

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2015
vol. 6, no. 1

Southern Labor Studies Association

Message from the President

With current SLSA President Scott Nelson hip-deep in dissertations this month, I've stepped in to pen the president's message for this edition of the newsletter. Scott's two-year term as SLSA president will be ending in May when he'll be taking over as chair of the elections committee. Scott steps down from the SLSA presidency leaving the organization on a stronger footing than it's ever been. Thanks Scott!

We're currently holding the election to fill officer positions and three executive board seats. The deadline to vote is Monday, May 4. See pages 2-3 for candidate bios and voting instructions. Beyond the officers and executive board, we have lots of ways members can participate in the organization, and new initiatives planned for the next two

years that we'll need help with. In the near term, we're continuing to revamp and enhance SLSA's website and social media presence, are working toward the launch of an SLSA podcast, and will be organizing a small interim workshop. Feel free to [email me](#) to discuss how we can put your interests and experience to work.

We held our 2015 conference at George Washington University in Washington, DC in March. It was, in spite of a wintry onslaught, a huge success. A big thank you to conference co-chairs Eric Arnesen and Cindy Hahamovitch, and to conference organizer Seth LaShier! A run-down of some of the highlights of the

(Continued on p. 2)

Book Spotlight

When Tobacco Was King:

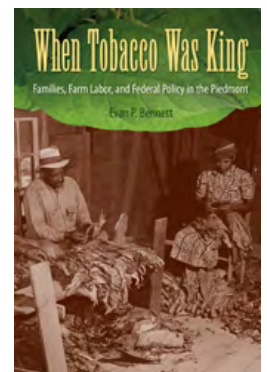
Families, Farm Labor, and Federal Policy in the Piedmont

Evan P. Bennett, Florida Atlantic University

Tobacco has left an indelible mark on the American South, shaping the land and culture throughout the twentieth century. In the last few decades, advances in technology and shifts in labor and farming policy have altered the way of life for tobacco farmers: family farms have largely been replaced by large-scale operations dependent on hired labor, much of it from other shores. However, the mechanical harvester and the H-2A guestworker did not put an end to tobacco culture but rather sent it in new directions and accelerated the change that has always been part of the farmer's life.

In *When Tobacco Was King* ([University Press of Florida](#)), Evan Bennett examines the agriculture of the South's original staple crop in the Old Bright Belt--a diverse region named after the unique bright, or flue-cured, tobacco variety it spawned. He traces the region's history from Emancipation to the abandonment of federal crop controls in 2004 and highlights the transformations endured by blacks and whites, landowners and tenants, to show how tobacco farmers continued to find meaning and community in their work despite these drastic changes.

Evan P. Bennett is assistant professor of history at Florida Atlantic University, and Treasurer of SLSA. He is a coeditor of *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction*.



Visit SLSA online at www.southernlaborstudies.org

SLSA Election: Vote Now!

Jennifer Brooks, chair of the Elections Committee, is currently accepting votes in 2015 SLSA election. Members in good standing are encouraged to vote by [emailing Jenny](#) with your choices from our outstanding slate of candidates, no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, May 4. Many thanks to all who participated in finding nominees, and especially to those who agreed to stand for election.

Vice President

**vote acceptable or not*

ROBERT KORSTAD is Professor of Public Policy and History at Duke University. His research interests include twentieth century U.S. history, labor history, African American history, and contemporary social policy. His publications include: *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (with James L. Leloudis), *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South*, *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Talk About Life in the Segregated South* (coeditor), and *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (coauthor).

Board Trustees

**vote for 3*

BRYANT ETHERIDGE finished his Ph.D. at Harvard University in 2014 and currently teaches at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 2015-16, he will be a fellow at the Clements Center for Southwest Studies at Southern Methodist University. His dissertation, “Making a Workforce, Unmaking a Working Class: The Creation of a Human Capital Society in Houston, 1900-1980,” examines the effect of America’s twentieth-century preoccupation with “human capital” on class relations. A native of Chesapeake, Virginia, he is especially interested in the history of labor and political economy in the twentieth-century Sunbelt. Before entering graduate school, he worked as a researcher for Service Employees International Union in Washington, DC.

