

Uniting On The High Road

A Conference
on Economic
Justice at
the Local Level

Burchfield
Penney
Art Center
Buffalo, NY

Bringing together activists and
leaders working in local and national
movements for racial and economic
equality, climate justice, worker rights
and power, and a strong democracy.



June
20-22

In cities across the United States, everyday people are working to transform our democracy by strengthening their voices in local government, shaping an economy that works for all, and reenvisioning public safety and health. They are organizing locally to imagine and build a new future where people have good jobs, affordable housing, climate justice, and a real voice in the decisions that affect our lives.

We're gathering at **Uniting on the High Road: A Conference on Economic Justice at the Local Level** to learn together from these broad movements for racial and economic justice and authentic democracy. It's fitting that we're in Buffalo -- home to a vibrant network of movement builders, advocates, researchers, artists, and workers who continue a great tradition of activism and organizing in our region. Buffalo was an epicenter for historic social movements including abolition, the Underground Railroad, labor organizing, civil rights, LGBTQ rights, and many other forms of grassroots activism. Now, residents and community groups continue to resist injustice and mobilize for a better future, including organizing the first Starbucks stores in the US and many other emerging unions.

This conference is hosted by Cornell University ILR Buffalo Co-Lab and Partnership for the Public Good, together with co-sponsors Clean Air Coalition, Open Buffalo, University at Buffalo Center for Urban Studies, University at Buffalo School of Social Work, Buffalo State University Department of Anthropology, CWA District 1, 1199SEIU, and Hayes Dolce.

**Scan here to view
the full conference
program, including
speaker bios:**



About Cornell in Buffalo

As a land grant university, Cornell University is committed to fostering meaningful collaboration between students, faculty, and our local, national, and global communities to work together to solve important problems. Established in 1946, Cornell School of Industrial Labor Relations (ILR) Buffalo Co-Lab is a powerful example of how this is done through our work in community engagement initiatives, labor leadership education, and action research to change public policy for the common good. This work has only become more important with threats to democracy and the rise of authoritarianism, ever worsening inequality across many spectrums, and the tepid response to climate change, which have stirred in our students and community partners a demand for systemic changes. The founding principle of Cornell University is “any person...any study” to do the greatest good to improve the lives of the world around us. This High Road Conference is a direct descendant and embodiment of these values.

About Partnership for the Public Good

Partnership for the Public Good is a community-based think tank that builds a more just, sustainable, and culturally vibrant Buffalo Niagara through action-oriented research, policy development, and civic engagement. PPG unites 340 partner groups, a diverse array including nonprofit organizations, neighborhood associations and block clubs, labor organizations, advocacy groups, faith groups, businesses, and more. PPG supports our partners, community groups, and residents to have a stronger voice in public policy

Each fall, PPG invites our partners to submit proposals for the Community Agenda. Partners meet, collaborate, and consider ways to change local or state policies to advance equality, sustainability, and cultural vibrancy in the Buffalo Niagara region. The partners take a vote, and the top ten proposals become the focus of PPG’s work for the coming year. For each issue on the Community Agenda, PPG trains partners on public policy advocacy skills, schedules meetings with elected officials, publishes needed research, and co-hosts community conversations and media events. In 16 years, this process has supported over 50 policy wins.

About the High Road Fellowship

The High Road Fellowship began in 2009 in Buffalo as a collaboration of PPG, community partners, and Cornell University ILR. The program brings up to 25 Cornell University students to Buffalo where fellows experience an immersive summer living together and working with community partners on social justice issues such as building a powerful labor movement, justice reform, health equity, racial justice, food justice, transportation, asylee and refugee support, promoting democracy, and the arts as change agents. Our goal is for students to leave knowing they can be change agents for the common good in any community they choose to live in. When they return to campus, many High Road students are leaders in movement building. Several High Road students have moved to Buffalo to live and work here after graduation.

What is a “High Road” economy?

It’s no secret that our existing political and economic systems aren’t built to create equal outcomes for all people and places. That factors like race, ethnicity, and gender have as much power as they do to predict whether someone earns poverty wages, works in a job without health or other benefits, pays too much for low quality housing, or has a chronic health issue – the fact that individual characteristics can be systematically linked to these and other poor life outcomes means that we haven’t carried out our nation’s mission to build a society in which all people are created equal.

Rather, **we’ve built a society, and an economic system, where profits tend to come before people and the planet.** We give away public dollars to firms who pay sub-living wages, in the name of development – even as the firm’s workers might struggle to survive, and its practices might pollute surrounding communities. That’s just one example of why we’re here.

When we as a society, through the policies we adopt and the institutions we create, prioritize profits and development over people and communities, we’re taking the Low Road. We’re putting self-interest ahead of the common good.

Instead, we need new policies and new institutions that can build a “High Road”. **A High Road society is one that’s constantly progressing toward (1) shared property, (2) environmental sustainability and ecological integrity, and (3) participatory democracy.**

We need High Road policies and institutions that directly **engage, dismantle, and replace the inequitable structures of our Low Road system.** Such policies and institutions will be actively anti-racist, reparative of past and present systemic harms, designed to bridge divides and build solidarity, and, above all, innovative.

Throughout this conference, we will discuss concrete High Road policies and practices that we can win and build together.



Conference participants are welcome to explore the Burchfield Penney Art Center’s exhibitions and enjoy the collection during open hours throughout the conference.

Uniting on the High Road

Day 1 | June 20, 2024

2:30 - 3:45 PM

Registration

Visit the Burchfield Penney Art Center and tour its galleries, get to know fellow conference participants, and enjoy tea, coffee, and refreshments before we begin.

.....

4:00 PM

Welcome

Cathy Creighton

Director, Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

Andrea Ó Súilleabháin

Executive Director, Partnership for the Public Good

.....

4:10 - 5:30 PM

Transforming our Democracy to Build a People's Economy

In this collective keynote the voices of local and national leaders will convey their vision for a solidarity economy and the movement building underway to get there. The keynote will share the work and long-term agenda of PowerSwitch Action, a national network of 21 powerful grassroots organizations. As PowerSwitch Action states, "Most of us want pretty similar things: a safe home, meaningful work, a livable planet, and time to enjoy with family and friends." These are the priorities that our economy and democracy should center, and leaders from PowerSwitch Action's network and local Buffalo leaders will reflect on how we build the people power and people's institutions to achieve this vision.

Lauren Jacobs

Executive Director, PowerSwitch Action

Carlos Fernandez

Executive Director, Grassroots Collaborative

Dr. Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.

Director, Center for Urban Studies, University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning

Franchelle Parker

Executive Director, Open Buffalo

Moderator: Andrea Ó Súilleabháin

Executive Director, Partnership for the Public Good

Uniting on the High Road

Day 1 | June 20, 2024

5:30 - 6:15 PM

FREE FRED BROWN!, Ujima Company, Inc. Theatre

Free Fred Brown! is a devised theatre piece about a young Black man who becomes the reluctant face of a movement while in prison for “theft of services” from the National Gas Company. Fred is from Uptown, a frontline neighborhood at the epicenter of economic, racial, and climate justice, in a rust-belt city that is identical to Buffalo, NY. When a surprise snow storm wreaks havoc on the region, Uptown suffers most and demands explanations: What happened? Who is responsible, and how do we make sure it doesn't happen again? In partnership with a climate justice coalition in Buffalo, this play was created in 2017 by Ujima Company, Inc., founded as a multi-racial and multi-ethnic theatre in 1978.

This presentation will feature parts of the original production, musical performance, and a Q&A with the Company’s actor creators.



6:15 - 8:00 PM

Reception

Stay with us for food, drinks, and making new connections on the High Road!

Uniting on the High Road

Day 2 | June 21, 2024

8:00 - 9:00 AM

Breakfast and Poetry with Annette Daniels Taylor

Join us for breakfast and poetry with Annette Daniels Taylor, award winning Theater Artist, Poet, and Artist-Filmmaker from 8:30-8:50 AM.



