

NEWSLETTER

Southern Labor Studies Association

Fall/Winter 2013
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Message from the President

Hello SaLSAtians,

Southern labor is very much in the news these days—from the victory over Alabama’s nasty HB56 anti-immigration law to the possible restarting of a comprehensive guest-worker bill in Congress. This makes it an exciting time to be president of a still relatively new and vital organization like the SLSA.

Our conference in New Orleans in 2013 was a rollicking success thanks to the hard work of Jana Lipman and Steve Striffler. We had an attendance of nearly 200 and some excellent keynotes. Many members remarked to me how much they enjoyed hearing about the labor of musical performance, including the difficult hours and the instability

of work in New Orleans so many years after Katrina. Eric Arnesen and Cindy Hahamovitch, who are planning the 2015 conference, have a hard act to follow.

Our annual lunch at the Southern Historical Association went off without a hitch thanks to Evan Bennett and Beth English, who made the financial and logistical arrangements. Thanks to Jenny Brooks for arranging the panel presentation (a new format for our luncheon). The panel was a great hit. Most of the folks at lunch got involved in the discussion of immigrant workers past and present.

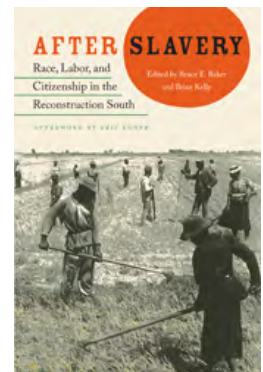
(Continued on p. 2)

Book Spotlight

After Slavery: Race, Labor and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South

Bruce E. Baker and Brian Kelly, editors, with an Afterword by Eric Foner

In the popular imagination, freedom for African Americans is often assumed to have been granted and fully realized when Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation or, at the very least, at the conclusion of the Civil War. In reality, the anxiety felt by newly freed slaves and their allies in the wake of the conflict illustrates a more complicated dynamic: the meaning of freedom was vigorously, often lethally, contested in the aftermath of the war. *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South* (University Press of Florida) moves beyond broad generalizations concerning black life during Reconstruction in order to address the varied experiences of freed slaves across the South. Urban unrest in New Orleans and Wilmington, North Carolina, loyalty among former slave owners and slaves in Mississippi, armed insurrection along the Georgia coast, and racial violence throughout the region are just some of the topics examined.



The essays included here are selected from the best work created for the After Slavery Project, a transatlantic research collaboration. Combined, they offer a diversity of viewpoints on the key issues in Reconstruction historiography and a well-rounded portrait of the era.

(Continued on p. 3)

(President's Message, Cont.)

In her comment, former SLSA President Cindy Hahamovitch gave some hints about how to navigate the difficult world of translating our work for legislative aides, lawyers, and governing bodies.

Our membership committee has been hard at work. Composed of Jay Driskell, Jennifer Bickham-Mendez, Michael Innis-Jiménez, Molly Perry, and chaired by Cindy Hahamovitch, they have already generated a list of about 150 names of people who should be members. All have been invited to join. Our membership is at an all-time high with 160 members and climbing. We've changed the renewals to a January-December membership to line up with some of the other historical organizations. Those who've just joined will be renewed through 2014.

Over \$5000 has been raised for the Robert Zieger Prize, a new prize to be offered every other year for "the best unpublished article in southern labor studies by a graduate student, early career scholar, journalist, or activist." You can still make donations to support the prize by going to the [SLSA website](#) or by sending a check to SLSA's Treasurer, Evan Bennett. Paul Ortiz, who will chair the Zieger

Prize committee, will begin to advertise the prize soon so that we can make our first award at the 2015 meeting.

Be aware that we will soon be proposing changes to our constitution and bylaws. You'll be asked to vote on the changes by email.

Finally, we have a new [Facebook page](#) where we can exchange news about events, exhibits, rallies, new books, whatever. We hope you'll join in. You can adjust the settings to maximize or minimize your exposure to what folks post.

I look forward to meeting all of you over the next two years. If you'd like to participate more fully in the organization, feel free to shoot me [an email](#) to discuss how we can take advantage of your interests and experience. If you just want to observe, enjoy this great newsletter, which is produced by Beth English and Joey Fink.