KELLY KENNINGTON received her Ph.D. in history from Duke University in 2009. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor of History at Auburn University, teaching courses in United States history, the American South, World History, and the History of American Slavery. Her research interests include slavery, law, and the antebellum American South and she most recently published an article, “Geography, Mobility, and the Law: Suing for Freedom in Antebellum

(Continued, page 3)

(President’s Message, Cont.)

conference, including the awarding of the inaugural Robert H. Zieger Prize for Southern Labor Studies, are included in this newsletter. We’re already starting to plan for 2017. We’ll be holding the conference in Florida thanks to Evan Bennett who will be serving as conference committee chair. [Contact Evan](#) if you’re interested in serving on the conference committee. In the meantime, mark your calendars for our next scheduled event: SLSA’s annual luncheon at the Southern Historical Association annual meeting in November in Little Rock, Arkansas. Scott Nelson will be the keynote speaker.

hourly wage, racialized police-on-citizen violence, a renewed right-to-work charge in Wisconsin and elsewhere, the ramping-up 2016 presidential election where issues of economic inequality loom large—shows that the time for scholarship on and public engagement with labor, grassroots organization, and economic and social justice issues are all the more necessary now. SLSA members are uniquely qualified to engage in this urgent and important work. Keep us informed of what you’re doing via the [SLSA listserv](#), and you can always connect with us [online](#) and by liking [SLSA on Facebook](#).

A quick glance at recent headlines—strikes for a \$15

Beth English
SLSA President-Elect

(SLSA Election, Cont.)

St. Louis,” in the *Journal of Southern History*. her current book project, *In the Shadow of Dred Scott: St. Louis Freedom Suits and the Development of Slaves’ Legal Culture in Antebellum America*, expands on her dissertation and focuses on enslaved litigants—in St. Louis and elsewhere—who sued for freedom in the antebellum years. She is interested in joining the SLSA board to encourage broader participation by nineteenth-century scholars in this important organization.

JESSIE WILKERSON is Assistant Professor in History and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi. She is currently working on her manuscript, *Where Movements Meet: From the War on Poverty to Grassroots Feminism in the Appalachian South*. Since joining the faculty at U of M, she has been learning about current labor struggles in Mississippi—including the organizing efforts of Nissan workers—and is eager to find ways to support southern labor struggles through teaching, writing, public history projects, and networking with SLSA members.

JAY DRISKELL is currently an assistant professor of history at Hood College in Frederick, MD and has been a member of SLSA for several years. His work explores the relationship between race, gender, and the forging of effective political solidarities in struggles for power within the urbanizing, segregating South. His recent book, *Schooling Jim Crow: The Fight for Atlanta’s Booker T. Washington High School and the Roots of Black Protest Politics* (University Press of Virginia, 2014), tells the story of how the NAACP organized a voting bloc powerful enough to compel the city of Atlanta to budget \$1.5 million for the construction of schools for black students. Jay’s next book will explore how the language of disease and public health shaped the terms of political contestation in Gilded Age Jacksonville, FL. Jay also worked for five years as an organizer for the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO) at Yale University, doing consulting and research work for UNITE HERE and member education for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT). Alongside Lane Windham, he also helped build the labor history curriculum for the National Labor College. Currently, he also runs the DC-Area African American Studies Works-in-Progress Seminar, which meets in the IBT archive at George Washington University. He can bring all of those connections to bear on his work as a board member for the SLSA.

KEONA ERVIN earned her Ph.D. from Washington University in 2009, and currently is an assistant professor of African-American History at the University of Missouri, Columbia. She is the recipient of several grants and awards for her research, including the Huggins-Quarles Dissertation Award from the Organization of American Historians, the Mellon-Mays Undergraduate Fellows Travel and Research Grant from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the Lewis Atherton Dissertation Award for the best dissertation produced on a Missouri topic from the Missouri Historical Society, and Research Council funding from the University of Missouri, Columbia. Her current project, *The Labor of Dignity: Black Women, Urban Politics, and the Struggle for Economic Justice in the Gateway City, 1931-1969*, is forthcoming with the University Press of Kentucky. Previously, Ervin was a post-doctoral fellow and lecturer in Gender and Women’s Studies and History at Bowdoin College and an assistant professor at Luther College. Her teaching and research interests include African American women’s history, U.S. urban and labor history, and the history of black social movements.

Graduate Student Representative to Board

**vote acceptable or not*

SETH LASHIER is a Ph.D. candidate in the history department at George Washington University. His research interests include the histories of labor, race, liberalism, and urban political economy. He is currently writing a dissertation on the politics of work in Atlanta in the 1960s and 1970s. Seth helped organize the 2015 SLSA conference, which, despite the weather, was successfully held at George Washington University over the first weekend of March. One of the things that drew Seth to the SLSA is the organization’s desire to bring together scholars who research a broad range of topics related to labor, from 18th century slavery to the Fight for \$15 protests of the past several years. As the graduate student representative on the SLSA board, Seth would work to raise awareness of the organization among graduate students and help build more networking opportunities for students, particularly in the time between the bi-annual conferences.