9:00 - 10:30 AM

Public Goods for Public Money: Investing in Communities Instead of Corporations

Where should our tax dollars go? For childcare or for corporate welfare? For privatized or public control of public-funded healthcare? At a time when public investments in economic and social programs are being controlled by and for corporate interests, how can citizens counteract the privatization of taxpayer-funded resources? What policies are being put in place around the country to redirect the use of public resources for the benefit of all, not just the corporate few?

Greg LeRoy

Executive Director, Good Jobs First

Rebecca Bailin

Executive Director, New Yorkers United for Child Care

Jon Rivera

New York State Assembly (149th District)

Sean Ryan

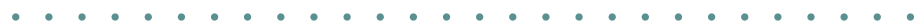
New York State Senator (61st District)

Jon Rivera

New York State Assembly Member (149th District)

Moderator: Russell Weaver

Director of Research, Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab



10:30 - 11:00 AM

Coffee Break

Uniting on the High Road

Day 2 | June 21, 2024

11:00 - 12:45 PM

This session will take place in the Burchfield Penney auditorium.

Parallel Session 1

Labor and Community Together: Fighting for Living Wages, Healthy Communities, and a Livable Planet

A founding ideal of the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of labor unions in the United States, is to assemble a broad progressive coalition for social and economic justice, understanding that the struggles of workers are inextricably interwoven with the struggles of communities. In this moment in time, how are labor and community partnerships faring? Why is building enduring labor and community alliances critical in a country facing accelerating deep divides and inequalities? How do we grow our memberships? How do we grow our allies? How do we grow our collective power?

Kathleen Mulligan

The Worker Institute, Director of Labor Leadership Programs

Bianca Cunningham

Campaigns Director, Bargaining for the Common Good

Theo Moore

Executive Director, ALIGN

Grace Bogdanove

Western NY Nursing Home Division Vice President, 1199SEIU, United Healthcare Workers East

Lara Skinner

Executive Director, ILR Climate Jobs Institute

Michelle Eisen

Theatre Artist/Stage Manager

Organizing Member of Starbucks Workers United

Moderator: Cathy Creighton

Director, Cornell University ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

Uniting on the High Road

Day 2 | June 21, 2024

11:00 - 12:45 PM

This session will take place in Bulger Communication Center, Room 422, a short walk from the Burchfield Penney. Please gather near the main doors at 10:50 to walk together.

Parallel Session 2

A Just Economy is a Democratic Economy: Overcoming Race, Class, and Gender Inequalities

The economy can be a driver of inequity, such as racial health disparities, the gender pay gap, and lack of opportunity for those impacted by the justice system and incarceration. Or, a better and just economy can help families and communities thrive. How can we rebalance power in the economy and workplace so that workers have greater control of their work, earn their fair share, and have more decision-making power? This panel will explore workplace democracy and equity-driving policies and programs, from supporting worker cooperative development in disinvested communities to creating opportunities for the people and communities most affected by mass incarceration.

Tori Kuper

Director, The School of Democratic Management, Democracy at Work Institute and Founder and Board Member, Cooperation Buffalo

Kim Smith

Rochester City Council Member (At-Large)
Political Director, VOCAL-NY

Jodi Anderson, Jr.

Director of Technological Innovation, ILR Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative

Erin Hatton, PhD

Professor, UB Department of Sociology

Rev. George Nicholas

Executive Director, Buffalo Center for Health Equity

Moderator: Deja James

Director of Policy Advancement and Media, Partnership for the Public Good

Uniting on the High Road

Day 2 | June 21, 2024

1:00 - 1:45 PM

Lunch and Musical Performance by the band Son BoriKua

Son BoriKua performs traditional Afro Cuban–Puerto Rican music while incorporating their own influences.

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1:00 - 4:30 PM

Burchfield Penney
classroom, first floor

Collective Art Making: Blues Flag Memorial

Blues: A May 14th Memorial Project is a collaborative community art making response to honor the victims of the 5/14/2022 white supremacist attack in our city.

So far, 2,500 cyanotype flags have been made by community members to memorialize the victims and bear witness to the collective impact of this tragedy. Artists and community builders are facilitating workshops in venues throughout the city. Hundreds of residents from age 5 to 85 have made flags, coming together to share their grief, share their ideas, and share their messages for the world.

Cyanotype is a photo sensitive fabric that turns blue when exposed to light leaving traces of objects or words. These flags will become part of the memorial, raising the voices and visions of their makers.

On Friday afternoon, head to the Burchfield Penney classroom, on the first floor, to make a flag. Each flag will become part of a sea of thousands of flags installed on Jefferson Avenue and emanating from there, stitching neighborhoods together.



Uniting on the High Road

Day 2 | June 21, 2024

2:00 - 3:45 PM

Democracy on the Defense: What's the Economy Got to Do With It?

Famously, Justice Louis Brandeis said, "We can have a democracy in this country or we can have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." In the new Gilded Age of today, how are increasing inequality and concentrated economic power threatening American democracy? How are people mobilizing in communities across the country to secure political power and create a fair, multi-racial, inclusive democracy and economy? What are local communities and states doing to reimagine public goods and gain public governance over unchecked private corporate and financial power? What reforms are necessary to protect the democratic process, personal freedoms, and workers' rights? Still asking: how do we achieve a government of the people, by the people, and for the people?

Udochi Onwubiko

Director of Economic Justice, Demos

Neda Khoshkhoo

Associate Director of Democracy, Demos

Shelley Mayer

New York State Senator (37th District)

Derek Seidman

Writer, Researcher, Historian, Contributor to *Truthout* and *LittleSis*

Moderator: Rosemary Batt

Alice Cook Professor of Women and Work, Cornell ILR School

Uniting on the High Road

Day 2 | June 21, 2024

4:15 - 6:30/45 PM

Guided Buffalo Field Trips and Dinner

See, first hand, high road policies and practices in action and have a chance to talk to other conference attendees, as well as local workers and activists. Space is limited to participants that pre-registered. Buses will leave the Burchfield Penney at 4:15 and bring participants back at the end of their field trip.

High Road Fellowship and Engaged Learning

Learn about engaged learning programs that develop genuine partnership between universities and community organizations to allow a unique place to create dialogue, build relationships, and that work in concert to tackle the awesome challenges facing America and the world. Intended to bring together High Road Fellows, alumni and supporters, explore some Buffalo silos and, over dinner, hear what changes fellows and alumni are working toward and how best to prepare young people for a better, more democratic society.

Digging Deep into Ecological Justice

Connect with the land and get your hands dirty while learning about local, sustainable practices. We will have the opportunity to volunteer for a bit with Katie Pfohl, farm manager at Massachusetts Avenue Project, an urban farm that offers youth employment and job training, a community kitchen, and a mobile fresh market. For dinner, we'll get (delicious!) pizza from Extra Extra, Buffalo's worker cooperative restaurant!

"Reinvestment" Walking Tour

Walk the Broadway-Fillmore area of Buffalo with urban planner and labor historian Chris Hawley. We will explore "reinvestment," look at upcoming development projects in the area, and afterwards, will we'll go to Eugene V. Debs Hall for delicious Indian-Mediterranean food from Alibaba Kebab.

Neighborhood Planning and Development on the East Side

How do you revitalize an entire neighborhood from the ground up? Dr. Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., Professor, Urban and Regional Planning, University at Buffalo will lead a tour of the East Side Neighborhood Demonstration Project Area- part of his "How We Change The Black East Side" initiative. A catered dinner will be served at the storied African American Cultural Center with director Dr. Leah Angel Daniel.