Onward,
Scott R. Nelson
College of William and Mary

Robert H. Zieger Prize for Southern Labor Studies

In honor of the late Robert H. Zieger—teacher, scholar, and tireless union activist—the Southern Labor Studies Association is raising funds for the Robert H. Zieger Prize for Southern Labor Studies. This prize will be awarded every two years to the best unpublished article in southern labor studies submitted by a graduate student or early career scholar, journalist, or activist ("early career" being defined as no more than five years beyond the author's highest degree).

To make a tax-deductible contribution, visit the [SLSA website](#) or send a check made out to the "Southern Labor Studies Association" to:

Robert H. Zieger Prize, SLSA
c/o Evan Bennett, Treasurer
Department of History
Florida Atlantic University
777 Glades Road
Boca Raton, FL 33431

(Book Spotlight, Cont.)

Q&A with Brian Kelly, Co-editor of *After Slavery*

Joey Fink

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Q: There's been a lot of outstanding work on the aftermath of slave emancipation in recent years—from field-shaping studies like Foner's *Reconstruction* and Steven Hahn's *A Nation Under Our Feet* to detailed monographs that take up particular themes or explore ground-level developments in a particular region. How does this collection relate to that work and what does it offer to labor historians?

A: The collection grew out of a concern among three of us—Susan O'Donovan, Bruce Baker, and myself—that although historians had produced some really impressive new work over the past generation, much of it was marked by a fairly striking incongruity: even while W.E.B. Du Bois was being held up as the progenitor of a “new history of emancipation,” his elemental understanding of Reconstruction as labor history—even as the critical episode in the history of the American working class—was regarded as passé, or ignored. We wanted to pull together new scholarship on Reconstruction that reasserted the utility of that perspective.

At the same time we wanted to take stock of the best of the new work and move beyond broad generalizations about “the black experience” in the post-emancipation South: to begin instead to map out the contours of a diverse encounter with “freedom”—shaped by varying crop cultures and demographic settings, an uneven legacy of labor and political mobilization, the viability of alliances with sections of white society, access to literacy, and a range of other variables. The result, I think, is a collection useful to anyone working on Reconstruction but one that also manages to reassert the primacy of the “labor question.”

The third piece, I suppose, was to step back from an assertion of almost unbounded freedpeople's “agency” in the

recent literature and mark out a framework that acknowledges both their power to demand change and the limits on their room for maneuver.

Q: Are there any particular essays that labor historians should pay attention to, or which tell us something new about the post-emancipation South?

A: It's hard to know where to start in a collection book-ended with essays by Tom Holt and Eric Foner, and with some really impressive new scholarship in between. Holt's contribution makes explicit the connection between free labor's failure to satisfy slave aspirations in the mid-nineteenth century and the global resurgence of unfree labor in the twenty-first. Foner reflects broadly on interpretative developments from the vantage point of the preeminent scholar of Reconstruction. In between are some really compelling essays on black and white labor in coastal Georgia and urban New Orleans, Charleston, Wilmington, and upcountry South Carolina; along with two or three essays that will compel new thinking on freedpeople's agency. We see it as a kind of necessary intervention aimed at rescuing Du Bois from the “condescension of posterity,” so to speak, to reassert the most fundamental aspect of his work in a way that labor historians should welcome but which too many scholars seem oblivious to. I hope that it gets a wide readership.

Brian Kelly is co-editor, with Bruce Baker, of *After Slavery*, and director of the After Slavery Project. He is a reader in the School of History and Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast, and the author of *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-21*.

Join the Southern Labor Studies Association

Annual membership is \$25 (\$10 for students and the unemployed); lifetime membership is \$500. Members receive the biannual newsletter, steep discounts on conference registration, and access to other members via the SLSA listserv.

To join, visit: www.southernlaborstudies.org

SLSA at the Southern Many Peoples, Many Paths

Beth English
Princeton University

The Southern Labor Studies Association held a lunch and panel, “Many Peoples, Many Paths: Diversifying the Immigration Debate, Past and Present,” during the 2013 Southern Historical Association annual meeting in St. Louis. Jennifer Brooks, Associate Professor of History at Auburn University and immediate past President of SLSA, and Monique Laney, Lecturer in History at American University, presented their research at the panel. Cindy Hahamovitch, Class of ’38 Professor of History at the College of William and Mary, provided comment, and Scott Nelson, Legum Professor of History at the College of William and Mary and current President of SLSA, chaired and moderated. The the Organization for the Study of Southern Economy, Culture, and Society co-sponsored the session.

