

NEWSLETTER

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Southern Labor Studies Association

Message from the President

Greetings to you all, as the steamy summer of 2011 finally winds down into the (hopefully) cooler and busy fall! It is both an honor, and more than a bit intimidating, to assume the presidency of the SLSA, following in the footsteps of wonderful past presidents, such as Cindy Hahamovitch of the College of William and Mary, and Heather Thompson of Temple University. We have been blessed with creative, energetic, and devoted leadership among our officers and members, and I hope my tenure as president will continue that tradition.

As I reflect on the recent past and look towards our future this year, I see reason for both optimism and concern. Thanks to the amazing work of Traci Drummond, Alex Lichtenstein, and Cindy, we pulled off a wonderful confer-

ence in April. I've always thought that the sign of a successful conference is when each session begins a little late and goes a little long because everyone is so excited to be learning from, and sharing and engaging with each other. I think we held up that standard in Atlanta quite well!

It isn't too soon by any means to be thinking about our next biennial conference, scheduled for April 2013 in New Orleans. We are very lucky to have two superb volunteers on the ground in the Big Easy already busily planning the event, Jana Lipman at Tulane University and Steve Striffler at the University of New Orleans. We have also signed a contract with the conference hotel so our venue is finally set (see p. 3 for more on the conference).

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Book Spotlight

Based on a vast array of sources from US, Jamaican, and English archives, as well as interviews, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* tells the history of the American "H2" program, the world's second oldest guestworker program. Since World War II, the H2 program has brought hundreds of thousands of mostly Jamaican men to the United States to do some of the nation's dirtiest and most dangerous farmwork for some of its biggest and most powerful agricultural corporations, companies that had the power to import and deport workers from abroad. Jamaican guestworkers occupied a no man's land between nations, protected neither by their home government nor by the United States. The workers complained, went on strike, and sued their employers in class action lawsuits, but their protests had little impact because they could be repatriated and replaced in a matter of hours. Today, nations around the world, including the United States, have turned to guestworker programs to manage migration. These temporary labor recruitment systems represented a state-brokered compromise between employers who wanted foreign workers and those who feared rising numbers of immigrants. Unlike immigrants, guestworkers couldn't settle, bring their families, or become citizens, and they had few rights. Indeed, instead of creating a manageable form of migration, guestworker programs created an especially vulnerable class of labor. *No Man's Land* puts Jamaican guestworkers' experiences in the context of the global history of this fast-growing and perilous form of labor migration. For more information, visit press.princeton.edu/titles/9574.html.



Cindy Hahamovitch is Professor of History at the College of William and Mary and immediate past president of the Southern Labor Studies Association. She is the author of *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945*.

Visit SLSA online at www.southernlaborstudies.org

President's Message, Cont.)

Thanks to our elections committee, chaired by past president, Heather Thompson, we have an excellent new slate of officers and board members to welcome to the SLSA. There are too many to list here, but be sure to check out the "People" link on the website to find out who they are. We look forward to their participation and ideas.

On Saturday, October 29, Cindy Hahamovitch will deliver the keynote address at our annual luncheon and membership meeting at the Southern Historical Association Annual Meeting in Baltimore. Cindy's talk draws on her recently published book, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton, 2011), and we hope many of you will be able to join us there. This event is co-sponsored by the Southern Industrial Association, and the history departments of the University of Maryland-College Park and Georgetown University. Tickets may be purchased for \$15 directly through the SLSA by mailing a check to Evan Bennett, Treasurer, Department of History, AH 107, Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Rd., Boca Raton, FL, 33431.

Based on members' ideas presented at our last business meeting in April in Atlanta, Max Krochmal has updated the website (thanks, Max!), and we are now posting new links from members on current events in labor and working class history and studies. We have profiled the Blair Mountain March of June 2011, in defense of preserving our labor heritage and to protest mountaintop removal. We have followed the efforts of undocumented students in Georgia to demand their rights to fair treatment and education. We have highlighted activities in Alabama aimed at protesting anti-

immigrant legislation in that state. And we posted an examination of potential new IRB rules for conducting oral history interviews. We hope to continue using the website to communicate to our members and others about important developments in these and other areas. This is an area of concern as well, however. We don't seem to be getting as much browsing traffic to the website as we would like, so new ideas to help improve in this area are welcome.

