Critical Legal Empowerment

Strategies for Community Built Justice

February 24-25, 2022 | Virtual | #criticalLE

Register: 2022.nyubernsteinconference.org

Robert and Helen Bernstein
Institute for Human Rights
NYU SCHOOL OF LAW

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
LAW REVIEW

A deep change in approach is needed to alter the basic conditions of those who experience persistent injustice. In our current legal ecosystem, lawyers are placed at the center of efforts to resolve justice problems. Legal empowerment—a global movement led by the grassroots, with lawyers and other professionals in supporting, rather than leading roles—is a crucial part of the justice transformation that is needed. When rights-holders are centered and directly engage institutions affecting their lives, they demand that systems become more accessible and responsive to the daily challenges of the people. And when the law and legal systems are actively harming marginalized and oppressed peoples, critical legal empowerment can ensure they are the authors of their own liberation.

Critical legal empowerment rejects technocratic approaches and embraces community-based efforts to redistribute legal power. These methods open up space for communities to engage in legal work and the legal profession, and builds upon—but offers something distinct from—progressive legal approaches such as movement lawyering, law and organizing, and community lawyering. Inspired by scholars of critical race theory, this quality of critique also requires self-reflection, humility and a commitment to critical praxis—a groundedness in the grassroots.

This year's annual NYU Law Review symposium, *Critical Legal Empowerment: Strategies for Community Built Justice*, is in partnership with—and truly the vision of—the Bernstein Institute for Human Rights. Our collaboration is rooted in a desire to democratize knowledge production and center the voices and demands of those directly impacted in the building of an American legal ecosystem that is truly just. To realize this vision and ensure we practice the values we espouse, we invited a dynamic group of community justice advocates to serve as Advisory Committee members. We are immensely grateful to Nixon Boumba, Ariadna Godreau-Aubert, Antonio Gutierrez, Lam Ho, Jay Monteverde, Jhody Polk, Alejo Rodriguez, and Jayshree Satpute for their collective inquiry and reflection as we co-designed a gathering that solidifies the knowledge that comes from lived experience.

Critical Legal Empowerment is a testament to the power and promise of community. Through a mix of panel sessions and community action workshops—community members, organizers, attorneys, law students, academics, donors and justice allies—will gather to interrogate the barriers within the current legal system, explore the efficacy of legal empowerment to address those challenges, and identify what's needed to redistribute legal power to the grassroots.

We are incredibly grateful to the Bernstein family for their leadership, philanthropy, and deep commitment to human rights. Special thanks to the Legal Empowerment Network, convened by Namati, for their partnership and the Mott Foundation and the Tuttleman Family Foundation for their generous support.

In solidarity,

Sukti Dhital, Executive Director,
Bernstein Institute for Human Rights

Margaret Satterthwaite, Faculty Director,
Bernstein Institute for Human Rights

Sara Miller, Managing Editor,
NYU Law Review

Arijeet Sensharma, Editor-in-Chief,
NYU Law Review

9:15 - 10:45 am

What is Critical Legal Empowerment?

Moderator: Sukti Dhital, Executive Director, Bernstein Institute for Human Rights, NYU Law

Speakers: Lam Ho, Founder and Executive Director, Beyond Legal Aid

Vivek Maru, CEO, Namati

Jhody Polk, Founder and Director, Legal Empowerment and Advocacy Hub

This opening session will introduce critical legal empowerment (theory, methods, impacts) and its embrace of community-based efforts to democratize and redistribute legal power. Panelists will discuss how critical legal empowerment builds upon, but also offers something distinct from other progressive legal approaches, including its focus on creating space for communities to directly engage in legal work and the legal profession. The discussion will also situate the burgeoning US legal empowerment movement within the context of the wider and more established global movement.

12:30 - 1:50 pm

Community Paralegals: The Power and Promise of Frontline Justice Advocates

Moderator: Tyler Walton, Project Attorney, Bernstein Institute for Human Rights, NYU Law

Speakers: Fatima Adamu, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF

Jay Monteverde, Environmental Justice Director, Namati

Alejo Rodriguez, Director of Collaborative Advocacy, Zealous

Geovanni Gutierrez Vivar, Senior Paralegal, Immigrant Justice Corps

In this session panelists will introduce the role and impact of "community paralegals" or frontline justice advocates, both here and around the world. The session will explore the ways community paralegals engage in the practice of law and challenge the legal profession's monopoly of the law. Speakers will also reflect on the training and resources needed to develop agents of change within communities, drawing from firsthand experience within environmental justice, immigrant rights, child rights, and the rights of incarcerated peoples.

FEBRUARY 24

2:00 - 3:20 pm

The Transformative Power of Accompaniment

Moderator — Ellie Happel, Co-Director of Haiti Justice & International Accountability Project and Caribbean Climate Justice Initiative; Adjunct Professor, Global Justice Clinic, NYU Law

Speakers — Andrea "Muffin" Hudson, Director, The North Carolina Community Bail Fund of Durham and Durham's Participatory Defense Hub

Ambien Mitchell, Post-Release Coordinator, Envision Freedom Fund

Alicia Torres, Organizer, Grassroots Leadership

This panel will examine the power and promise of accompaniment. Informed by grassroots' experiences in designing and deploying accompaniment programs within the immigration and criminal legal systems, panelists will share how accompaniment bears witness, expresses solidarity, and transforms power within courts and other legal settings.