Uniting on the High Road

Day 3 | June 22, 2024

8:00 - 9:00 AM

Breakfast and Poetry with Just Buffalo Writing Center Youth

Just Buffalo Literary Center's mission is to create and strengthen communities through the literary arts. And for more than 45 years, they have brought the world's greatest writers to Buffalo, hosted poetry events and readings, and supported the development of young writers.

The Just Buffalo Writing Center (JBWC) has long been a gathering place designed to aid young and emerging writers ages 12–18 in the cultivation of their writing skills, as well as adult writers of all ages and skill levels. The JBWC is also a great resource for encouraging and supporting the teachers and schools in our community.



9:00 - 10:30 AM

Local Movements for a More Equitable, Sustainable, Democratic Society: Building Democracy from the Ground Up

At the city level across the United States, community-based organizations are building social movements to win a more equitable and democratic future. We will hear from leaders and members of organizations in Buffalo, New York that are reimagining public safety, strengthening the voices of immigrants and New Americans in shaping our public policy, and winning environmental justice campaigns to repair the harms caused by extractive corporations. How are they using democracy in their own organizations to advance a more democratic future for us all? We will also look to organizing in Minneapolis, Minnesota to reflect on labor and community collaboration in our fight to change who governs our economies and communities. By building together at the local level, we can win more equitable American cities.

Phylicia Brown

Executive Director, Black Love Resists in the Rust

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Uniting on the High Road

Day 3 | June 22, 2024

9:00 - 10:30 AM

Local Movements for a More Equitable, Sustainable, Democratic Society: Building Democracy from the Ground Up

(continued from previous page)

Grace Karambizi

Executive Director, Buffalo Immigrant Leadership Team

Jerry Manuel

Chair of the Board, Buffalo Immigrant Leadership Team

Bridge Rauch

Environmental Justice Organizer, Clean Air Coalition

Tom Morahan

Member, Clean Air Coalition

Amelia Pedrego

Research and Strategic Campaigns, SEIU Local 26 (Minneapolis, MN)

Moderator: Andrea Ó Súilleabháin

Executive Director, Partnership for the Public Good



10:30 - 11:00 AM

Coffee Break



11:00 - 12:15 PM

Democracy Sparks

This series of 5 minute presentations by advocates and artists will showcase innovative ideas that serve the public good—either imagined or actualized—to ignite sparks of creativity and possibility. Opened with a poetry performance by Jillian Hanesworth, an EMMY award winning spoken word artist, the Poet Laureate Emeritus of Buffalo, and a community organizer and activist.

Poet and Facilitator: Jillian Hanesworth

Poet Laureate Emeritus, Buffalo NY

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Uniting on the High Road

Day 3 | June 22, 2024

11:00 - 12:15 PM

Democracy Sparks

(continued from previous page)

Worker-Centered Workforce Development: Envisioning Buffalo's Worker Empowerment Center

The Area Labor Federation is working to bridging the gap between organized labor and the general public. By centering workers as experts, and aligning organized labor's demographics with regional populations, WNY ALF is showing how labor and community can both become more powerful together.

Lilly Kahris

Project Director, Western New York Area Labor Federation

Fiat Ars Pereat Mundus

What is the role of art in a world on fire? Can artistic practices be catalysts for radical political imagination?

Unai Reglero

Art and Cultural Organizer, PPG Buffalo
Co-Founder, CALDODECULTIVO

Creating Neighborhood Wealth: The Role of Makerspaces in Workforce Development and Streetscape Revitalization

Imagine the possibilities when you really invest in individuals and neighborhoods, and people are resourced and trained to bring their talents to the world around them. The Foundry believes in the transformative power of community building using makerspace resources and workforce development programs.

Megan McNally

Executive Director and Co-Founder, The Foundry

(continued on next page)

Uniting on the High Road

Day 3 | June 22, 2024

11:00 - 12:15 PM

Democracy Sparks

(continued from previous page)

Speculation for the Common Good

How do we dream of the unknown? We can dream in fifth spaces, created worlds that point the way towards the future we want and deserve. Tiny Minotaur is an immersive fantasy space that hosts hundreds of visual, musical and performance artists, and workshops, and actively creates a living world devoid of historical colonization for a massively diverse patronage.

Dana Bauerle-McKnight

Multimedia Artist and Creator of Tiny Minotaur

Changing the Narrative

Have you ever thought about how you could change the narrative for some of the most vulnerable, marginalized, and forgotten populations in the United States? In this talk, you will learn how that is happening in a collaboration between Fostering Greatness, PPG, and our area's foster alumni.

Dr. Leah Angel Daniel

Founder, Fostering Greatness

Executive Director, African American Cultural Center

Good Food Purchasing Comes to Buffalo-Niagara & New York State

This is the story of how one coalition of community groups has worked to connect the dots between food systems, supply chains, and community values in the Buffalo Niagara region. Winning state legislation to change municipal food purchasing, they are meeting the needs of small farmers and food workers while ensuring animal, environmental, and public health.

Ayana McKoy

Program Manager, Good Food Buffalo Coalition

(continued on next page)

Uniting on the High Road

Day 3 | June 22, 2024

11:00 - 12:15 PM

Democracy Sparks

(continued from previous page)

BICA School: Reimagining Higher Arts Education for Everyone

Launched in June 2022, BICA School is a free, collaborative, non-hierarchical co-learning program that is made of, by, and for Buffalo's up-and-coming artists, curators, and researchers. We will hear about how this creative community has begun imagining and building a future—a beautiful and energetic and collective future—for all of us.

Nando Alvarez-Perez

Founding Director, Buffalo Institute of Contemporary Art

Special Guest: **Miss Della Miller**

Freedom Gardens / Food for the Spirit

Miss Miller was a longtime collaborator, coworker, and friend of the stalwart community activist Gail Wells, who passed away in early June. She will speak about their work together to ensure that all our communities have access to food that is nourishing for the body as well as the soul—and how those initiatives are moving into the future.



12:15 - 12:30 PM

Closing Remarks

Closing Music with Curtis Lovell

Curtis Lovell is an artist, musician, actor, entrepreneur, and healer born and raised in Buffalo New York. Curtis Lovell began singing at the age of 4 years old when his mother, actress, poet, and playwright Lorna C. Hill, realized that Lovell had perfect pitch. He is a 2009 graduate of the Buffalo Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts. As a solo musical artist, Lovell is known for creating his own looping accompaniment, singing the melody over the lush background of looped vocal phrases

Thank you to our co-sponsors:

Clean Air Coalition

Open Buffalo

University at Buffalo

Center for Urban Studies

University at Buffalo

School of Social Work

Buffalo State University

Department of Anthropology

CWA District 1

1199SEIU

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THANKYOU
ILR BUFFALO CO-LAB AND PPG
FOR THE FANTASTIC PROGRAM

AND WELCOME TO ALL THE
DISTINGUISHED PANELISTS

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Uniting on the High Road

Biographies

Day 1



Lauren Jacobs

Executive Director, Powerswitch Action
Philadelphia, PA

As the Executive Director of PowerSwitch Action, Lauren Jacobs's mission is to ensure that our amazing network of organizations and extremely talented staff achieves its purpose: making multiracial feminist democracy a reality. Lauren is a committed organizer. She has dedicated her life to supporting working people as they gain power to shape their own working and living conditions. Lauren began organizing factories with UNITE in the South and later joined SEIU. During her 17 years at SEIU she served in a number of roles, from organizer to 1st Vice President. Over the course of those years, she organized thousands of previously non-union janitors and security officers in three major metropolitan areas. She led contract campaigns for tens of thousands of workers in Boston and the Bay Area, which resulted in breakthroughs in wages, healthcare and other benefits. Lauren's most recent work was with the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC) as the organization's National Organizing Director.

