

education, providing for training of officers, staff, and local union activists. A strong advocate of labor education and labor history, Sonny Hall chaired the Board of the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at NYU and was a recipient of NYLHA’s John Commerford Labor Education Award in 1997. He died on January 13, 2022.



SAVE THE DATE

Call for entries: Bernhardt Prize

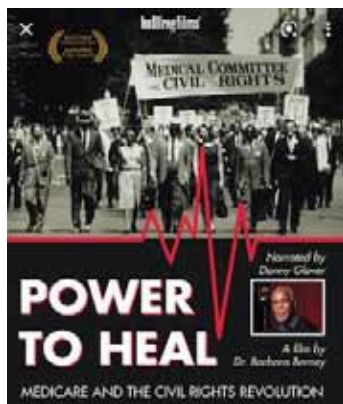
The annual Bernhardt Labor Journalism Prize will be announced at a labor journalism forum on October 13, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. The award of \$1000 will be given for an article (published in print or online between August 31, 2021 and August 30, 2022) that furthers the understanding of the history of working people. For further information or to propose an article for the award (by the deadline of August 30, 2022), visit LaborArts.org/Bernhardt.

A focus on healthcare

The NY Labor History Association sponsored two stirring presentations about the history of health care in the African American community and on the organizing of its medical workforce.

On February 7, 2022, there was a showing via Zoom of the film “Power to Heal: Medicare and the Civil Rights Revolution”, followed by a discussion with the film’s producer, Dr. Barbara Berney, a distinguished scholar in public health, environmental justice and the U.S. health care system, and Emerita Associate Professor at CUNY’s Graduate School of Public Health & Health Management.

The film depicted the brutal inequality of a segregated healthcare system;



even federal funds for hospital construction would be subject to “separate but equal” rules, and a “black AMA” had to be formed due to the hostility of a racist American Medical Association. Change came with Medicare and with the 1964 Civil Rights Act’s policy of non-discrimination in federally-funded programs. Medicare funds and a government enforcement

program were tools to break down racial barriers. But the job is unfinished, as reflected by the unfavorable health metrics of the African American community.

On February 16, a Zoom panel moderated by Donald Moore, M.D., discussed “Organizing the Black Medical Community: Past, Present & Future”. Dr. Moore, President of the Provident Clinical Society, noted Dr. King’s assertion that “of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”

Dr. Moore gave us an overview of African American medical pioneers. Panelist Doris Browne, M.D., a former President of the National Medical Association, reviewed the NMA’s history and

significance. Panelist Julius Johnson, M.D., a founding member and current President of the Greater NYC Chapter of the Black Nurses Association, discussed the home-based care which is of special importance to at-risk communities.

Panelist Lystra Sawney is Vice President of SEIU Local 1199’s new organizing department for home healthcare workers, who are predominantly women and largely women of color. She discussed SEIU’s long history of organizing for wage-parity and other benefits for healthcare workers.

Our thanks to Marcia Newfield for organizing these programs, and to the evening’s co-sponsors, Labor Arts, NYU’s Tamiment Library, and the PSC Retiree Chapter.

Civil rights & labor relations issues in baseball

(continued from page 1)

conditions; perhaps the current unionization wave will reach the minor leagues.

♦♦♦♦

Panelist Peter Dreier is the co-author (with Univ. of San Francisco Prof. Robert Elias) of two new books, “Baseball Rebels: The Players, People and Social Movements That Shook Up the Game and Changed America,” and “Major League Rebels: Baseball Battles Over Workers’ Rights and American Empire”. From the titles alone it is evident that this is not your grandpa’s kind of baseball book (unless grandpa was

Jim Bouton); they do offer a far more honest accounting of baseball’s history than one gets from “official” MLB propaganda.

The former book spotlights the rebels who challenged racism, sexism and homophobia in baseball, and describes the “unfinished agenda” that remains. The latter focuses on the sport’s labor wars and the progress made once labor solidarity was achieved, and on the dissenters to baseball’s conservative, flag-waving culture. Dreier and Elias (and the other panelists) also call

for an extension of solidarity, i.e., expanded ties between major league ballplayers, the fans, minor-league players, and the broader labor movement. They believe that Marvin Miller, the Moses of sports labor who ascended to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2021 (posthumously), and who wrote a book called “A Whole Different Ball Game”, would in today’s world be educating the major leaguers about a new kind of solidarity, with minor leaguers, with the Costa Rican workers who stitch baseballs and risk their health, with the makers

of uniforms whose jobs are transferred to non-union shops, and with hotel workers whose picket lines have to date been crossed by members of the major league players’ union. Now that would be a whole different ball game!

The event was co-sponsored by NYU’s Tamiment Library and the Claire Smith Center for Sports Media and was listed in the online calendar of events for Labor History Month, a traditional offering of the NYLHA which has returned thanks to the efforts of the Calendar Committee chaired by Joe Doyle.

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... and more

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!**



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