Thus, quite a bit is happening at the moment in the area of southern labor and working class studies, and many SLSA members are in the thick of both academic and activist work in this field. From my perspective, sitting here in Alabama, the immigration debate has been front and center since last spring, when the new Republican majority in the Alabama legislature, along with the new governor, enacted the nation's harshest anti-immigrant law, the "Beason-Hammon Act," known as "HB 56." This bill not only requires businesses to use the federal e-verify system, among other things, it also criminalizes assistance that citizens might lend to an undocumented person in need. Public schools are required to verify the citizenship status of registering students. Local law enforcement officers are required to check the papers of someone "suspected" of being "illegal." Citizens may sue local law enforcement if they believe such officers have not been diligent enough in pursuing action against undocumented persons. HB 56 also excludes certain groups of immigrants, undocumented and documented, from enrolling in institutions of higher education in the state. This is just a sampling of what the bill proposes to do. Several religious groups, labor unions, the

ACLU, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and other community organizations, along with the federal Justice Department, have sued to enjoin the Act's implementation, which was scheduled for September 1. As of this writing, a federal judge has stayed implementation until September 29, or earlier, while she studies the issues raised by the litigants. Meanwhile, citizens, residents, and allies across the state of Alabama have organized prayer vigils, protests, and rallies to protest this bill and to call for its repeal. I have attended four of these so far, two in Montgomery, one in Birmingham, and one in Auburn. It has been, indeed, a sublime experience to march with undocumented workers and their children along the same streets trod by civil rights activists over 40 years ago. Many families carried American flags while marching past Martin Luther King's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to the state capital in Montgomery. I invite you to peruse the photos and blog posts on our website covering these and other events. Watch for new updates on the SLSA website, and feel free to send us other links on this and other issues for the website.

Last but not least, thanks to Beth English for her hard work on getting previous newsletters compiled and published, and to Joey Fink for temporarily taking over that task. I am sure there is much I am leaving out, but I think this covers the basics for the past few months. We are always looking for new members, especially those interested in K-12 outreach, so pass the word along. And don't forget to sign up for the SLSA luncheon in Baltimore, check the website often, and have a great fall!

Jennifer E. Brooks
Auburn University

The Avondale Research Project

Scholars and Workers Unite to Document the Past and Build a Model for a Better Future

Jana Lipman
Tulane University

This summer, faculty members at Loyola University, University of New Orleans, Southern University at New Orleans, and Tulane University worked with the AFL-CIO Metal Trades Council at the Avondale Shipyard to document the shipyard's historic social, political, and economic contributions to the greater New Orleans region.

The shipyard is currently scheduled to close in 2013, and workers are completing the final two ships in the yard. At the same time, they have launched the S.O.S.-Avondale Campaign to Save Our Shipyard. For generations, the Avondale shipyard has provided skilled and relatively well-paid industrial work, which has enabled many families to achieve greater economic stability, skilled training, and provided a gateway into the middle class. With more than 4,000 jobs and an economic engine in the local community at stake, workers reached out to academics to help document the shipyard's vital importance.

To that end, scholars are engaging in a wide range of projects, from documenting the shipyard's origins in World

War II, to mapping the economic impact of the shipyard through surveys of local businesses and real estate agencies, to highlighting the opportunities Avondale provided to women and African Americans in an era largely defined by low-skilled service employment. Other scholars involved in the project have been analyzing the consequences of economic instability on the physical and mental health of families directly affected by the planned yard closure. Moreover, scholars are also investigating the history of intracoastal shipping as a way of providing a context for reinventing the shipyard to respond to contemporary economic and environmental concerns. Given the New Orleans and Gulf South's economic and social crises in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill, maintaining good, stable jobs is central to fostering an actively engaged citizenry and enabling the region's recovery.

Collectively these studies aim to raise awareness about the consequences of closing the Avondale shipyard, contribute to public dialogue, and provoke discussions about economic models for the future.

THE MANY SOUTHS 2013 Southern Labor Studies Conference

The Southern Labor Studies Conference will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana, March 7-9, 2013 at the Double Tree Hotel. The conference theme, "The Many Souths" will ask participants to examine how scholars have conceptualized "the South:" as rural and urban, as a single region and as multiple sub-regions (the Mountain South, Deep South, etc.), as part of the Caribbean, and as a region defined by particular sets of race, class, and gender relations.

New Orleans is an ideal place to do this, as it is often set apart as somehow "exceptional" or outside the South in popular culture and historical accounts. For some, it is a city distinct from the rest of the South, while for others, it is very much part of the South's economic and racial framework. Others see New Orleans as a Caribbean capital. In fact, New Orleans, like much of the South, is often "exemplary" of larger historical trends related to migration, deindustrialization, race relations, violence, the rise of the service economy, the importance of tourism, and working-class struggles.

The conference will offer a broad range of panels, keynote speakers, a New Orleans labor history tour, and the chance to engage with southern labor activists. Look for the call for papers in the spring, and in the meantime, put New Orleans, March 7-9, 2013 on your calendars.