Lauren has a long history with PowerSwitch Action affiliates. She was on the founding board of the network's Boston affiliate, Community Labor United, and worked in coalition with affiliates across California and Pittsburgh. She joined PowerSwitch Action (then the Partnership for Working Families) in 2016. Lauren led the process which birthed the Long Term Agenda, has grown the organizations's national resources, expanded the network and staff, and, along with Jackie Cornejo, supported our early efforts with Stand Up Nashville. Lauren has authored chapters in [Igniting Justice and Progressive Power: The Partnership for Working Families Cities](#) and [The Cambridge Handbook of Labor and Democracy](#), as well as written for [The Boston Review](#) and [The Forge](#).

Lauren is a proud native New Yorker, a daughter of Harlem, an intermediate knitter, and a terrible but dedicated artist.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Carlos Fernandez

Executive Director, Chicago's Grassroots Collaborative
Chicago, IL

Carlos joined Grassroots Collaborative in 2021 as the Bargaining for the Common Good Director and took on the Executive Director role in May 2022. Carlos comes to Grassroots Collaborative after 10 years as a National Representative for the American Federation of Teachers, and over 10 years in a number of organizing and program roles at community and labor organizations in Chicago. His work to build worker power, immigrants' voices, global justice, and community-labor alliances has been motivated and guided by his upbringing in an Mexican immigrant family, growing up on Chicago's southwest side, and witnessing and studying neoliberalism's reshaping of local, national and global forces.



Dr. Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.

**Director, Center for Urban Studies and Associate Director, UB
Community Health Equity Research Institute**
Buffalo, NY

Professor Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., is an internationally recognized historian, urban planner, and professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo. He is director of the Center for Urban Studies and Associate Director of the UB Community Health Equity Research Institute. Taylor has written or edited five books and over 100 articles and technical reports. He has been cited in many national publications, including the New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN, USA Today, The Atlantic, the Huffington Post, and Time Magazine. He has appeared on ABC's Nightline, CBS Mornings News, CNN, and MSNBC. Taylor is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2018 Marilyn J. Gittell Activist Scholar Award by the Urban Affairs Association, the nation's largest urban studies organization. He is completing a book, *From Harlem to Havana: the Nehanda Isoke Abiodun Story* (SUNY Press).

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Franchelle Parker

Executive Director, Open Buffalo
Buffalo, NY

Franchelle Parker was born and raised in the City of Niagara Falls. Parker is the founding Executive Director of Open Buffalo, a nonprofit organization bringing everyday people together to learn new skills, connect with others, and become leaders in the fight against racism, poverty, and climate change in Western New York.

Parker draws upon two decades of progressive advocacy, communications, and capacity building to empower leaders to enact lasting changes in their communities. Parker found her start as a student organizer on the campus of Buffalo State College, fighting to repeal mandatory minimum sentencing for drug sentencing. Later, she would use her degree in political science to win numerous legislative changes from the local to the national level.

After she completed her education, Parker took her political and organizing skills to 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, where she would spend the next seven years managing the union's communication, political and community outreach efforts. As the organization's Western New York Communication Coordinator, Parker also traveled the country organizing for health care reform and dozens of political campaigns. Parker served as a board member for the Western New York Area Labor Federation, executive board member for Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, and as President for the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (Buffalo Chapter). Parker was awarded the New York State Labor Award from the New York State Association of Black Puerto Rican Hispanic and Asian Legislative Association.

Parker is a proud member of the Buffalo Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Also, she is a member of Edison Street Community Church and she serves as the secretary for the board of directors for the Buffalo Urban League, and numerous legislative commissions across New York State. Parker is a 2023-2024 Highland Fellow and she has been honored by numerous coalitions and organizations, including Erie County Citizen of the Month, the Community Service Award from the Buffalo Urban League and 2023 Buffalo Black Achievers award. Parker is the loving wife to Kenneth Parker Jr. and mother of two beautiful daughters, Kennedy and Malia.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies

Day 2



Annette Daniels Taylor

Theater Artist, Poet, and Artist Filmmaker

Buffalo, NY

Annette Daniels Taylor, is an award winning theater artist, poet, and artist-filmmaker. The author of the children's series *The Marvelous Marvella J.Q: Marvella Finds Her Magic* (west44books, 2022) about an Afro-latina who talks to animals, and her novels in verse, *Shoot the Storm* (west44books, 2022) and *Dreams on Fire* (west44books, 2018). As a filmmaker Annette's cinematic poems are screened and exhibited internationally. Her poems are featured in The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries Buffalo, New York's 15th *Three Poems* chapbook series. Annette teaches Writing for Broadcast at SUNY Buffalo State College Communication Department and Acting with D'Youville University's Dramatic Theater Arts MFA program and is a recipient of the Creatives Rebuild New York Artist Employee Program.



Greg Leroy

Executive Director, Good Jobs First

Washington, DC

Greg founded Good Jobs First in 1998 upon winning the Public Interest Pioneer Award. He has been training and consulting for state and local governments, associations of public officials, labor-management committees, unions, community groups, tax and budget watchdogs, environmentalists, and smart growth advocates for more than 30 years.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies

Day 2



Rebecca Bailin

Executive Director, New Yorkers United for Child Care

New York, NY

Rebecca Bailin has over ten years of experience organizing for progressive policies. Rebecca served as campaign manager for the state-wide Invest in Our New York Campaign which won billions of dollars for New York State by increasing taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers.

Rebecca spent over 8 years at the Riders Alliance managing the grassroots organizing, coalition, political and press strategy of many successful campaigns, including Fair Fares, New York City's first program providing discount MetroCards for low-income New Yorkers.



Rusty Weaver

Director of Research, ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

Buffalo, NY

Russell Weaver, PhD, is a quantitative geographer and Director of Research at the Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab. He was previously an Associate Professor (with tenure) in the Texas State University Department of Geography, where he taught courses in community geography, community development, urban planning, geographic thought, and quantitative data analysis. His research programs are aimed at understanding pathways for context-sensitive, sustainable, and equitable community economic development. He is the lead author of *Shrinking Cities: Understanding Urban Decline in the United States*, and his work appears in such journals as *The Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *Ecological Economics*, *Applied Geography*, and *Community Development*. Weaver holds a master's degree in Economics and a PhD in Geography from SUNY Buffalo.

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Jon Rivera

New York State Assemblymember, 149th Assembly District
Buffalo, NY

Jonathan D. Rivera is the Assemblymember for New York State's 149th Assembly District representing parts of the cities of Buffalo and Lackawanna, the town of Hamburg including the villages of Blasdell and Hamburg, and the hamlet of Lake View.

Jon is a lifelong resident of the West Side of Buffalo, where he resides with his wife Stephanie and their daughter Ana. Being the son of a police officer and a teacher, he learned the value of serving the public from a young age.

Jon attended Buffalo Public Schools and graduated from Hutchinson Central Technical High School. He went on to earn a bachelor's degree in business administration from SUNY Buffalo State College.

Upon graduating, Jon began his career in public service in 2005 as a field representative in the office of Congressman Brian Higgins where he participated in community events and advocated for constituent needs.

Jon moved to the private sector in 2007 for a position at HSBC Bank. He was quickly promoted to Branch Manager and managed multiple branches including in his neighborhood on Grant St. and West Ferry.

However, Jon's passion for public service led him back to work in local government. In 2014, he took on the role of a legislative liaison for Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz and was instrumental in drafting local laws and the passage of multiple on-time budgets. Jon was promoted to Special Assistant to the Commissioner of Public Works in Erie County in 2018.

Jon has played an active role in the Western New York community, serving in various positions with the Erie County Commission on New Americans, the Erie County Commission on Reapportionment, and the Open Buffalo Advisory Board.

Uniting on the High Road

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Sean Ryan

New York State Senator, 61st Senate District, Chairman of Committee on Commerce, Economic Development, and Small Business

Buffalo, NY

Sean M. Ryan was elected to the New York State Senate in 2020 after serving in the New York State Assembly from 2011 to 2020. He represents the 61st Senate District, which includes parts of Buffalo, Tonawanda, Amherst, Grand Island, Kenmore, and Williamsville.