Raise Up Charleston

Robert Korstad
Duke University

I'm spending the spring in Charleston, SC, where my wife Jacquelyn Hall is the Mark Clark Chair in History at the Citadel. Charleston is a second home for me. My mother was born and raised here, and I spent many holidays and vacations in town and on the islands. This was also the place where my parents met and fell in love. My father, a native of northern Minnesota, was stationed at the Army Hospital and my mother was a social worker for the county welfare department. Not long after they married, they became involved in a support group for strikers at the American Tobacco Company's Cigar Factory. The union, Local 15 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers (FTA), was comprised mostly of black women, but included men and white women.



Workers at the American Tobacco Company's Cigar Factory in Charleston, South Carolina.

It was a life-changing moment for both of them. At the end of the war, they moved to Memphis where my father became the business agent for FTA Local 19 and my mother continued her career in social work. A few years later they moved to North Carolina when my father became FTA's Southeast Regional Director.

One of our first excursions this spring was to the Cigar Factory where the 1945-46 strike took place. It is now being renovated for "upscale" businesses. The developers claim that this will "revitalize" the surrounding neighborhoods, which are mostly black and often poor. Gentrification is soon to follow.

On the evening of April 2, I appeared on a panel for the Charleston People's Assembly. The event was held in the impressive hall of the International Longshoreman's



Korstad's Parents on their wedding day.

Local 1442, and was in part a preparation for the April 15 protests by fast food workers, "Raise Up for \$15," in Atlanta. My comments were brief, and my message was simple: South Carolina, like North Carolina, might have the lowest unionization rates in the country, but it also has a history of militant struggle by slaves, black and white farmers, and industrial workers.

The people that Raise Up represents are not that different from the tobacco workers my parents joined with in the 1940s, and I couldn't help but be moved by the passion and militancy of the other speakers and the audience. Here we were sitting not far from the Cigar Factory seventy years after the strike that produced the anthem of social movements worldwide, "We Shall Overcome." Added to this echo of the past, was the fact that the moderator of the panel was a comrade from the student movement at UNC in the early 1970s, George Hopkins, an emeritus professor at the College of Charleston.



Korstad and George Hopkins.

(Continued, p. 6)

Inaugural Zieger Prize Awarded

The inaugural 2015 Robert H. Zieger Prize for Southern Labor Studies was awarded to A. Lane Windham for her provocative and ambitious essay, “The Cannon Mills Case: Out of the Southern Frying Pan, Into the Global Fire.” A former union organizer, Windham is currently a U.S. History Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maryland.

In honor of the late Robert Zieger—teacher, scholar, and tireless union activist—SLSA awards the Robert H. Zieger Prize for Southern Labor Studies every two years to the best unpublished article in southern labor studies submitted by a graduate student or early career scholar, journalist, or activist. Paul Ortiz (University of Florida), Max Krochmal (Texas Christian University), and Michelle Haberland (Georgia Southern University) served on the 2014-15 prize committee.

Joey Fink, Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, received honorable mention for her essay, “In Good Faith: Working-Class Women, Feminism, and Religious Support in the Struggle to Organize J. P. Stevens Textile Workers in the Southern Piedmont, 1974–1980.”



Lane Windham with SLSA President Scott Nelson at the Zieger Prize award ceremony.

Like SLSA
on Facebook



Highlights from the 2015 SLSA Conference

For me, one of the highlights of the March SLSA conference was the session, “Race, Violence, and the State.” Although two of the presenters were unable to attend, the one presentation that did occur, by Toni Gilpin, sparked a great deal of conversation and thought. Gilpin’s work on the Farm Equipment Workers has been used by historians for more than two decades, and it is exciting to see her return to her scholarly pursuits and try to contextualize the FE’s unique approach to organizing, union building, and fighting for racial equality.

*Ken Fones-Wolf
University of West Virginia*

Hard to pick a few highlights out of a weekend of fantastic presentations on southern labor! One session that was particularly relevant and useful for me was, “The Legacy of the 1960s and Workplace Politics in the 1970s and 80s.” The presenters and commenter raised great questions about the connections between labor and civil rights activism and the effect of media and Hollywood on public perceptions of southern labor. I also have to thank my fellow participants on the southern labor feminism roundtable: Mary Frederickson and Anne Valk (who both braved terrible travel conditions) and Dorothea Browder (whose participation was a welcome addition, although we were sad that two participants, Katarina Keane and Susan Harbage Page, couldn’t make it). In a sense, our roundtable was a good representation of the entire weekend: the weather couldn’t stop us from having some amazing conversations and building networks among colleagues and friends!