The panel focused broadly on providing historical context for current debates over immigration reform. In her presentation, “Becoming Juan Crow: The Political Journey of Immigration Labor Reform in Alabama,” Jennifer Brooks discussed issues of labor recruitment and the importance of immigrants as a “cheap” and “controllable” labor source. Alabama’s harsh 2011 immigration law, commonly known as HB56, put Alabama at the forefront of the national debate over immigration restriction. But, despite being largely absent from the historical record on immigration, Alabama has had a long love-hate relationship with immigrant labor. As Brooks explained, attracting immigrants to the state became a priority in Alabama between the 1870s and 1920s, as industrialists and especially planters sought new sources of cheap and controllable labor in the post-Civil War, free-labor milieu. Immigrants, as Brooks noted, offered a “different sort of opportunity.” Attempts to recruit immigrants to Alabama—including making farming land available through sale to immigrants who were willing and able to work it—largely failed, however, with the state taking much of the blame for its tepid support of these recruitment efforts. Shift to 2011 and, Brooks asserts, many of the same debates are playing out in Alabama between political interests looking to severely restrict immigration and representatives of business interests wanting steady access to low wage labor.

In her presentation, “Alabama’s German Rocketeers: The First Immigrants Recruited for their ‘Special Skills?’” Monique Laney engaged with issues related to the recruitment of highly skilled immigrants. Immediately after World War II, the

(Continued on p. 6)



From left to right, panelists at the Southern Labor Studies Association’s luncheon at the 2013 Annual Meeting of Southern Historical Association: Jennifer Brooks, Cindy Hahamovitch, Scott Nelson, and Monique Laney.

Treasurer's Update

Evan Bennett,
Florida Atlantic University

This year has been a fruitful one for the Southern Labor Studies Association. Thanks to Jana Lipman and Steve Striffler's hard work in beating the bushes for outside funding, we were able to host a great conference in New Orleans and add to the association's general fund. As a result of the conference, too, our membership expanded to more than 150 people. Renewals for 2014 are due; you will each receive an email reminder shortly. It's especially important for members to renew in non-conference years so we may continue to host outstanding meetings on the even years. Membership is still \$25 for faculty and others fully employed, \$10 for graduate students and the unemployed. We also have the option to become a lifetime member for \$500, payable over a calendar year.

In addition to funding the conference, the SLSA has also created a fund to present an award in the memory of Robert Zieger. We began collecting money for the fund in March and have received a generous outpouring from scholars and others who are appreciative of Bob and his hard work as a scholar, activist, and colleague. The distance from which the donation checks have come testify to his wide influence, while the small notes that have accompanied some of the donations contain stirring acknowledgements of the genuineness of his life as a scholar, academic, and activist for working people. (The number of donations from his colleagues at the University of Florida has been especially notable.)

In the past year, SLSA applied for and received tax-exempt status from the IRS. All donations to the SLSA, including those for the Zieger Fund, are tax deductible.

As always, thanks for your ongoing support.

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on Facebook



A Teaching and Research Resource for Scholars and Teachers

Kelly Rowland
University of Maryland

The Freedmen and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland announces *Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, which is series 3, volume 2 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*. The 1,070-page volume—interpretive essays and annotated documents—examines the remaking of the labor system of the U.S. South in the aftermath of emancipation. It depicts the struggle of disenfranchised and propertyless ex-slaves to control their own labor, establish their families as viable economic units, and secure independent possession of land and other productive resources. Among the topics addressed in the volume are the dispossession of former slaves who had settled in the Sherman reserve, the reordering of labor on plantation and farm, nonagricultural labor, new relations of credit and debt, labor migration, and ex-slaves' efforts to rent, purchase, and homestead land. The volume is published by the University of North Carolina Press, and its editors are René Hayden, Anthony Kaye, Kate Masur, Steven Miller, Susan O'Donovan, Leslie Rowland, and Stephen West.

