

# WILL EMPOWER

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## Emerging Leaders Cohort Profiles

2019



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY  
*Kalmanovitz Initiative  
for Labor and the Working Poor*

RUTGERS

School of Management  
and Labor Relations

Center for Innovation in Worker  
Organization

WOMEN INNOVATING  
LABOR LEADERSHIP

WILL  
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## Amari Foster.

Amari Foster found her voice speaking about injustices and inequality at a young age. Raised by a mother who is active in social justice collaborative work, it came naturally. As a Project Manager for Georgia Stand-Up, a labor-community partnership Think and Act Tank for working Communities, based in Atlanta, Georgia, Amari started as an intern, then organizer and now a Project Manager, she has worked with labor, community, and helped to build and sustain coalitions. As a founding member of the Partnership for Working Families, Georgia Stand-Up relies on Amari for her next generation perspective and she is currently serving on the Just Cities Narrative Cohort, sponsored by the Ford Foundation. For the past two years, Amari has served as the lead community organizer for the TransFormation Alliance. She builds bridges from the TFA transit oriented development coalition

to the community and leads the community grants process. As a project manager with Stand-Up, Amari manages campaigns that intersect transit, affordable housing and jobs, often leading to discussions and speaking at rallies that intersect race, class, generational issues and gender in spaces.



## Anne Barnett.

Anne Barnett is a lifelong Tennessean who has been an advocate for social justice from an early age. She has fought for workers' rights for over twelve years, beginning as a student organizer with United Students Against Sweatshops, later as a rank-and-file union member and a leader of the local Jobs with Justice chapter, then as a staff rep with United Food and Commercial Workers union, and currently as the Campaign and Community Coordinator for the Central Labor Council of Nashville and Middle Tennessee. She also Co-Chairs Stand Up Nashville, a community-labor coalition focused on equitable development in one of the fastest growing cities in the US.



## Cecilia Ananya Belser-Patton.

cecilia-ananya belser-patton is the Champions Organizer for Missouri Jobs With Justice (MO JWJ), where she is responsible for coalition building in the faith and labor communities in Kansas City, as well as the regional and state level. She is most proud of the collaborative work being done with MO JWJ & the MO Voter Engagement (MOVE) Collaborative's Urban/Rural Multi-Racial Movement Building, which is intentionally building capacity and sustainability for engagement and solidarity between urban and rural communities in Missouri. As a part of the Core Leadership, Development & Planning Team for MOVE's Multi Racial Movement and as the Lead Organizer for the MOVE Collaborative POC Caucus, she feels most

purposed and centered in the work of equity and justice. She is the Founder & Principle Organizer & Facilitator for JUST Systems, a capacity & sustainability building Restorative Practices Diversity, Inclusion & Equity Firm. An educator, organizer and professional development facilitator, she is also a professional thespian, who describes herself as an "activist—artist & activist--advocate and self-empowerment actualizer." A Co-Founder of Kansas City CARE, Mayor Sly James' Initiative On Race, Chair of the steering committee, Anytown-KC, a youth Social Justice Leadership Development Institute, an active member of The Cultural Competency Collective of Kansas City, including its' leadership team & Planning Council. Cecilia-Ananya is also an active citizen volunteer of Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ)KC and it's leadership team, as well as The Open Table, a spiritual community that centers anti-racism at it's core ministry. She is President of Uzazi Village's Council of Elders, and is a board member of Communities In Schools-KC and Black Archives of Mid-America, and works actively at building intersectional, multi-racial, anti-racist community in Kansas City, and everywhere else in our world.



## Chama St. Louis.

Chama St. Louis is the Central Illinois Coalition Organizer for the Peoria People's Project. She's the founder of the Black Justice Project, and is a board member of Change Peoria, the East Bluff Community Center and the HOI Sierra Club. She is an entrepreneur, she owns Euphoria Aerial & Dance Academy. She was the youngest president of the Peoria Black Chamber of Commerce at age 26 and the youngest Chairwoman of the same organization at age 28. Chama has worked as a political consultant to various campaigns across Illinois, she was the spokesperson and communications director for the successful re-election campaign of the Honorable Dorothy Brown, Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court. She was also elected as the Peoria County Democratic precinct committeewoman for West Peoria, precinct 03. She is the President of Sunset Hills Neighborhood Association and a team leader for

State Senator Chuck Weaver's 1000 pound project. She is the mother of Ryann (12), Eliana (10), Pharaoh (6) and the wife of Donald. She was the 2018 Mics Uncut Award recipient for her contributions to the community and was awarded the Grassroots Award by the City of Peoria in 2019.