FEBRUARY 25

9:15 - 10:35 am

Community-Driven Litigation: Redistributing Legal Power

Moderator — Gabrielle Apollon, Co-Director of Haiti Justice & International Accountability Project, Global Justice Clinic, NYU Law

Speakers — Alana Greer, Director and Co-Founder, Community Justice Project

Krystina Francois, Secretary, The Black Collective

Antonio Gutierrez, Co-Founder, Organized Communities Against Deportations

Ramzi Kassem, Professor of Law, Director of CUNY Clear

Panelists will discuss the need for community-driven litigation, a legal empowerment approach to litigation that transfers legal power into the hands of community members. The session will explore strategies for how community organizers and attorneys can work together to advance litigation led by the experience and expertise of impacted communities, and reimagine the relationship between attorneys and clients from one of an "expert" to that of "collaborator."

10:45 - 12:05 pm

Challenges in Advancing Legal Empowerment in the United States

Moderator: Emese Ilyes, Critical Social Psychologist, PAR Research Consultant, Bernstein Institute for Human Rights, NYU Law

Speakers: Rohan Pavuluri, Co-founder, Upsolve

Atieno Odhiambo, Director, Legal Empowerment Fund

Devon Simmons, Co-founder & Project Director, Paralegal Pathways Initiative, Columbia Law

David Udell, Executive Director, National Access to Justice Center, Fordham Law

This panel will explore what's needed to move forward with a robust critical legal empowerment methodology in the United States. Speakers will discuss current efforts to reform the regulation of legal practice (unauthorized practice of law), need to secure increased financing and support for legal empowerment programs, and a need for the legal profession to recognize community advocates as essential members of the legal ecosystem.

12:35 - 2:05 pm

Looking Ahead: Building Alternatives, Transforming Structures

Moderator: Meg Satterthwaite, Professor of Clinical Law and Faculty Director of the Bernstein Institute, NYU Law

Speakers: Matthew Blumin, General Counsel, Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Union

Nixon Boumba, Organizer, Kolektif Jistis Min nan Ayiti

Gerardo Reyes Chavez, Member Leader, Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Union

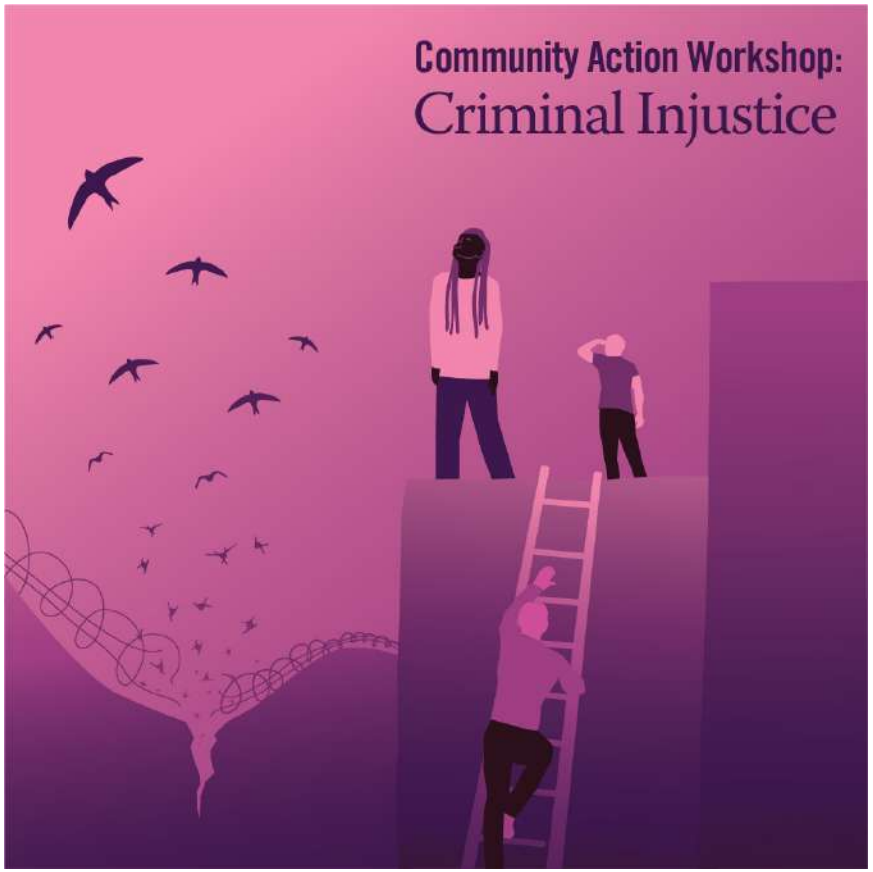
Ariadna Godreau-Aubert, Founder and Executive Director, Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico

Richard Midkiff, President & CEO, RSMCC Paralegal Consulting Company

A forward-looking discussion on how critical legal empowerment helps build alternative, transformative structures rooted in humanity. Panelists will share reflections from their work in advancing prisoner rights, labor rights, climate justice and corporate accountability in Puerto Rico, Haiti, Florida, and beyond.