*Joey Fink
UNC, Chapel Hill*



Mary E. Frederickson and Joey Fink at Geroge Washington University’s Teamsters Archive following their roundtable, “Labor Feminism and Working-Class Feminists in the American South.”

Call for Applications: Reed Fink Award

Applications are now being accepted for the Reed Fink Award in Southern Labor History. One or more fellowships of \$250-\$500 are awarded annually to individuals whose research in the Southern Labor Archives will lead to a book, article, dissertation, or other substantive product. The recipient will make a presentation about his/her research to the Georgia State University community and the fellowship amount will be awarded thereafter. Faculty, graduate students, upper-level undergraduates, and recognized independent scholars and artists are encouraged to apply.

Professors Merl E. Reed and Gary Fink were instrumental in the establishment, development, and use of the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University from the early 1970s. Today, the Southern Labor Archives has over 500 collections used by researchers from throughout the Southeast, the United States, and the world. Created in 2000, the Merl E. Reed Fellowship in Southern Labor History was named, at the urging of Dr. Fink, to honor Dr. Reed's career and role in the founding of the Southern Labor Archives. After Dr. Fink passed away in 2008, Dr. Reed requested that the name be changed to honor Dr. Fink as well. The Reed Fink Award in Southern Labor History now honors both men and their many contributions to education, labor studies, and the Southern Labor Archives.

The Southern Labor Archives, part of Special Collections and Archives at Georgia State University Library, was established in 1971 to document working people and their unions, professional associations, political organizations, and grassroots groups. Holdings are particularly strong in the areas of aviation, machinery, and aerospace; the textile and garment industry; building trades; the nursing profession; the communications industry; government, office, and retail workers; furniture and wood industries; arbitration and mediation; and union activities in the Southeast. The largest accumulation of labor records in the southeast, the Archives includes materials dating from 1888 to the present, and is comprised of union records, the personal papers of individuals, photographs, artifacts, periodicals, film and sound recordings, and oral history interviews.

[Application materials](#) are available online. Questions should be directed to [Traci Drummond](#), Archivist at the Southern Labor Archives.

(Raise Up Charleston, Cont.)

The workers' struggles of 2015 aren't the same as they were in 1945. But it is clear to me that history has to inform the organizing strategy of today. I'm not on the front lines in the same way that my parents were, but I keep trying to play my small historians' part in what they and Jacquelyn's mother, who went from working as a secretary to leading the Labor Action Coalition of New York, would have called the "good fight."



Korstad with speakers from Carolina Raise Up at the People's Assembly in Charleston.

Become a Member of the Southern Labor Studies Association

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

To join, visit:
www.southernlaborstudies.org

Member News

TALITHA LEFLOURIA is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Florida Atlantic University. Her new book, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South*, is being published by the University of North Carolina Press, Justice, Power, and Politics series in April 2015. She was recently [interviewed by Ms. Magazine](#) about the book.

CALVIN SCHERMERHORN is associate professor of history in the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies at Arizona State University. His book, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815-1860*, has just been published by Yale University Press. This provocative study views the development of modern American capitalism through the window of the nineteenth-century interstate slave trade.

The Society for History in the Federal Government has awarded its 2015 Thomas Jefferson Prize to *Land and Labor, 1866-1867* (series 3, volume 2, of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*). The Jefferson Prize is awarded every two years. *Land and Labor, 1866-1867* was edited by René Hayden, **ANTHONY E. KAYE**, Kate Masur, Steven F. Miller, **SUSAN E. O'DONOVAN**, Leslie S. Rowland, and Stephen A. West (University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

CINDY HAHAMOVITCH is current chair of William & Mary's History Department. Last year, she was a John E. Sawyer Fellow at the National Humanities Center, and was named an OAH Distinguished Lecturer. She served as an expert witness in a Colorado human trafficking case involving Peruvian shepherders and on a human rights commission in New York, which heard testimony from Jamaican guestworkers who had been working as hotel and luxury home cleaners without pay in Florida. She co-organized the 2015 Southern Labor Studies Conference, and continues to serve as reviews editor for LABOR. She has an article comparing “coolies” and guestworkers forthcoming in *Working the Empire*, edited by **JANA LIPMAN** and Daniel Bender.