Sean grew up in Lackawanna, learning the value of hard work from his firefighter father and teacher mother. The closure of Bethlehem Steel during his high school years deeply impacted his community, shaping his dedication to economic recovery for Western New York.

Sean graduated from SUNY Fredonia and Brooklyn Law School. His legal career includes work with Neighborhood Legal Services, the Learning Disabilities Association of WNY, and the Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo. He achieved notable successes in housing discrimination cases, special education advocacy, and enforcing Buffalo's Living Wage Ordinance.

In 2008, Sean helped establish the Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Company, Inc., serving as Executive Director and General Counsel to redevelop Buffalo's West Side. He has also provided legal guidance to several non-profits, including Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper and Housing Opportunities Made Equal.

As an Assemblyman, Sean focused on fair economic policies, protecting taxpayer dollars, reducing middle-class and small business taxes, investing in education, and environmental protection. In the State Senate, he continues to serve the people of Western New York with dedication.

Sean lives in Buffalo with his wife, Catherine Creighton, and their two daughters.

Uniting on the High Road

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Bianca Cunningham

Campaigns Director, Bargaining for the Common Good

New York, NY

Bianca Cunningham is a former Verizon Wireless worker who led her coworkers in 7 stores across Brooklyn, NY to join CWA in 2014, making them the first unionized retail workers in the company. She later led her coworkers on a 49 day strike to secure their first contract. Verizon fired her for organizing, and during the Verizon strike, picketers across the country chanted "Bring Back Bianca!" Bianca was on the bargaining team to help secure their first contract for stores in Brooklyn as well as a store in Massachusetts.

Bianca co founded the DSA's AfroSocialists and Socialists of Color caucus, a caucus for Black Indigenous and people of color within the organization. She also served as co-chair of the NYC chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America for two terms. She most recently was on staff at Labor Notes where she sometimes wrote and more often facilitated training on Race and Labor.



Theo Moore

Executive Director, ALIGN

Brooklyn, NY

Theodore Moore (he/him) is the Executive Director of ALIGN, setting the organization's strategic vision for worker power and climate justice, leading engagement with campaigns and movement partners, and supervising a team of nine staff members.

Moore brings close to 20 years of movement and political advocacy experience to the position, most recently serving as New York Immigration Coalition's (NYIC) Vice President of Policy & Programs. Previously, he was a Senior Policy Analyst for NYC Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, an organizer with the Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC-United) and the Working Families Party, and was among the original staff of ALIGN in 2012. Theo is also a founding member of New Kings Democrats and serves as a board member of the Riders Alliance. A lifelong resident of Brooklyn, Moore was born and raised in East Flatbush and now calls Bed-Stuy home.

Uniting on the High Road

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Grace Bogdanove

**Western NY Nursing Home Division Vice. President, 1199SEIU
United Healthcare Workers East
Buffalo, NY**

1199SEIU WNY Nursing Home Division Vice President Grace Bogdanove first became exposed to organized labor as a High Road fellow with the WNY ALF, AFL-CIO while an undergraduate student at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Throughout her two years of work with the WNY ALF, Bogdanove became committed to the movement and after graduating Cornell and organizing for a brief time with the Pennsylvania State Education Association, she found her way to 1199SEIU - the union she admired most throughout her time with the WNY ALF. As an 1199SEIU Administrative Organizer in Syracuse, Bogdanove represented workers in six nursing home facilities, and in 2020 she accepted a position as Vice President of 1199SEIU's North Country region. The following year, Bogdanove made her way back to WNY as Vice President of 1199SEIU's WNY Nursing Home Division. In this role, Bogdanove represents several thousand nursing home workers in WNY, focusing on member organizing, comprehensive contract campaigns, and social justice unionism that will improve the lives of healthcare workers and the communities in which they live.



Lara Skinner

**Executive Director, Climate Jobs Institute
New York, NY**

Skinner is the Executive Director of the Climate Jobs Institute at Cornell University's ILR School. Skinner is a nationally recognized expert in the labor and employment impacts of climate change, clean energy policy, and the transition to a low-carbon economy. Under Lara's direction, Cornell has designed jobs-led climate programs for 8 U.S. states and helped form coalitions composed of labor unions, elected leaders, environmental organizations, and industry experts in states like Texas, Illinois, New York, and Rhode Island.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Michelle Eisen

Organizing Member, Starbucks Workers United
Buffalo, NY

After working as a Barista at Starbucks for over a decade, Michelle thought it was time to move on. The company did not seem to care about its workers anymore, and profits over people became especially pronounced during the pandemic. Instead of quitting, Michelle began organizing. In December 2021, Michelle joined with fellow baristas to organize the first Starbucks store in the US. Since then, Starbucks Workers United (SBWU) has organized hundreds of stores nationwide. In 2024, due to strategic pressures, SBWU forced the employer to the table, and Michelle is playing a large role at the bargaining table. In her spare time, Michelle continues to work as a Barista, putting her prior work as a Stage Manager at Irish Classical Theater on hold.



Cathy Creighton

Director of Cornell University ILR Buffalo Co-Lab
Buffalo, NY

Catherine Creighton is the Director of Cornell University ILR Buffalo Co-Lab. Ms. Creighton is also a graduate of Cornell University's ILR School, and later attended Boston University School of Law. For thirty years, Ms. Creighton worked as an attorney in the field of labor relations, first as a field attorney for the NLRB, and then as a union-side labor attorney where she co-founded the firm Creighton, Pearce, Johnsen & Giroux. Ms. Creighton represented private and public sector unions in NLRB and PERB matters, arbitration, contract negotiations, and general litigation. Ms. Creighton also represented individual workers in discrimination matters, Federal and State litigation, employment contracts, severance agreements, and wage theft cases.

Early in her career, Ms. Creighton served as an adjunct instructor in the Labor Studies program of the Cornell University ILR Extension. She has lectured for Continuing Legal Education programs for the AFL-CIO, Cornell University, and the National Labor Relations Board and has written for legal publications. She has also conducted numerous labor union officer and stewards' training workshops.

Uniting on the High Road

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Tori Kuper

Founder and Board Member, Cooperation Buffalo, and Director of the School for Democratic Management
Buffalo, NY

Tori Kuper is the Program Director for the School for Democratic Management where she supports the growing field of worker cooperative managers and technical assistance providers with the training, education, and tools they need to thrive. Tori comes to DAWI after spending fifteen years building democratic organizations that increase worker power. She founded BreadHive Worker Cooperative and Cooperation Buffalo, re-catalyzing the worker cooperative movement in Buffalo, NY. Most recently, she was the Membership Director at New Economy Coalition, where she spent seven years building power and momentum for the solidarity economy movement in the US. At NEC, she played a central role in planning and executing CommonBound conferences, developing the Pathway to a People's Economy policy toolkit, launching Rural Power Coalition, and facilitating NEC's conversion to a democratic workplace. Tori has served on the boards of RIPESS: The Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy, US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, North American Students of Cooperation, US Solidarity Economy Network, and is currently on the Stewardship Council for the Nonprofit Democracy Network. She holds a Master's Degree from New York University and is graduate of DAWI's Participatory Management Certificate Program with Rutgers University.



Erin Hatton

PhD, Professor, UB Department of Sociology
Buffalo, NY

Erin Hatton, PhD, is Professor in the UB Department of Sociology. Prof. Hatton's research focuses on work and political economy, while also extending into the fields of social inequality, labor, law and social policy. Her first book, *The Temp Economy: From Kelly Girls to Permatemps in Postwar America* (Temple University Press, 2011), weaves together gender, race, class and work in a cultural analysis of the temporary help industry and rise of the new economy. Prof. Hatton's second book, *Coerced: Work Under Threat of Punishment* (UC Press, 2020), analyzes four very different--and unusual--groups of workers: incarcerated, workfare, college athlete, and graduate student workers. Drawing on more than 120 in-depth interviews across these four groups, in this book she uncovers a new form of labor coercion and analyzes its consequences for workers in America.