COMMUNITY ACTION WORKSHOPS

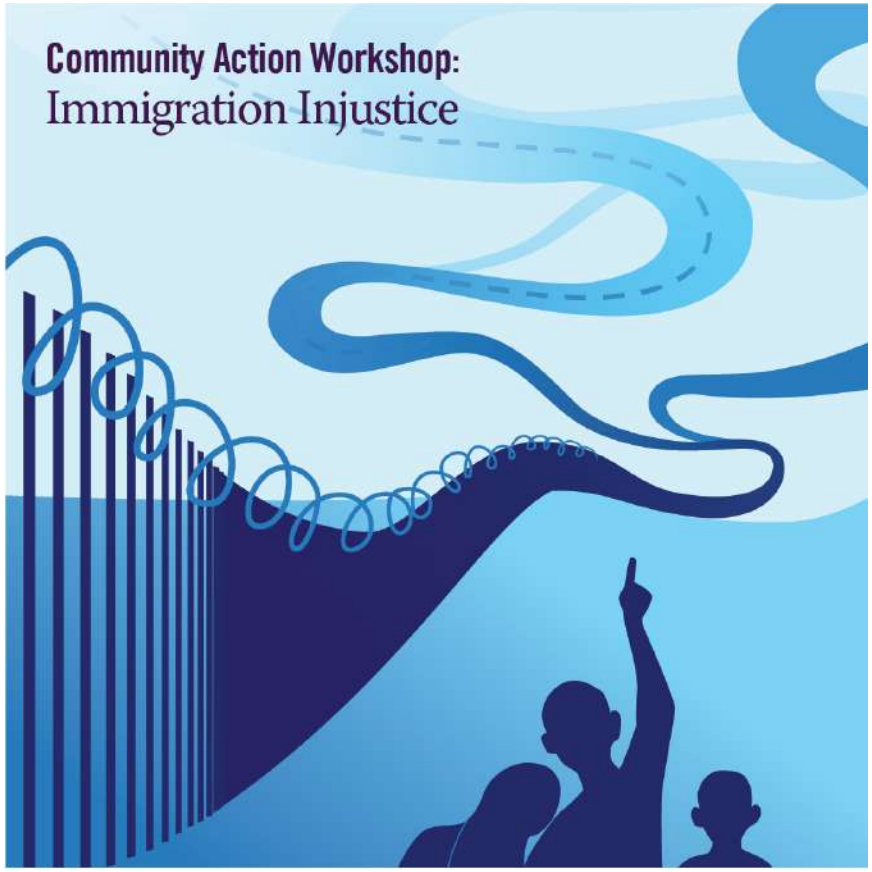
Alongside the Symposium, we are organizing four Community Action Workshops anchored by leading community justice advocates, to explore the power of legal empowerment to confront and combat injustice within civil, criminal, immigration, and environmental systems.



Anchors — Jhody Polk, Legal Empowerment and Advocacy Hub and Alejo Rodriguez, Zealous

NYU Law Student Fellow — Sean Langberg

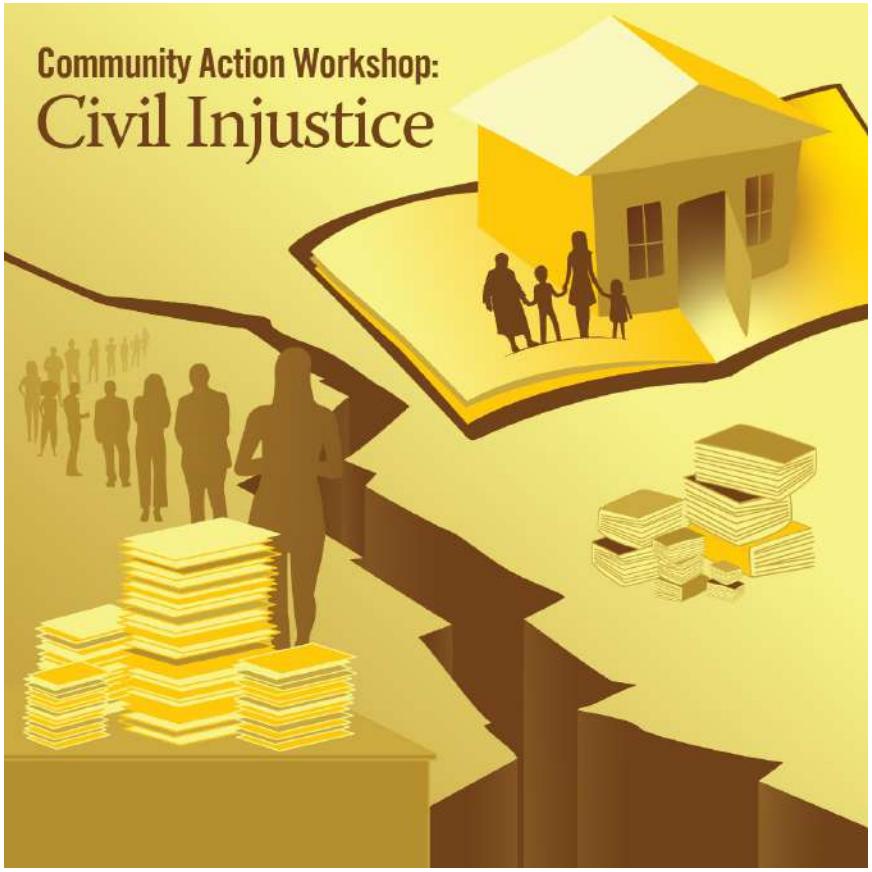
Reimagine the criminal and carceral legal systems in the United States. Abolition, restorative justice, jailhouse lawyering, participatory defense, antiracism… how do we support communities to achieve system-transformation from the inside out?