STEVE STRIFFLER and Thomas Adams have [a new edited book](#), *Working in the Big Easy: The History and Politics of Labor in New Orleans*, published by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press.

MICHAEL D. THOMPSON, an assistant professor of history at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, published *Working on the Dock of the Bay: Labor and Enterprise in an Antebellum Southern Port* (University of South Carolina Press) in April 2015. He also contributed a chapter entitled “‘Some Rascally Business’: Thieving Slaves, Unscrupulous Whites, and Charleston’s Illicit Waterfront Trade” to *Capitalism by Gaslight* (University of Pennsylvania Press) in February 2015. Mike presented a paper in July 2014 on the impact of South Carolina’s Negro Seamen Acts upon Charleston’s waterfront workers at the annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early Republic. In July 2015 he will participate in a two-week NEH Summer Institute on “Slavery in the American Republic: From Constitution to Civil War.” Mike currently is working on a project that examines how racialized perceptions of disease susceptibility influenced labor and working people in the urban antebellum South.

Donate to the 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 the Southern Labor Studies Association awards the Robert H. Zieger Prize for Southern Labor Studies every two years to the best unpublished article in southern labor studies submitted by a graduate student or early career scholar, journalist, or activist

To make a tax-deductible contribution, visit the [SLSA website](#). Thank you!

Conferences and Calls for Papers

10th Southern Conference on Women's History
Re-membling/Gendering:
Women, Historical Tourism, and Public History
College of Charleston, South Carolina
June 11-14, 2015

The Southern Association for Women Historians (SAWH) will hold its tenth triennial conference, June 11-14, 2015 at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. Co-sponsored by the College of Charleston, The Citadel, and Clemson University, the conference provides a stimulating and congenial forum for discussing all aspects of women's history. Its program seeks to reflect the best in recent scholarship and the diversity of our profession, including university professors, graduate students, museum curators, public historians, and independent scholars. For more information and to view a preliminary program, visit [SAWH online](#).

4th Annual Labor Research and Action Network
National Conference
Georgetown University, Washington, DC
June 15-16, 2015

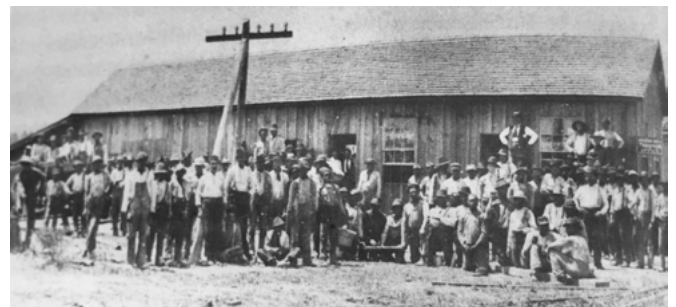
One of the principal goals of the Labor Research and Action Network (LRAN) is to create a space for the generation and exchange of fresh ideas and thinking among labor leaders, activists, scholars, and students. A secondary goal is to connect practitioners employing innovative strategies with scholars who are interested in strategic research and advocacy efforts that support workers/the struggle for workers; rights. The June LRAN conference will thus focus on two intersecting areas of work: innovative organizing campaigns (broadly defined, not limited to union initiatives) that are either informed by cutting-edge research or raise challenging questions researchers ought to explore further; and new research that sheds light on critical organizing issues. More information and registration is available by visiting [LRAN online](#).

Joint LAWCHA-WCSA Conference
Fighting Inequality: Class, Race, and Power
Georgetown University, Washington, DC
May 28-31, 2015

The Labor and Working-Class History Association together with the Working-Class Studies Association will hold its annual conference focusing on the theme, "Fighting Inequality," May 28-31, 2015 hosted by the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University. For more information, to register, and to view a preliminary program, visit [Fighting Inequality online](#).

37th NALHC: Labor, Law, and
Progressive Activism
Detroit, Michigan
October 22-24, 2015

The 37th Annual North American Labor History Conference will be held October 22-24, 2015 at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. The Program Committee of the NALHC, an international conference with global perspectives on labor history, invites proposals for papers, panels, roundtables, and talks on the theme of "Labor, Law, and Progressive Activism" We will also consider other thematically related proposals, especially if part of a full panel or roundtable. Submissions of proposals should include a one paragraph abstract and a brief biographical statement per each participant. For more information or to submit proposals, [email Thomas Klug](#), NALHC Lead Coordinator. Proposal deadline is April 30.



Masthead Image: African American Bricklayers, Gadsden, Alabama, ca. 1895 (Gadsden Public Library)..