News from the Southern Labor Archives

The Great Speckled Bird, Atlanta's underground newspaper published from 1968-1976, has been digitized in its entirety by the Georgia State University Library and is available online (dlib.gsu.edu). The Library recently received a \$2,000 grant from the Georgia Humanities Council to create a traveling exhibit about the *Bird* for Georgia's colleges and universities. The exhibit will be available for loan starting in January 2012 and will provide information about the content of the *Bird* and how to access it online. For more information about the digitized *Bird* or the exhibit, contact Traci Drummond at tdrummond@gsu.edu.

New oral history interviews are now available. Interviews with Graphic Communications/International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 527-S members Ralph Meers and James Parker were created as part of the Voices of Labor Oral History Project. The president and former vice-president, respectively, discuss race relations in the union, organizing efforts, negotiations, and the wildcat strike at the Mead plant in 1972.

Jim Ashlock, former public relations manager for Eastern Airlines, recounts his time writing for *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, his career at Eastern, and the labor-management dispute between the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers and Eastern CEO Frank Lorenzo that ultimately led to the bankruptcy and closure of the airline.

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Labor History Made and Marked in North Carolina

David Zonderman

Chair, Labor Outreach Committee

On Labor Day weekend, an important piece of North Carolina labor history was remembered and memorialized for future generations; and the very act of remembering was in itself a historical moment. A spirited group of union veterans and local historians witnessed the dedication of the first North Carolina highway marker recognizing a major event in the state's labor history – Operation Dixie and the efforts of nearly 10,000 tobacco leafhouse workers (most of them African-American women) to organize unions and secure contracts 65 years ago. The marker was placed one block from the now-vacant China American Tobacco Company in Rocky Mount, site of the first successful vote for the FTA-CIO (Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers Union) in eastern North Carolina's tobacco belt.

The dedication ceremony included the introduction of one surviving member of the original bargaining unit; a rousing rendition of "Solidarity Forever" led by James Andrews, President of the North Carolina AFL-CIO; and remarks by SLSA's own Robert Korstad. Bob highlighted the historical connections between the leafhouse workers' efforts, the broader goals of Operation Dixie to organize a host of Southern employers including the vast textile industry, the previous successful campaigns of tobacco workers in Winston-Salem during World War II, and the nascent postwar civil rights movement. In fact, many of the local

labor activists were also committed members of the NAACP. They saw distinct links between the act of organizing and voting in union representation elections and the struggle for political and legal rights throughout the South.

Getting North Carolina to put up a marker noting any aspect of labor history is a momentous event in and of itself; many political and business leaders trumpet the state's historically low union density rate, now hovering around four per cent. Having the dedication ceremony at the City of Rocky Mount's arts and sciences center, and having the City Council issue a proclamation declaring "Operation Dixie Day" added to the commemoration's uniqueness in the annals of local labor lore. Two other highway markers – recognizing the Loray Mill Strike (1929) in Gastonia and the long struggle at the Harriet-Henderson Mills (1958-1961) – remain in storage because no local organization or political leader is willing to organize a dedication ceremony. Struggles more than half a century in the past still stir up powerful memories that local elites do not want to acknowledge. But the marker to Operation Dixie stands tall on US Highway 301 Business, heading into downtown Rocky Mount, reminding all who pause to read it of the brave union pioneers who strived to break down the

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Treasurer's Report

Evan P. Bennett
Florida Atlantic University

The last year has been a period of growth for the Southern Labor Studies Association. As of September, we have more than 150 members. Two factors have driven this increase: a successful membership drive, especially in the months leading up to the April meeting in Atlanta, and Duke University Press's discovery of 70 "lost" members who had fallen through the cracks of DUP's subscription system. We owe special thanks to LAWCHA treasurer Thomas Klug for working with Duke University Press in determining the fates of these members. We are excited to have them.

This year's meeting in Atlanta was successful beyond our expectations. With more than 100 attendees, we were able to raise over \$3,900, money that will provide a nice nest egg as we prepare for the 2013 meeting in New Orleans. We owe much of our success to significant underwriting from a number of organizations. Thanks are due to LAWCHA, the Georgia Humanities Council, the Departments of History and African American Studies at Emory University, the History Department at the University of Georgia, the History Department at Georgia Southern University, the History Department at Georgia State University, the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University, and the History Department at Kennesaw State University. Special thanks also to Traci Drummond of the Southern Labor Archives and Alex Lichtenstein of Indiana University for their hard work in organizing the conference and soliciting this support.