Uniting on the High Road

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Kim Smith

Political Director, VOCAL-NY

Rochester, NY

Kim is the Political Director for VOCAL-US (Voices of Community Activists and Leaders). VOCAL works directly with impacted individuals and elected officials to create policies that will end HIV, Homelessness, The Overdose Crisis and Mass incarceration.

With a Master's of Public Administration from SUNY Brockport, Kim led a 25-year-long career in public service with the Monroe County Department of Public Health. Before her departure, Kim worked with the County's Disease Control Unit where she created and managed Monroe County Partnering to end the Epidemic, a coalition of people living with HIV/AIDS who work alongside clinical and non-clinical organizations to strengthen access to HIV/AIDS care.

As an At-Large member of Rochester City Council, Kim is the Liaison for the Police Accountability Board and the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative. She is a member of the Neighborhood and Business Development, Finance, and Public Safety Committees. Kim also serves on the Rochester Housing Task Force and leads the 3x3x3 Committee, comprising three City Councilmembers, three Monroe County Legislators and three RCSD School Board Commissioners.



George Nicholas

CEO, Buffalo Center for Health Equity

Buffalo, NY

Rev. George Nicholas is the CEO for the Buffalo Center for Health Equity and senior pastor of the Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church. Rev. Nicholas is known for his work to address health inequities based on race, geography, and economics across Buffalo and Western New York. He is a founding member of the African American Health Equity Task Force which became the catalyst for establishing three entities: Buffalo Center for Health Equity, University at Buffalo Community Health Equity Research Institute, and the Erie County Office for Health Equity. These groups work together to change the social and economic conditions that cause illness and shorten lives. From Buffalo and lives in Buffalo. He Studied Sociology at The Ohio State University, studied Applied Public Affairs and Public Policy Studies at University at Buffalo and studied Theology at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

Uniting on the High Road

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Jodi Anderson Jr.

Director of Technological Innovation, Cornell ILR Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative
Stanford, CA

Jodi Anderson Jr. is the Director of Technological Innovation at Cornell ILR's Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative, where he is responsible for spearheading the development and deployment of technology solutions that will enable justice-involved individuals to access employment and career development opportunities.

Prior to his current role, he served as a researcher at Stanford's Accelerator for Learning, where he facilitated connections between early-stage EdTech entrepreneurs and resources necessary for accelerating growth and product development aimed at serving under-resourced and marginalized learners. In collaboration with the Stanford Criminal Justice Center, the Stanford University Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, the Stanford Arts Institute, and the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, Jodi also served as project manager for Stanford's Imagining Justice youth diversion program throughout the Bay Area.

As an educator, he continues to teach computer programming and digital design courses in Northern California for justice-impacted and incarcerated youth. Jodi is an alumnus of Cornell University's Prison Education Program and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, as well as a Master of Arts in Education with a focus on Policy and Educational Technology from Stanford University.

Uniting on the High Road

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Deji James

Director of Policy Advancement and Media, Partnership for the Public Good

Buffalo, NY

Deji Marie James is Director of Policy Advancement and Media with PPG. She is a native Buffalonian whose family emigrated to the city from Havana, Cuba in the 1960s. As a Black feminist and African American/Afro-Cuban, she is dedicated to advocating for underrepresented communities and creating autonomous spaces for constructive support of marginalized peoples. Her areas of focus are member engagement, public affairs, and local, state, and national community relations, specializing in developing content and storytelling that has advanced inclusive citizenship and advocacy for racial equity. She is proficient in understanding the New York State legislative process, the role of lobbying, developing sustainable pathways for leadership, access to resources, and shaping narrative.

Deji Marie received her Bachelor of Arts in International Relations with a minor in Spanish from SUNY Geneseo, where she completed her Spanish studies in Quito, Ecuador.

Prior to PPG, Deji Marie worked closely on immigration advocacy, refugee resettlement, and childcare small business training through a program developed by Childcare Resource Network and Journey's End Refugee Services. She also coordinated for racial equity initiatives at a local foundation.



Son BoriKua

"Tropical Salsa" Band led by Manuel "Manny" Perez

Buffalo, NY

Son BoriKua has blended different variations of the Latin Genre for nine years to create its own unique sound, "Tropical Salsa." Influenced by the Classical Trio music of Puerto Rico and the Son Montuno of Cuba ala Buena Vista Social Club, they've incorporated this music in keeping with the tradition of Afro-Cuban / Puerto Rican music heritage.

Manuel "Manny" Perez, director and band leader, states that Son BoriKua has a simple mission, "To make you dance and leave you without any worry." Son BoriKua has been nominated by Jazz Buffalo for Latin Jazz Group of the Year 2019, 2020, and 2021.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Udochi Onwubiko

Director of Economic Justice, Dēmos

Washington, D.C.

Udochi Onwubiko joined Dēmos as Director of Economic Justice in September. She comes to Dēmos with a decade of experience in economic justice policy. Most recently, she served in the Biden-Harris Administration as Labor Policy Advisor in the Office of the Vice President of the United States and as Senior Policy Advisor in the Wage and Hour Division at the U.S. Department of Labor. In these roles, she supported implementation of federal employment laws and developed campaigns to empower vulnerable workers to exercise their rights.

Before working in the Administration, Udochi served as Labor Policy Counsel for the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor. There, she developed policies to support economic security for workers, including provisions of the nation's first paid leave law, which provided paid sick leave and childcare leave to millions of workers during the height of the pandemic. She also pushed to center racial equity in economic security policymaking, including spearheading a historic congressional hearing on the legacy of the racist exclusion of Black workers in federal wage laws.

Udochi graduated from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and holds a M.A. in Media and Strategic Communication from George Washington University and a B.B.A. in Marketing from the University of Mississippi.



Derek Seidman

Contributing Writer, Truthout and LittleSis

Buffalo, NY

Derek Seidman is a writer, researcher, and historian living in Buffalo, New York. He is the former research director of the corporate watchdog group LittleSis (also known as the Public Accountability Initiative). Over the past decade, his research and writing has focused on corporate power, the labor movement, the fossil fuel industry, and U.S. militarism. His writings have appeared in the Washington Post, Jacobin, Nonprofit Quarterly, In These Times and other outlets. His research has been referenced in the Guardian, Politico, Houston Chronicle and other media. He's currently a regular contributor to Truthout and LittleSis's Eyes on the Ties new site. He has a PhD in history from Brown University and has taught courses on labor history and social movements at several universities.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Neda Khoshkhoo

Associate Director of Democracy, Dēmos

Boston, MA

Neda Khoshkhoo joined Dēmos as Associate Director of Democracy in 2024 after nearly a decade working in public interest law, social justice advocacy, and nonprofit management. She focuses on crafting policy solutions for democratic reform, racial justice, and immigrant justice.

Most recently, Neda served as the policy director for an academic center focused on advancing racial equity. Before that, she was a staff attorney at a nonprofit organization dedicated to abolishing criminal legal debt. She also has experience representing clients in immigration proceedings, public benefits eligibility denials, housing and employment cases, and special education matters. Neda clerked for judges on the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, and the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Neda received her undergraduate degree from U.C.L.A. and her law degree from U.C. Berkeley. Her family's experience as Baha'is who fled Iran to escape state-sponsored religious persecution informs her commitment to social justice.



Rosemary Batt

Alice Cook Professor of Women and Work, ILR School

Buffalo, NY

Rosemary Batt is the Alice Hanson Cook Professor of Women and Work at the ILR School, Cornell University. She is a Professor in Human Resource Studies and International and Comparative Labor. She received her BA from Cornell University and her Ph.D. from the Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research focuses on comparative international studies of management and employment relations, with particular attention to the impact of financialization on management and employment and the globalization and restructuring of service industries and its impact on low wage workers.