Anchors — Antonio Gutierrez, Organized Communities Against Deportations and Lam Ho, Beyond Legal Aid

NYU Law Student Fellow — Alejandra Torres

No one is illegal. How do we build the power of immigrant communities to dismantle the racist deportation machine and lead the design of systems that are rooted in dignity and inclusion?



Anchors: Ariadna Godreau-Aubert and Veronica Gonzalez, Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico; and Matthew Burnett, American Bar Foundation

NYU Law Student Fellow: Jahnavi Jagannath

Endless lines and mundane technical rules; bureaucratic violence hides local contestation, sidelines criticism and denies justice. How do we support communities to create dignified systems that protect civil rights–from housing to family, labor, disability and more?

Anchors: Jay Monteverde and Kerri Evelyn Harris, Namati

NYU Law Student Fellow: Hailey Corkery

The environment is in a moment of crisis, and isolated and marginalized communities are bearing the brunt of the impact. How do we achieve a just transition away from fossil fuels and towards healthy communities for everyone?

FEBRUARY 18

10:30 - 12:00 pm

Community Action Workshop #1: Communities at the Margins

Injustice is a reality, and the very structures of legal systems in the United States often act to depower and limit community voice and direction. This pre-conference session will examine the shape of this access to justice problem within the four issue areas. The first workshop will introduce critical legal empowerment, set the issue context, and encourage participants to identify challenges working within a highly regulated, lawyer-driven system.

FEBRUARY 24

11:00 - 12:00 pm

Community Action Workshop #2: Legal Empowerment is Happening Now

Organizations, communities, and activists are already striving towards justice. Specific strategies such as community paralegals, accompaniment, community-driven litigation, and community-based monitoring are being used to implement legal empowerment. Told through real life examples, anchor organizations will share how they use legal empowerment methods to address injustice and invite participants to share their community empowerment strategies.

MARCH 4

10:30 - 12:00 pm

Community Action Workshop #3: Pushing Forward Toward Justice

Legal empowerment approaches do not come without challenges, including concerns about unauthorized practice of law (UPL), funding difficulties, evidence gaps, and delegitimization by the legal profession. This post-conference workshop will provide participants a chance to conduct power mapping to identify levers for change. Conversations and exchanges held during the plenary sessions will be interrogated in context, rather than in the abstract, and we'll identify actionable items to push forward the power of the community.

SPEAKERS

Fatima Adamu is a child protection specialist with UNICEF Nigeria. Prior to UNICEF, she worked with the Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative, a National NGO in Nigeria that works in the area of legal empowerment and the rule of law. Fatima designed and implemented various protection programs for women and children that included access to justice with a focus on legal empowerment. She also built the capacity of community-based paralegals to support rural communities on SGBV, trafficking, child labor, and forced marriage, land disputes. Fatima is an Alumni of the Legal Empowerment Leadership Course and a proud community paralegal.

Gabrielle Apollon co-supervises the Global Justice Clinic's projects on Haiti Justice & International Accountability and Torture, Rendition, and Detention. She previously served as Managing Attorney at The Door: A Center for Alternatives, where she represented young people in immigration and family law matters. While at The Door, Gabrielle expanded services for Francophone immigrants and became a New York Community Trust Leadership Fellow. As a student, Gabrielle earned a Ford Foundation Public Interest Law Fellowship to work with Conectas in Brazil in 2013, documenting human rights violations of Haitian migrants en route to Brazil. Prior to law school, Gabrielle worked at the United Nations Office of the Special Envoy to Haiti as a research specialist.

Nixon Boumba is a Haitian human rights activist and member of the Kolektif Jistis Min nan Ayiti (Haiti Mining Justice Collective). Boumba has been working in mining-affected areas of Haiti to ensure that local people understand their rights in regard to the extractives industry. Besides his work on mining, Boumba is also a supporter of economic and cultural rights in Haiti, a staunch advocate on behalf of all marginalized and oppressed populations in Haiti, and a leading figure calling for vigilance and justice in Haiti's current development climate, which is marked by notoriously low wages and controversial efforts to create industrial and tourist zones. Boumba also works on issues of gender and sexuality in the context of humanitarian aid.

Matthew Burnett is a senior program officer for Access to Justice at the American Bar Foundation (ABF). Prior to joining the ABF, Matthew was senior policy officer for legal empowerment at the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), a program of the Open Society Foundations. His work included leading OSJI's migrants' equality project, supporting OSF partners in Puerto Rico on housing justice and displacement, providing technical assistance and field building support to legal empowerment efforts by OSF regional and national foundations in the US, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, and global advocacy and coordination on civil access to justice and Sustainable Development Goal 16.3. Prior to his work with the Open Society Foundations, Burnett helped to launch the Immigration Advocates Network, a groundbreaking collaboration between leading national immigrants' rights organizations in the US, where he served first as associate director from 2007-2011 and then as director from 2011-2017.