Visit the [UNC Press website](#) for more information on the book and for a peek inside.

Visit the [Freedmen and Southern Society Project website](#) to access nearly 100 sample documents from the volumes of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*. These are transcriptions (in a few cases, images) of originals housed in the National Archives of the United States, and are wonderful teaching and research tools. The website includes a helpful bibliography and chronology. This project is supported by the University of Maryland and funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Immigration Reform Echoes an Ignominious Past with Provisions to Expand the U.S. Guestworker Program

Cindy Hahamovitch
College of William and Mary

The call came into the Florida Rural Legal Services office on November 22, 1986. “Something bad is going down at Okeelanta ... something crazy.” What was going down at Okeelanta—an enormous sugar farm south of Lake Okeechobee—was the mass deportation of some 350 Caribbean men—all guestworkers holding legal, temporary “H-2” visas. The cane cutters had gone on strike, alleging that they were being paid half as much as the year before and that their timecards had been doctored to make it seem as though those low wages met their contractual guarantees. Okeelanta’s managers refused to negotiate. Instead, bayonet-wielding sheriff’s deputies rousted the strikers from their barracks and bussed them to Miami’s airport, where attorneys found them—some in their dirty work clothes, others barefoot or wearing only slippers and boxer shorts, and all clutching boarding passes that said “Farmworker” where other travelers’ names were printed. Two more were later discovered in the Palm Beach County hospital, where they were being treated for bites inflicted by police dogs.

The “Dog War,” as the 1986 strike and deportation became known, was especially shocking because Congress had decided only a month before to expand the H-2 guestworker program. We too should be shocked because the program that made the Dog War possible still exists and is likely going to get bigger.

Created during World War II when Florida growers sought an alternative to increasingly militant black farmworkers, the guestworker program was made a permanent part of U.S. immigration law in 1952. In the 1960s, however, Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of Labor had scaled it back, convinced that there were more than enough American farmworkers to meet growers’ needs. The program thereafter imported just 15,000 men a year, all of whom harvested sugarcane or apples.

(Continued on p. 8)

(SLSA at the Southern, Cont.)

United States government recruited a group of some 500 German scientists, starting with Wernher von Braun and a small group of colleagues. Despite past links to the Nazi regime, Laney explained, the U.S. government provided these German scientists with a relatively easy path to citizenship. A high-profile group of these scientists ultimately settled in Huntsville, Alabama, working on technology that was foundational for the moon landing. Two of these Huntsville “rocketeers” were so strident in their Nazism that their paths to citizenship were blocked until the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act established a preference system in U.S. immigration law based on “special skills.” Within the context of U.S. national security interests and achievements in the space race, these German rocketeers pushed special skills (deemed important to national economic and security issues) to the center of U.S. immigration policy. This focus on skills recruitment continues to shape immigration debates today, and the fear of “losing out” to other

nations, which shaped Cold War recruitment of the German rocketeers, remains salient. “It’s all about international competition,” Laney observed of the arguments put forth today especially by the IT sector. “If we don’t get them, China [and] India will.”

Before fielding questions, Cindy Hahamovitch rounded out the panel, observing that the two presentations highlight the very different terms under which skilled and unskilled workers come to the United States, and that historians have a role to play in today’s debates over immigration reforms. But Hahamovitch also sounded a note of caution to the audience. As historians, Hahamovitch argued, we must always be asking ourselves what precisely we should be saying and what lessons can be drawn from the historical record: “We don’t want other people clarifying the argument for us.”

News from the Southern Labor Archives

Traci Drummond
Georgia State University

Klan Infiltrator's Papers Now Available Online



The personal papers of Stetson Kennedy, author, folklorist and human rights advocate, are now available online through Georgia State University Library's Digital Collections portal. The papers are housed in the Southern Labor Archives at GSU, the largest collection of labor-related primary resources in the Southeast.

Kennedy's career began in the 1930s with his work on the Federal Writers Project Guide to Florida. He went on to write the Florida volume in the *American Folkways* series (*Palmetto County*), *Southern Exposure* (1946), and *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.* (1959).