Uniting on the High Road

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Shelley Mayer

New York State Senator, 37th Senate District, Chair of Committee on Education

Yonkers, NY

Shelley Mayer is an experienced and progressive advocate for New Yorkers. Elected to the New York State Senate in an April 2018 Special Election, she represents the 37th District and was re-elected in 2018, 2020, and 2022. Previously, she served six years in the State Assembly.

Shelley champions children and public schools. From 2013 to 2017, she chaired the Assembly Education Subcommittee on Students with Special Needs, securing increased funding for schools serving vulnerable students. As a State Senator, she chairs the State Senate Education Committee, advocating for resources and policies to ensure quality education for all children. She played a key role in decoupling teacher evaluations from state standardized tests and advancing Foundation Aid and PreK expansion.

Before her legislative career, Shelley was Chief Counsel to the New York State Senate Democrats, helping draft ethics reforms and taxpayer protections. At Columbia Law School, she focused on healthcare and labor law rights. She also served as Vice President of Government and Community Affairs at Continuum Health Partners, advocating for Medicaid and Medicare.

From 1982 to 1994, Shelley was an Assistant Attorney General, handling reproductive health litigation and civil rights protections. She holds a JD from SUNY Buffalo School of Law and a BA from UCLA. Shelley lives in Yonkers with her husband, Lee Smith. They have three adult children and five grandchildren.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies

Day 3



Nzingha Cameron, Athena Clabeaux, and Pride David

Youth Poets, Just Buffalo Writing Center

Buffalo, NY

Just Buffalo Literary Center's mission is to create and strengthen communities through the literary arts. And for more than 45 years, they have brought the world's greatest writers to Buffalo, hosted poetry events and readings, and supported the development of young writers.

The Just Buffalo Writing Center (JBWC) has long been a gathering place designed to aid young and emerging writers ages 12–18 in the cultivation of their writing skills, as well as adult writers of all ages and skill levels. The JBWC is also a great resource for encouraging and supporting the teachers and schools in our community. The JBWC writers featured at this event are **Nzingha Cameron** (JBWC alum), **Athena Clabeaux** (current JBWC writer), and **Pride David** (JBWC Youth Ambassador).



Phylicia Brown

Director, Black Love Resists in the Rust

Buffalo, NY

Phylicia is the Director of Black Love Resists in the Rust, Buffalo, NY. She has worked at the intersection of education and justice as a general and special education teacher, an advocate for Students with Disabilities, and most recently, a school administrator. Phylicia joined Just Resisting in 2015, and continued her membership to Black Love Resists in the Rust. Prior to her directorship, she served as the chair of BLRR's Advisory Board, co-leading the organization through the transitions of founding Co-Directors Shaketa Redden and Natasha Soto.

Phylicia is an alum of Black Organizers for Leadership and Dignity's (BOLD) Amandla! Praxis training and is committed to base-building, leadership development, and political education for the sake of Black Liberation in Buffalo and beyond!

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Bridge Rauch

Environmental Justice Organizer, Clean Air Coalition
Buffalo, NY

Bridge has been a member of CACWNY since 2019. Bridge's parents met at UB's engineering school, and Bridge, as well as their five siblings, were raised with a clear understanding of the importance of community and workplace environmental health, safety and justice, especially around industrial sites – their mother often would practice her workplace safety presentations and screen safety videos with Bridge and their siblings. Bridge has a master's of Regional Planning from SUNY Albany and has lived on the West Side of Buffalo since 2009. They have volunteered and worked extensively in Buffalo's non-profit sector, including at The Service Collaborative of WNY, Preservation Buffalo-Niagara, and the Coalition for Economic Justice, where they currently serve as a board member and volunteer for the Buffalo Transit Riders United and Buffalo Mutual Aid Network campaigns. Their two cats, which you will very likely see prowling around during video chats, are named Kurt and Sean.



Grace Karambizi

Executive Director, The Buffalo Immigrant Leadership Team
Buffalo, NY

Grace Karambizi was born in Rwanda, known as the Country of a Thousand Hills. At age 8, she became a refugee, moving frequently until resettling in Buffalo, NY in 2004. Buffalo became her home, a place where she could learn and dream again. However, acclimating to her new home was challenging. She realized these challenges were common among many refugees and immigrants. Under VOICE Buffalo, she became a leader addressing educational issues affecting immigrant and refugee students in Buffalo Public Schools.

Grace is the Leader Organizer for BILT. One of her favorite quotes is from Michelle Obama: "...When you've worked hard, and done well, and walked through that doorway of opportunity, you do not slam it shut behind you. You reach back and you give other folks the same chances that helped you succeed." This quote defines why she does this work.

Grace recently completed a master's in biology from Buffalo State College and received the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence Special Award: Overcoming the Odds. She also holds a master's in medicinal chemistry from the University at Buffalo. When Grace is not organizing in the community, she can be found in a lab running scientific experiments. She enjoys the company of friends and family. In her free time, she loves writing blogs and reading non-fiction books.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Amelia Pedrego

Director, Research and Strategic Campaigns, SEIU Local 26
Minneapolis, MN

Amelia Pedrego is the Director of Research and Strategic Campaigns at SEIU Local 26. Local 26 is a militant union of over 8,000 janitors, security officers, and airport workers in Minnesota. Members of Local 26 are primarily people of color, women, and immigrants. The union has a long track record of creating progressive coalitions with deep connections in communities that win groundbreaking pilot projects and policies.

Amelia, an Albuquerque native, completed her B.A. in American Studies at the University of New Mexico and her M.A. in Social Justice and Community Organizing at Prescott College. Amelia moved to Minneapolis for her position at Local 26 and in their role does market and opposition research in addition to overseeing strategic and tactical development for campaigns both at Local 26 and for campaigns with other community and labor partners in Minnesota. She is also an avid DnD player and over-confident karaoke singer.



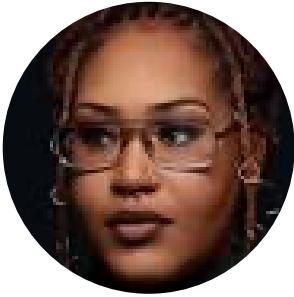
Andrea Ó Súilleabháin

Executive Director, Partnership for the Public Good
Buffalo, NY

Andrea Ó Súilleabháin is Executive Director at Partnership for the Public Good, a community-based think tank that provides research, policy advocacy, and civic engagement support for 340 partner organizations in Buffalo Niagara. Each year its partners vote on a Community Agenda of their ten top policy priorities for the coming year, and PPG works with its partners throughout the year to bring those goals to fruition. Andrea leads PPG's team in working on criminal justice and community safety reform, language access policies, health equity and healthy housing, and other priorities on the annual Community Agenda. Previously, Andrea was a Research Fellow at the International Peace Institute in New York, focused on bringing community voices to United Nations policymaking and increasing women's participation in peace talks. Her research helped change United Nations policy and United States law, and has been cited by Foreign Policy, The Guardian, PBS, and several academic books and journals. Andrea has worked as a lawyer on death penalty reform and refugee resettlement cases. She holds a JD from New York University School of Law and a BA in Political Science and Peace Studies from the University of Notre Dame.

Uniting on the High Road

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Jillian Hanesworth

Poet Laureate Emeritus

Buffalo, NY

Jillian Hanesworth is an EMMY award winning spoken word artist, the Poet Laureate Emeritus of Buffalo, New York and a community organizer and activist. Jillian was born and raised on the east side of Buffalo where she developed a vision to use art and advocacy to help her community reimagine justice and work together to create a system where all people can thrive.