SPEAKERS

Gerardo Reyes Chavez is a key leader of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). He is a farmworker himself and has worked in the fields since age 11, first as a peasant farmer in Zacatecas, Mexico and then in the fields of Florida picking oranges, tomatoes, blueberries, and watermelon. He has worked closely with consumer allies to organize national actions—renowned for their creativity and effectiveness — designed to bring pressure on the large retail purchasers of Florida produce to join the Fair Food Program. He speaks publicly about the Fair Food Program at events across the country, and as part of the implementation of the Fair Food Program, conducts workers' rights education in the fields on all farms participating in the program. He also receives complaints of abuses in the fields, manages wage theft claims, and assists in the investigation of cases of modern-day slavery when they arise.

Hailey Corkery (she/her) grew up in Reston, Virginia and is a 2L at NYU Law. She is a Critical Legal Empowerment Student Fellow, Staff Editor on the NYU Review of Law & Social Change and a student researcher with the NYU-Yale American Indian Sovereignty Project. She is also on the board of various student groups, including Law Students for Justice in Palestine, Ending the Prison Industrial Complex's Solitary Confinement Project, and NYU Law's chapter of the National Lawyers Guild. During her 1L summer, she was an International Law and Human Rights Fellow at National Foundation for India in New Delhi. She will be spending her 2L summer as a Legal Intern with EarthRights International in Washington, D.C. Hailey hopes to use her JD to defend human rights and support grassroots movements through a community-centered approach.

Sukti Dhital is the Executive Director of the Bernstein Institute for Human Rights at NYU Law. She also serves as a Supervising Attorney with the Global Justice Clinic, where she oversees legal empowerment projects spanning jailhouse lawyers and immigrant rights. Previously, Sukti was the Executive Director and Co-founder of Nazdeek, a legal empowerment organization that works closely with indigenous and Dalit women to advance human rights through a community-driven approach. Prior to Nazdeek, Sukti was the Director of the Reproductive Rights Unit at the Human Rights Law Network, India and assisted in securing landmark social and economic rights judgments. She has also worked at the American Civil Liberties Union's Reproductive Freedom Project and as an appellate litigation associate.

Kyrstina Francois is the Secretary of The Black Collective, a movement committed to promoting a shared agenda to elevate political consciousness and amplify the economic power of black communities. She is a social justice advocate and works as the Executive Director of the Office of New Americans for Miami-Dade County where she spearheads an innovative initiative to bring legal and financial resources for immigrants out of the office and into the community. Krystina is a first generation Haitian-American who is driven by the desire to create opportunities for immigrants and marginalized communities to have a voice. In her spare time, she volunteers with organizations committed to improving the status of women and people of color including the League of Women Voters and the Junior League of Miami. She has been featured in media outlets such as The Miami Herald, NBC6, Bustle, and WLRN.

SPEAKERS

Ariadna Godreau-Aubert is a human rights lawyer and the founder and Executive Director of Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico, a non-profit organization that offers education, community legal support and advocacy for social impact in Puerto Rico. She has worked in several access to justice initiatives, which include strategic litigation at local and international levels, the use of technology to increase legal literacy, and organizing movements lawyers. Ariadna is also an adjunct professor at the Universidad de Puerto Rico, where she teaches courses on human rights, political theory, and international relations. She's a writer, with topics spanning human rights, gender, austerity, housing, and the right to protest.

Verónica Gonzalez is a lawyer at Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico and university professor. Her work focuses on environmental, community, and human rights issues. She studied environmental sciences at the University of Puerto Rico. She has a Juris Doctor from the same University. Verónica holds a Masters in International Law from the American University Washington College of Law. She directs the environmental section of the Legal Assistance Clinic of the Inter-American University. She participated in high-impact community cases, standing out among these the defense of communities against displacement.

Antonio Gutierrez is an undocumented queer immigrant working on anti-displacement campaigns in Chicago, Illinois. They are the Strategic Coordinator and co-founder of Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD) an undocumented-led organization that empowers undocumented immigrants to resist ICE deportation and detention. Antonio has over seven years of experience in non-profit administration development, is an urban gardener, story-teller and co-founder of the Albany Park Defense Network and the Autonomous Tenants Union (ATU).

Alana Greer is the Director and co-founder of Community Justice Project. She is passionate about lifting up the voices of the community members she works with and using her legal and analytic skills to support grassroots movements seeking to dismantle structural racism and inequality. Alana is an Echoing Green BMA Fellow and an advisory board member for the Dream Defenders, Law for Black Lives, and New Florida Majority. She was previously a staff attorney at Florida Legal Services and Advancement Project's National Office, where she worked with youth and parent leaders across the nation fighting to end the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Prior to law school, she was a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and worked with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area to defend individuals from the criminalization of homelessness.