Out to expose the social and political inequities of the South in the mid-20th century, he infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia in the 1940s. The secrets he learned in Klan meetings led to writing *I Rode with the Ku Klux Klan* (1954) and sharing their rituals with writers of the *Adventures of Superman* radio show, who incorporated the information into one of their story arcs. Because of Kennedy's efforts, the Ku Klux Klan's national corporate charter was revoked in 1947.

The digitized collection includes correspondence, subject files, typescripts and clippings of articles written by Kennedy, bulletins and fliers, pamphlets, propaganda, and photographs. Topics within the collection include civil rights, the Ku Klux Klan, poverty, labor and anti-black violence, peonage, lynching, the Works Progress Administration, and Kennedy's campaign for a U.S. Senate seat from Florida in 1950.

The Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University is the first repository to make its Kennedy collection available online. The collection is available online to any interested user at no cost. Other Kennedy collections can be found at the University of Florida, the Florida State Archives, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Records Digitized and Online

In other Digital Collections news, the digitization of the PATCO records (funded by the NHPRC) is now complete, and over the last year we have increased the Southern Labor Archives-related content including photographs and the IAM periodicals. Transcripts from the Voices of Labor Oral History Project and from the IAMAW Oral History Project will be available online next spring.

Questions about these collections should be directed to Traci Drummond, archivist, Southern Labor Archives [by email](#) or by phone at 404.413.2880.

(Immigration Reform, Cont.)

That changed in October 1986, when lawmakers won growers' support for comprehensive immigration reform by promising to expand the guestworker program. The Immigration Reform and Control bill (IRCA) was supposed to legalize undocumented workers already in the U.S., while clamping down on future unauthorized entries by enlarging the Border Patrol and making it a felony to hire an undocumented worker. But farm employers—who were a tiny but political powerful group—opposed the bill. To win their eleventh hour support, lawmakers took the teeth out of the employer sanctions (making “knowingly” hiring an undocumented worker only a civil offense and making the proposed immigration status verification system optional, so employers could almost always say they didn’t “know” their employees’ immigration status). Lawmakers also promised to make it easier for employers to get legal, temporary H-2 workers. A few months later, they slashed Border Patrol funding.

Growers got their cake and ate it too. After IRCA passed, any grower in any state growing any crop could apply for guestworkers from anywhere in the world. Fifteen thousand workers soon became a hundred thousand and growers could still hire undocumented immigrants with impunity. When Immigration authorities raided farms—a rare occurrence—only the workers suffered any consequences.

There were even more problems with IRCA. Anti-immigration pundits complained that IRCA fraudulently legalized too many immigrants but legalizing people deemed “illegal” was the best part of IRCA. The worst part was that the law not only enlarged

an abusive guestworker program in agriculture, it expanded it to non-agricultural industries without carrying over any of the hard-won protections to which agricultural guestworkers were entitled. So, while importers of agricultural guestworkers (now called H-2As) had to pay workers' airfare and housing, higher than prevailing wages (to discourage employers from hiring guestworkers over residents), and a “three-quarters guarantee” (which meant workers' had to be paid for three-quarters of their time, even if there wasn't enough work to keep them busy), none of that applied to the new “H2-B” workers. These H2-Bs workers (who pick crab, take tickets, wait tables, clean hotel rooms, and weld oil rigs) pay for their airfare, housing, and travel documents. For-profit recruiters, who have proliferated since the program's expansion, have tacked on exorbitant fees—in some cases as much as \$20,000—so workers' often arrive deeply in debt.

Despite H-2A workers' superior contracts, both groups are vulnerable to intimidation and exploitation as the Dog War starkly revealed. When the Okeelanta workers struck, their bosses simply called the sheriff and replaced them with pre-recruited workers. That reality hasn't changed. Just this summer, guestworkers imported to clean luxury condos in Florida by Mister Clean Laundry and Cleaning Services were threatened with eviction and deportation for complaining that their employer had made so many illegal deductions from their paychecks and provided so little work that workers sometimes received checks for zero dollars and even owed money. Meanwhile, they owed \$300 a month for a space on the floor of an unfurnished apart-

ment where the recruiter housed them. Six brave workers walked out and filed a complaint with the Department of Labor, bringing all this to light but the conditions they suffered are all too common in the H2 system.