Currently, Jillian travels the country performing poetry and speaking on various topics including; art for activism, the impacts of storytelling and the importance of honest and critical social and political conversations. In addition, Jillian oversees "Buffalo Books", a nationally recognized program which aims to improve access to culturally relevant books for residents of the east side of Buffalo with the hopes of helping to increase literacy rates among Black and brown communities.



Lilly Kahris

Project Director, Western New York Area Labor Federation

Buffalo, NY

The Western New York Area Labor Federation's mission is to improve the lives of and increase the power for working families, bring fairness and dignity to the workplace and secure social equity. They are working to build a strong, diverse, free and democratic labor movement in order to give a political voice to workers in our area. They fight for a public policy agenda at all levels of government which benefits all working families, both union and non-union. They are active in our community and strive to create a broad progressive coalition for social and economic justice.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Unai Reglero

Art and Cultural Organizer, Partnership for the Public Good

Buffalo, NY

Unai Reglero is a Spanish visual artist, art director, graphic designer, and cultural organizer. Unai is joining PPG in 2022 as recipient of the Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY) Artist Employment Program grant. For two years, Unai will host "Creativity To The People," a creative advocacy agency to amplify community-based projects and advocacy campaigns. Unai will offer creative services to PPG's large network of partner organizations—applying arts and design, marketing, and narrative work to their collective policy change goals.

Unai studied in the School of Art and Design of Tarragona, and holds an MFA from the State University of New York at Buffalo. He worked in advertising agencies and his own graphic design and communication studio before founding CaldodeCultivo in 2006, an art collective that creates context-specific politically engaged projects. Their work amplifies the struggles of those who fight for social justice using different artistic strategies, from public installation to film. Through CaldodeCultivo, Unai has developed many projects in cities in Europe and The Americas, including Bogotá, Barcelona, Warsaw, Detroit, and now: Buffalo.



Megan McNally

Executive Director and Co-Founder, The Foundry

Buffalo, NY

Megan is the co-founder of The Foundry. She graduated from Barnard College with a degree in Environmental Policy, has worked on green building construction sites across the country, and gained experience in woodworking at Yestermorrow Design/Build School. She moved back to Buffalo to run a woodworking business from 2011-2014 and is passionate about supporting women and people of color in "non-traditional" career pathways. She is active in Big Brothers Big Sisters and encourages everyone to consider mentorship. She has been the recipient of Women Who Move The City Award, [BizJournal's](#) 30 under 30 Award, Protege of The Year from University at Buffalo's Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership and one of the finalists in the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo Centennial Awards.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Dana Bauerle-McKnight

Multimedia Artist and Creator of Tiny Minotaur

Austin, TX

Dana Bauerle-McKnight is a multimedia artist from Buffalo, New York, whose work combines illustration, experimental sound, sculpture, installation, performance art, painting, speculative fiction and poetry. McKnight's identity and subsequent experiences as a Black, queer woman are at the forefront of many of her works and artistic ventures. While in Buffalo, she exhibited at the Burchfield Penney, Squeaky Wheel Media Center, and the Box Gallery, and she was a cofounder of Dreamland Collective, a community art and activism space.

Bauerle-McKnight is now in Austin, Texas. Her current project is Tiny Minotaur, a "low-brow/high art" music-theater-worldmaking venue that offers immersive respite spaces for creative social workers and employs over 50 artists.



Dr. Leah Angel Daniel

Founder, Fostering Greatness

Executive Director, African American Cultural Center

Buffalo, NY

Dr. Leah Angel Daniel is an educator, writer, visionary, author, inspirational speaker and mentor who is the living epitome of the phrase, "I don't look like what I have been through." Leah grew up in the Buffalo, New York, in the foster care system. She understands firsthand the challenges and obstacles that foster care youth face. Leah was fortunate enough to be mentored and loved by people who helped her find her purpose in life and who have also attributed to her success. She founded Fostering Greatness Inc. to assist participants similar to her who have had a lived and shared foster care experience. Leah works diligently to change the narrative of negative statistics to positive outcomes for foster care alumni. Her goal is to support her fellow foster care alumni in taking control of their lives by assisting them with access, opportunities, and community support to obtain the resources that they need and deserve in order to be their best selves. This spring, Leah completed her doctoral degree at St. John Fisher College.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Ayana McKoy

Program Manager, Good Food Buffalo Coalition

Buffalo, NY

Ayana was born and raised in Brooklyn; In the last 7 years she's made a new home base for herself in Buffalo, NY where she attended SUNY UB. Ayana has a formal education background in Business & Economics and in '21 transitioned her skills toward the purposes of Gardening, Cultivation and Food Sovereignty. Ayana has many memories of community gardens and garden work during her childhood. While being of product of Caribbean native parents, she also thoroughly understands how the cultivation of food and all its subsequent processes can build community and understanding in ways like no other!

Ayana now stewards community gardens on the East Side of Buffalo connecting evolving communities while also providing assistance to community organizations on an independent level. She is also an entrepreneur and founded a wellness and plant-lifestyle brand, BloomMatter Botanics, which she intends to use in building a global community of autonomy-minded & "plant-first living" individuals. Ayana is very passionate about people, their autonomy and the building of conscious skillful communities. With an understanding of corporate/administrative systems coupled alongside her investments in grassroots community projects; Ayana is eager to apply her skills and qualities in contributing to the Good Food Buffalo Coalition's mission and the progression of Good Food Purchasing Policy in Buffalo's communities and New York State.



Nando Alvarez-Perez

Founding Director, Buffalo Institute for Contemporary Art

Buffalo, NY

Nando Alvarez-Perez is an artist from Buffalo, New York. In 2014 he graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute, where he received the Master of Fine Arts Fellowship in Photography. His practice extends to his work as a founding director of The Buffalo Institute for Contemporary Art and as editor-in-chief of Cornelia Magazine, a visual art review published three times a year for the Western New York and Southern Ontario region. He is currently a visiting professor of photography at Alfred University. His work has recently been exhibited at Rivalry Projects in Buffalo, NY, Lydian Stater Gallery in New York City, and in a solo presentation of works at NADA NY.

Uniting on the High Road

Biographies



Della Miller

Freedom Gardens / Food for the Spirit
Buffalo, NY

Della Miller (she/her) is passionate about education and generational wealth for underserved and low-income communities. Della started and directed St. Augustine's Food Co-Op and Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers Food Co-Op. She is founder of Community First Communications. Della, along with a team of food advocates were commissioned to write the operations plan for the City of Buffalo's only commercial kitchen in the historic Broadway Market district. She consults with new food startups and advocates for business justice by being a member of the Buffalo Food Equity Network, Food for the Spirit, and Black Farmers United – NYS, Buffalo Black Chamber of Commerce and as a board member of Clean Air Coalition. She has volunteered for over 15 years at the St. John United Federal Credit Union on all levels of operations as a teller, loan officer and in strategic planning, mergers, financial literacy and marketing. In her free time she teaches cooking classes in her community, focuses on plant-based cooking, develops healthy cultural recipes, and takes pride in her front porch container garden.



Curtis Lovell

Artist, Musician, Actor, Entrepreneur, and Healer
Buffalo, NY

Curtis Lovell is an artist, musician, actor, entrepreneur, and healer born and raised in Buffalo New York. Curtis Lovell began singing at the age of 4 years old when his mother, actress, poet, and playwright Lorna C. Hill, realized that Lovell had perfect pitch. He is a 2009 graduate of the Buffalo Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts.

As a solo musical artist, Lovell is known for creating his own looping accompaniment, singing the melody over the lush background of looped vocal phrases. He has collaborated with other musical artists such as Neheem Shabazz, Walter Kemp, David Jonathan, Rishon Odel, George Caldwell, Frank Scinta, Rodney Appleby, and Zuri Appleby. His influences include Jill Scott, Nina Simone, Nat King Cole, and Patsy Cline.