Lam Ho is the Executive Director and Founder of Beyond Legal Aid which unites lawyers and activists through community-located, community-operated, and community-directed "activism-law programs" for over 4000 people annually, including undocumented immigrants, sex workers, laborers, and activists. Lam has been engaged in legal advocacy efforts for more than 12 years, and prior to founding Beyond was an attorney at Equip for Equality and Skadden Fellow at the Legal Advocacy Fund, where he ran 10 community-based clinics providing free legal services to youth and their families on the west side of Chicago. Lam experienced firsthand the challenges of community lawyering and civil legal services, and was inspired to innovatively change the legal aid system in the US through a "community activism lawyering" model.

SPEAKERS

Andréa "Muffin" Hudson is an activist, abolitionist, and a freedom fighter who fights for people's rights in and out of the courtroom - specifically people who have been over criminalized by our judicial system. She is the Director of Durham's Participatory Defense Hub as well as the Director of The North Carolina Community Bail Fund of Durham. In 2018, Muffin was newly appointed to the Human Relations Commission in Durham. As an organizer, Muffin is a core leadership member of All Of Us Or None NC and a member of the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls.

Emese Ilyes is a critical social psychologist whose scholarship excavates the history of constructs that group people into categories. Her research, writing, and organizing has sought to understand the systems that define capacity and impose labels like intellectual disability on select bodies and minds. As an educator and researcher - working with participatory methodologies that make room for poetic and non-textual ways of knowing - she continues to work in collaboration with communities who most deeply understand structural violence and who can most clearly articulate visions of a just world. With this commitment to participatory methodologies led by those most impacted, Emese continues to work in solidarity with communities to interrogate systems of power and to name radical possibilities.

Jahnavi Jagannath (she/they) is a 1L from Memphis, Tennessee. She is a Critical Legal Empowerment Student Fellow and interested in environmental justice work and prison and police abolition. Prior to law school she worked in Houston as a field organizer for a senate campaign in 2018. She then researched criminal justice policy at the Urban Institute in Washington, DC until moving to New York for law school. She is a singer and visual artist, working in digital and physical media, and enjoys partnering with local creative collectives. She hopes to use her law degree to support radical movements working to dismantle harmful systems and prioritize community care, appreciation for the natural world, and creative paths to safety.

Ramzi Kassem is the founding director of CLEAR. He is a Professor of Law at the City University of New York. His writing, teaching, and legal practice all aim to contest the expressions and excesses of the sprawling U.S. security state, both domestically and abroad. In support of clients, communities, and social movements, Ramzi has litigated civil rights, constitutional, criminal, immigration, national security, wartime detention, and war crime cases at all levels of the U.S. federal judiciary, before military commissions and international tribunals, and in various administrative proceedings. Ramzi has long worked with and within various coalitions and movements, including Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) and Movement for Black Lives (M4BL). Ramzi is a proud immigrant, an incorrigible New Yorker, and a Paul & Daisy Soros New American Fellow.

SPEAKERS

Sean Langberg is a 3L student at NYU Law and a Critical Legal Empowerment Student Fellow. Before law school, he spent two years In Washington D.C. working for the Friends Committee on National Legislation and the Center for the Prevention of Genocide. In those roles he lobbied the White House and Congress to decrease the military budget and increase peacebuilding efforts in Iraq and Syria. After that he moved to New York and worked for the Institute of International Education and RIF Asylum Support, where he focused on refugee resettlement and services for asylum seekers. In law school he has interned at the Federal Defenders of New York, the Legal Aid Society, and Brooklyn Defender Services.

Vivek Maru is the CEO of Namati. He believes we can advance social and environmental justice by deepening democracy. Vivek started Namati in 2011 and since then, Namati and its partners have supported cadres of grassroots legal advocates—sometimes known as community paralegals—in ten countries. These advocates work with their communities to protect common lands, enforce environmental law, and secure basic rights to healthcare and citizenship. Globally, Namati convenes the Legal Empowerment Network, more than 2,500 groups and members from over 170 countries who are learning from one another and collaborating on common challenges. Vivek is co-author of Community Paralegals and the Pursuit of Justice (Cambridge University Press). Vivek is on the road a lot, but he has a home and family in Washington, DC. He tries to spend time in a forest or other natural place every week, wherever he is.

Richard Midkiff is the President and CEO of RSMC, a paralegal consultancy company specializing in appellate, post-conviction matters, prison reform and re-entry. Richard was incarcerated for 24 years in Florida State prison and during his time became a senior law clerk, assisting hundreds of incarcerated individuals with their legal cases and created re-entry and leadership programs. He applied his legal skills to his own case and obtained a ruling that released him 15 years earlier than his original sentence. However, an egregious decision from the Florida appellate court nearly sent back to prison. Justice advocates around the world rallied, urging the courts and policymakers to protect his freedom and recognize his deep commitment to the rights of the marginalized and disenfranchised. Richard is safely home and committed to fighting the good fight to help people through tough times.

Sara Miller grew up in Brooklyn, San Francisco, Seoul, and a rural town in southern Missouri called Waynesville. Before law school she worked in social policy research and as a freelance photographer. Sara is the Managing Editor of Law Review and has interned at The Bail Project and at Rothner, Segall & Greenstone as a Peggy Browning Fellow. She's also worked on expungement petitions with A New Way of Life's Reentry Clinic in Los Angeles, served as a board member for NYU's Ending the Prison Industrial Complex, and is currently working with immigrant youth at her externship with The Door. Sara hopes to work as a movement lawyer alongside communities advocating for the abolition of all state-sanctioned violence.