It's remarkable enough that in 2013 workers in the U.S. can be threatened with deportation for demanding pay in their pay checks but it's even more amazing that after a quarter century of post-Dog War exposés—countless newspaper stories, a book by a *New Yorker* staff writer, a prize-winning documentary film, as well as government studies and hearings—lawmakers are once again talking about expanding and deregulating the guestworker program. A bipartisan Senate coalition has proposed a comprehensive immigration reform measure, which would include a legalization provision, more border enforcement, and a much bigger guestworker program (sound familiar?). The Republican National Committee countered with a terrifying proposal that would turn almost all 11 million undocumented immigrants into guestworkers. Surely dogs will be next.

No immigration measure should pass unless it recognizes that immigrants don't undermine Americans' wages and working conditions; employers do. Congress must step up enforcement of labor law; grant all workers, including agricultural workers, the right of collective bargaining; and take away employers' power to deport.

You Got Something to Say? Well, Say It!

Nearly a decade ago, a study by the American Historical Association revealed that only 32% of Ph.D.s who received their degree between 1990 and 2004 had obtained a teaching position in a History Department. The majority of people who earned Ph.D.s in history in that time period left academe.

Many people in the academy have since addressed these disheartening numbers. One often hears the phrases “alternative careers” or “Plan B.” The consensus in the conversation seems to be that departments must adjust their graduate programs to better equip their Ph.D.s to compete in multiple job markets. At the same time, humanities departments have advocated (if not always defined) “engaged scholarship” to show the world what we all thought everyone knew: a strong liberal arts component to education makes for a well-rounded, thoughtful citizenry, a stronger democracy, and more imaginative and innovative entrepreneurs, workers, and civic leaders.

“Public writing” comes up in discussions of both “alternative careers” and “engaged scholarship.” Freelancing is encouraged: to reach a broader audience, to engage the public in exciting new scholarship, to contribute to public discourse and political debates with our historical knowledge and training. Some departments are considering making changes to their guidelines for achieving tenure to account for the time and effort junior professors put into their freelance writing.

“Engaged scholarship” and being more marketable on the job market are great reasons to try your hand at freelancing. But here are two more. First, learning to write effectively and efficiently for newspapers, blogs, and non-academic media outlets will only strengthen one’s academic writing. Freelancing encourages the development of good writing habits: being economical with words; meeting strict deadlines without breaking a sweat; connecting the past and the present in coherent, meaningful ways. Second, your knowledge and educated opinions are valuable and in demand. Share them, contribute to the public discourse, bolster your C.V., and maybe make a few extra bucks in the process.

Below are tips for getting started as a freelancer compiled and generously shared by Dr. Molly Worthen (UNC Chapel Hill, History Department), whose writing has been published in online forums and in the opinion pages of

many prominent newspapers, most recently, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*.

- Set aside an hour to make a list of the themes of your scholarship. What are the basic political, social, moral, and historical problems that interest you? How is your area of study crucial for understanding current affairs?
- Create a folder or file and title it “Story Ideas.” At least once each week, devote an hour to trolling the news and brainstorming connections between your own research and the headlines—or better yet, “deep trends” that reporters have missed.
- Keep a list of periodicals that might welcome articles from you. I use aldaily.com to brainstorm possible outlets. Read these periodicals to get a sense of their style and interests.
- Reverse-engineer editors’ email addresses. If you can’t figure them out, you probably know someone at your university or through SLSA who can help.
- When you hit on a promising idea, write a pitch. The pitch should be 200-400 words long and contain the news hook, your basic thesis (“nut graf”), the main characters/color in this story, and why you’re qualified to write it. If you have published before, include links to your work at the bottom of the message. Do not send anything by attachment.
- Wait at least a week before pitching the story to your second choice.
- When an editor bites, you will have to turn the piece around quickly and respond to edits gracefully. You will have no choice but to get over your perfectionism.
- When your work goes live, don’t read the comments! No good ever comes of it.

Many SLSA members have been writing for the public for quite some time, and no doubt have advice to add. The [SLSA website](#) and [Facebook page](#) are great places to post your questions, advice, lessons learned (the hard way or otherwise), and tips for the rest of the SLSA community.