While we have done well over the last year or so in growth, we will need to continue to focus on retaining and increasing our membership. Renewal reminders have been delayed, but will be coming out soon. Remember, you can always join or renew your membership via the SLSA website, and please tell your friends and colleagues to support us!

Member News

Joey Fink, SLSA's graduate student officer, was awarded the Archie Green Occupational Folklife Graduate Fellowship from the Department of American Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill, to support research on her dissertation "The Many Norma Raes: Working-Class Women in the Struggle to Unionize J.P. Stevens, 1963-1981" and a chapter on Crystal Lee Sutton (the "real Norma Rae") to be published in the forthcoming *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times* (University of Georgia Press, Spring 2013).

Robert Korstad, Kevin D. Gorter Professor of Public Policy and History, and Co-director of the Program on History, Public Policy, and Social Change at Duke University, delivered the keynote address at the 2011 Southern Labor Studies Conference. His address on the past 50 years of southern labor history highlighted the influence of the social movements of the 1960s on organized labor, efforts to "overcome gaps in historical memory and apply that new knowledge to the ongoing struggles," the stories of agricultural, service, and undocumented workers that have been brought into the southern labor history cannon, and the ongoing struggles in which labor historians and labor activists must work together in crucial and productive solidarity. The full transcript of this rousing and informative address is available on the SLSA website.

James C. Maroney, Professor Emeritus of History at Lee College, has co-edited with Bruce A. Glasrud the anthology, *Texas Labor History*, which will be published in 2012 by Texas A&M University Press. Through eighteen previously published articles that reflect the rich heritage of Texas labor, this collection addresses the history of the state's working-class and labor history that has been overlooked or ignored. Anthology contributors include Joseph Abel, Mary Margaret McAllen Amberson, Gregg Andrews, Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Michael R. Botson, Jr., Theresa A. Case, George N. Green, James R. Green, James C. Maroney, George T. Morgan, Jr., Ernest Obadele-Starks, James V. Reese, Marilyn D. Rhinehart, Yolanda G. Romero, Robert S. Shelton, Zaragosa Vargas, Emilio Zamora, and Robert E. Zeigler.

Jessica Wilkerson, PhD candidate in the History Department at UNC-Chapel Hill, won the Gender & History Graduate Student Paper Prize at the 2011 Berkshire Conference of Women Historians for her essay "Where Movements Meet: Generations of Women's Activism in the Appalachian South." She has been invited to revise the paper for publication in *Gender & History*.

Robert Zieger, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Florida, addressed the participants in the North Central Florida Central Labor Council's annual Labor Day Breakfast in Gainesville, Florida, on September 3. He spoke on "The Lessons of the Past," invoking the history of the CIO and reflecting on its relevance to today's workers and unions. A full transcript of his speech is available on the SLSA website.

Campaign for Fair Food

Marc Rodrigues

Student/FarmworkerAlliance

College campuses and cafeterias across the country have been battlegrounds in recent years over the direction of America's agricultural industry, working conditions for tens of thousands of farmworkers, and the corporate food industry that directly shapes both. College dining is a multi-billion dollar industry, and the conditions under which men and women toil in order to cultivate and harvest the produce and other food that ends up on dining hall trays is nothing short of appalling.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) – a Florida-based, award-winning farmworker organization whose 4,000 members largely work in the Florida and East Cost tomato harvest – has waged a highly-successful Campaign for Fair Food in recent years with the goal of improving conditions in the fields and ending decades of abuse and grinding poverty suffered by farmworkers. Along the way, students and educators have played key roles.

In spite of the arduous, even dangerous work required to grow and harvest tomatoes and other crops, workers are typically paid sub-poverty wages. In a report submitted to the US Congress in 2000, the Department of Labor called farmworkers “a labor force in significant economic distress,” citing their annual earnings of \$10,000 to \$12,500 to support its conclusions. In 2008, the Department of Agriculture released a similar report, which described agricultural laborers as being “among the most economically disadvantaged working groups in the U.S.,” and went on to declare that “poverty among farmworkers is more than double that of all wage and salary employees.” In addition to grinding poverty, farmworkers also suffer under a powerlessness seen in few other areas of work. Jim Crow era exclusions from federal workplace protections – including rules on collective bargaining and overtime pay – have contributed to the stark imbalance of power that farmworkers still face in dealing with their employers. Wage theft and sexual harassment are also commonplace. In extreme cases, workers have even been held against their will and forced to work for little or no pay, through threats or the actual use of violence. Since 1997, in Florida alone, there have been nine federal prosecutions for modern-day slavery, prompting one Department of Justice prosecutor to call Florida's fields “ground zero for modern-day slavery.”