SPEAKERS

Ambien Mitchell was born and raised in the red clay of North Carolina. She is the Post Release Coordinator at the Envision Freedom Fund and has organized for immigration justice, supporting the leadership of community members facing deportation and advocating alongside those under Orders of Supervision and the electronically incarcerated. Previously, Ambien was the Accompaniment Coordinator at New Sanctuary Coalition where she organized more than 80 accompaniments a week throughout NYC. Ambien has recruited and selected teacher candidates to staff the highest-need subject areas and geographic areas in NYC's public school system and worked as an actor and educator. She believes whole-heartedly in the power of effective storytelling to support movements, drive change, and build muscle for understanding our shared humanity.

Jay Monteverde has advocated for human rights and social justice through grassroots organizing and law and policy advocacy for 20 years. At Namati, he leads the US Environmental Justice Program, working with the program team to assist US legal empowerment advocates and communities facing environmental injustice. Jay started his legal career at the Illinois Attorney General's Office, where he handled environmental justice and other public interest litigation, investigations, and policy matters. He later moved to China and worked with the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, supporting grassroots organizations to push for environmental enforcement, transparency, and access to justice. Most recently, Jay co-founded Breach Collective, which partners with climate activists and frontline communities on locally-driven strategies to advance climate justice.

Jhody Polk is the Founder and Director of the Legal Empowerment and Advocacy Hub (LEAH), a grassroots organization dedicated to growing legal empowerment in the US through the Jailhouse Lawyer Initiative. Jhody is a 2018 Soros Justice Fellow and formerly incarcerated Jailhouse Lawyer. She has worked as a central Florida organizer on Amendment 4, restoring voting rights to over 1.4 million Floridians with felony convictions and is the founder of the Florida Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. In 2019 Jhody received the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Legacy Award and the Peacebuilder of the Year award. She is a proud Mother, community peacebuilder, defender of Justice and Black Woman, and aspires to become a certified license human rights attorney and teacher of the law.

Rohan Pavuluri is the CEO and Co-founder of Upsolve, one of America's leading resources helping low-income and working-class families overcome financial distress. He was named to the TIME100 Next list in 2021. Rohan is a member of the Legal Services Corporation's Emerging Leaders Council, a Board Director at the National Access to Justice Center housed at Fordham Law School, and a committee member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Making Justice Accessible project. He has been recognized as Forbes 30 under 30 in the Law & Policy Category and a TED Fellow. In 2019, Pavuluri and Upsolve were awarded the Robin Hood Foundation Heroes Award for "extraordinary contributions in the fight against poverty."

SPEAKERS

Atieno Odhiambo is a lawyer whose work has focused on human rights, democracy and governance. She is the Director of the Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF), a newly launched fund that provides long-term core funding to grassroots activists and organizations who are supporting their communities to tackle systemic injustices and advocate for expanded protections under the law. Prior to her role at LEF, Atieno worked at the Center for Reproductive Rights, the Chief of Party (Kenya) for Public International Law & Policy Group, and for the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Kenya. She has also worked on immigrant and human rights issues in the US, with experience at Microsoft Corporation, Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and Columbia Legal Services.

Alejo Rodriguez is the Director of Collaborative Advocacy at Zealous and oversees the intersectionality of Zealous' collaborations with social justice practitioners and the communities they serve with a focal point to ensure the integrity of human-centered engagement strategies as a means of actualizing true community-based advocacy. He is also a Catalyst for Change Fellow at the Center for Institutional and Social Change. Alejo is an advocate, teacher, and poet, whose work appears in OUTLAW BIBLE OF AMERICAN POETRY and DOING TIME: 25 YEARS OF PEN PRISON WRITER AWARDS. He serves as a Board Member for Gideon's Promise, the Broadway Advocacy Coalition, and the Parole Preparation Project. Alejo's odyssey through the New York State prison system, including his struggles with parole and legal discoveries were published in the September 2019 CUNY Law Review issue.

Jayshree Satpute is a human rights lawyer and co-founder of Nazdeek, a legal empowerment organization dedicated to bringing access to justice closer to marginalized communities in South Asia. Jayshree has extensive experience advocating at the Supreme Court of India and various High Courts. Her groundbreaking work has focused on the realization of socio-economic rights of marginalized groups in India through innovative grassroots legal education and strategic litigation. Jayshree was recognized by UK's The Guardian as one of the "World's Top 100 Inspiring Women. She has co-authored "The Right to Safe Motherhood Through Litigation: The Indian Story," in the book Social and Economic Rights in Theory and Practice: A Critical Assessment, Routledge Press UK 2014 and co-edited the book "Refugee and Law 2nd Edition", HRLN 2011.

Arijeet Sensharma grew up in Falls Church, Virginia, and lived in Virginia until coming to law school. He is the Editor-In-Chief of NYU Law Review and during law school has interned at Planned Parenthood Federation of America's Litigation & Law Department and the ACLU Racial Justice Program, and participated in the Racial Equity Strategies Clinic with the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund. He sings in the law school acapella group, Substantial Performance. He hopes to pursue a career related to civil rights law, focusing on racial justice and health equity.

SPEAKERS

Devon Simmons is the Co-founder & Project Director, Paralegal Pathways Initiative, a program that helps former jailhouse lawyers find a way into the legal field through a 14-week training course that teaches tech skills, legal ethics, soft communication skills, and legal history. In 2012, while incarcerated at Otisville Correctional Facility, Devon enrolled in John Jay College of Criminal Justice's Prison-to-College Pipeline program. Soon after his release, following over 15 years of imprisonment, he obtained his AA (with honors) and BA in criminal justice. As a global ambassador for higher education, he has traveled to Cuba, England, Jamaica, and South Africa in an effort to help establish prison-to-college pipeline programs internationally. He is a 2019 Atlantic Fellow for Racial Equity and 2019 Soros Justice Fellow.

Margaret Satterthwaite is a Professor of Clinical Law, Faculty Director of the Bernstein Institute for Human Rights, Faculty Director of the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, and the Director of the Global Justice at NYU School of Law. Her research interests include legal empowerment, vicarious trauma and wellbeing among human rights workers, and interdisciplinary methods in human rights. Before joining the academy, she clerked for Judge Betty Fletcher of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the judges of the International Court of Justice, and worked for a number of human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights First, and the Commission Nationale de Verité et de Justice in Haiti. She has authored or co-authored more than a dozen human rights reports and dozens of scholarly articles and book chapters. Meg serves on the boards of Digital Democracy and the Global Initiative for Economic and Social Rights.

Alejandra Torres is a third-year J.D. candidate at NYU School of Law and a Critical Legal Empowerment Student Fellow. She was born in Bogotá, Colombia, and raised in New Jersey. Alejandra is passionate about anti-imperialist, racial, and climate justice. She has worked primarily in the international space with immigrant and racialized communities, women, and children, through advocacy, education, policy and legal research, community-building, and direct services. Alejandra is a Derrick Bell Scholar, an NYU Social Sector Leadership Diversity Fellow, a Book Annotations Editor for the Journal of International Law and Politics, and a Global Justice Clinic Student Advocate. After graduation, she will be a Masiyiwa-Bernstein Fellow with the Global Justice Clinic.

Alicia Torres helps lead Grassroots Leadership's immigration defense efforts, including its community hotline, case work, legal strategy, and court watch programs. Alicia also works and builds community with ICE Fuera de Austin/ICE Out of Austin, a community-based group led by and for the undocumented community of Austin. It is a space committed to collaborative learning, support, and fighting for families that live under the threat of deportation. Alicia is originally from Central Mexico but has called Austin home since 1992.

Geovanni Gutierrez Vivar is a senior paralegal at Immigrant Justice Corps (IJC), providing supervisory support to the Community Fellowship Program. Geovanni joined IJC as Community Fellow in 2016 and worked on affirmative immigration benefits applications at two different sites during his fellowship. From there, IJC extended his fellowship and he focused on removal defense representation for families and unaccompanied minors where he screened hundreds of potential clients, and provided crucial litigation support to the Justice Fellows. Geovanni was granted full accreditation from the Department of Justice in April 2020. He was born and raised in Mexico, and in his teenage years, crossed the US-Mexican border. Geovanni lived undocumented for five years before he was able to adjust his status through SIJS.

Tyler Walton is a Tuttleman Project Attorney with the Bernstein Institute for Human Rights at NYU School of Law. He also serves as a Supervising Attorney with the Global Justice Clinic's project supporting the Jailhouse Lawyer Initiative. He works on legal empowerment, researching and co-developing strategies with affected community members to access and exercise their rights and shift power paradigms back towards communities and individuals. Prior to joining the Bernstein Institute, Tyler was a fellow at the Southern Africa Litigation Centre where he led the program on freedom of expression, working to combat closing civic spaces in southern Africa and address new human rights issues caused by the rise of the Internet and digital technologies. He also served two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Malawi developing participatory community health programs to advance gender equality, access to safe drinking water, and HIV prevention and mitigation.

David Udell is the Founder and Executive Director of the National Center for Access to Justice at Fordham Law School, a research and policy advocacy organization that works with data to expand justice in the United States. David leads all of NCAJ's justice system reform initiatives, including the Justice Index, promoting adoption of best policies for access to justice; the A2J Initiative and A2J Summit Collection, publishing articles from leading reformers on the civil justice reform movement; and the Outcomes Guide, endorsing best practices in tracking outcomes data for civil legal aid providers and funders. David was the Founder and Executive Director of the Justice Program of the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law School, a Senior Attorney at Legal Services for the Elderly (NYC); and a Managing Attorney at Mobilization for Justice (NYC).

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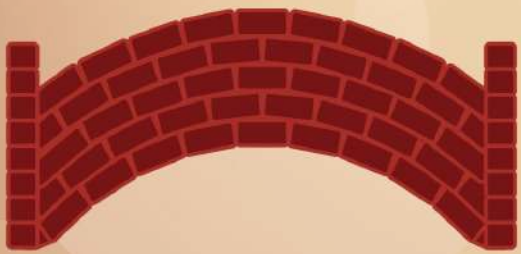
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