In 2001, CIW launched the Campaign for Fair Food with the first-ever farmworker boycott of a major fast-food

company, Taco Bell. The national boycott of Taco Bell called on the fast-food giant to take responsibility for human rights abuses in the fields where its produce is grown and picked.

The logic behind the Campaign for Fair Food is simple. Major corporate buyers – companies such as Aramark, Sodexo, Kroger, and Wal-Mart – purchase a tremendous volume of fruits and vegetables, leveraging their buying power to demand the lowest possible prices from their suppliers. This, in turn, exerts a powerful downward pressure on wages and working conditions in these suppliers' operations. The Campaign for Fair Food aims to reverse this trend by harnessing the purchasing power of the food industry for the betterment of farmworker wages and working conditions. Since 2001, the CIW and allies have successfully won Fair Food Agreements with nine leading food corporations, amongst them Taco Bell and its parent company, Yum Brands, McDonald's, Subway, Whole Foods, and campus foodservice providers Aramark, Bon Appetit, Compass Group, and Sodexo. During the four-year Taco Bell Boycott, members of the Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA) – a CIW partner organization founded by Florida college students which quickly expanded into a national network – on over 300 campuses across the country organized tirelessly around SFA's “Boot the Bell” campaign, amassing a formidable 25 hard-fought victories that saw institutions such as Notre Dame, UCLA, and the University of Chicago terminate contracts with Taco Bell. Similarly, student organizing played a major role in convincing campus foodservice providers Aramark, Bon Appetit, Compass Group, and Sodexo to sign Fair Food agreements with CIW in 2009 and 2010.

Over the course of the campaign, professors and other instructors have aided the SFA and CIW's organizing efforts by opening up their classrooms for farmworker-led presentations, connecting students with resources, and sometimes even taking principled stances in support of the campaign at great risk to their own careers. Today, the work of constructing a fairer food system continues as CIW turns its gaze to leading supermarket chains in the hopes that they too will join the growing tide of social responsibility. Students, professors, and instructors on college campuses across the country have anchored the campaign over the years and will continue to do so. For more information, visit www.ciw-online.org.

Freedom University

Founded in the summer of 2011, Freedom University is a volunteer-driven organization that provides rigorous, college-level instruction to all academically qualified students regardless of their immigration status and without charge. Our fully credentialed faculty are committed to providing students with coursework equivalent to that offered at the state's most selective universities, from which they have been barred by a decision of the University System of Georgia Board of Regents. We believe that all Georgians have an equal right to a quality education. Separate and unequal access to higher education contravenes this country's most cherished principles of equality and justice for all.

Four humanities PhDs in Athens have allied with the Georgia Undocumented Youth Alliance, the Georgia Students for Public Higher Education (Athens chapter), the Athens Immigrants' Rights Coalition, and a host of individual supporters to create Freedom University, open without tuition or fees to any qualified Georgia high school graduate or GED recipient. Freedom University will not discriminate on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, economic background, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identification, or immigration status.

Freedom University will accept applications on a rolling basis after September 15; classes start on October 9 and will run on a weekly basis through April of 2012. We are actively pursuing possibilities for academic transfer credit and tuition remission at universities both within Georgia and out of state. A distinguished Board of Advisors – including SLSA's own Nancy MacLean; Robin D.G. Kelley; George Sanchez; and Pulitzer-Prize-winning novelist Junot Diaz, along with more than 30 others – has volunteered to counsel us and our students.

To apply for Freedom University's inaugural class, visit www.freedomuniversitygeorgia.com or email freedomuniversitygeorgia@gmail.com.

(News from the Southern Labor Archives, Cont.)

Modibo Kadalie worked with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the African Liberation Support Committee, among others. He describes his role in organizing against police chief John Inman, the armed self-defense in the Techwood Housing Projects during the Atlanta Child Murders; an independent union of taxi drivers, a march from Savannah to Reidsville in response to a prison lock-down and against the death penalty, and many other events. He also discusses his influences, including C.L.R. James, Hosea Williams, Kimathi Mohammed, Charles Simmons, and many others.

Ken Lawrence discusses his origins with the civil rights and labor movements including his membership in the Young People's Socialist League, the Socialist Party, and the Facing Reality organization. He enumerates his influences and discusses his published articles for the Southern Patriot and his experiences in researching and writing them, including those written about citrus and sugar workers in Florida, pulpwood workers in Mississippi, the Farrah strike in Texas, poultry plant workers, and wildcat strikes throughout the South.

(Labor History Made and Marked in NC, Cont.)

barriers of Jim Crow and labor exploitation. As activists and scholars, we should redouble our efforts to encourage more public and permanent recognition of the rich labor history in towns and cities across the South.