## Dana Smith.

Dana Smith grew up in Michigan and graduated from Purdue University in 2016. She learned to sew when she was 10, leading to an interest in the fashion industry, but it was not until becoming active in feminist organizing efforts in college and learning about the exploitation of women garment workers around the world that it became clear that the way forward was to join the labor movement. Dana re-founded a United Students Against Sweatshop chapter on campus to fight for social and economic justice by pushing the university to end apparel contracts with brands that used sweatshops and campaigning against the privatization of campus services. Organizing at a large, public university showed her that good jobs, good education, and democracy are at stake when billionaires and corporations gain more influence over public higher education and value profit over people. This led her to work for

SEIU Faculty Forward in Washington, D.C. on adjunct and graduate worker organizing campaigns before heading to Tennessee. For the past two years she has been an organizer for United Campus Workers, CWA Local 3865 in Nashville, TN, where she works to build a grassroots union of faculty, staff, and students taking collective action to change their workplaces and communities.



## De'Andrea Lottier Ross.

De'Andrea Lottier Ross is a Southern California native and an avid activist for social justice and human rights issues including racial inequality, youth & homelessness, and immigration rights issues. She received two Bachelor's degrees in Psychology and History/Political Science from Warren Wilson College in Western North Carolina. While in undergrad, she co-started a peer mentor leadership program for students of color and international students. It has been running successfully for nearly 7 years. De'Andrea currently serves as the Project Coordinator for the Los Angeles Black Worker Center where she oversees the Ready 2 Work program and is currently developing a healing justice program and trauma-informed interventions to facilitate healing spaces for Black folks in Los Angeles.



## **Katrina Peterson.**

Katrina is the Climate Justice Program Manager at Puget Sound Sage, where she provides advocacy, policy analysis, and strategic direction for the climate program. Previously, Katrina worked at Washington Environmental Council and Climate Solutions. She currently serves on Got Green’s Climate Justice Committee and has experience as an environmental educator and guide, chaplain, and counselor. Katrina holds a Master of Divinity from Harvard and a Bachelors in Political Science from Yale.



## **Kayla Blado.**

Kayla Blado joined the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) as Media Relations Specialist in 2016. Here, she pitches worker-centric economic policy papers to journalists, drafts op-eds, and coordinates social media campaigns. She has recently gotten EPI’s research featured on the cover of TIME, on Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, and in The Washington Post. She has also served as the president of the EPI staff bargaining unit since 2018. Additionally, Kayla is serving as the Interim President for her local union, the Nonprofit Professional Employees Union (NPEU), a union of several hundred nonprofit workers in the DC-area who are united in improving their workplaces by strengthening their voices in the office. She previously served as the Vice President of Communications for NPEU.

Kayla became active in the labor movement in 2011 when former Wisconsin governor Scott Walker signed Act 10 into law, stripping collective bargaining rights from public sector workers. Kayla and her college classmates protested in the streets during the day and stayed overnight in the State Capitol building, all the while learning about Wisconsin’s rich labor history. As a fifth-generation Wisconsinite, Kayla has deep pride in her state and hopes to one day hold elected office in the Badger state.

She has also worked for several workers’ rights organizations, such as Change to Win and Workers’ Independent News. Previously, Kayla produced several radio shows, including a popular morning news program on Wisconsin Public Radio. Kayla also served as an AmeriCorps volunteer in rural Wisconsin, where she helped disabled farmers acquire assistive equipment.

Kayla holds a bachelor’s degree in Sociology and Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and she is currently pursuing a graduate certificate in business communications from the Harvard Extension School. She is also a graduate of the New Leaders Council, a progressive political training institute.



## **Keani Christianson.**

My name is Keani Christianson, I have been in the labor movement for past 11 years. I started out as a rank & file security officer in LA and quickly understood the importance of standing with others to make sure that hard working class people get seen, heard and are able to create a pathway to make improvements at the workplace. During that campaign I became an organizer and helped unionize 6,000 security officers. From there I went to organize workers at community healthcare centers, as well as Walmart workers in the “Our Walmart” campaign, and childcare workers in the “Fight for \$15” childcare campaign, and currently a campaigner for SEIU’s airport campaign.

Organizing, is one of the most rewarding experiences in my life. To be able to empower workers to know their value, worth and to build worker unity and strength by bringing people together around a common fight. There’s nothing like it. I strive to make sure I help others get the same opportunity I got from a security officer working on the front line to standing up and making change.



## Lindsay Buck.

Lindsay Buck was raised in a small town in rural Nebraska. She has two bachelor's degrees in elementary education and special education, and her master's degree in alternative education from Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska. Lindsay's involvement in the labor movement began in college as a student union member of the National Education Association (NEA), and continued with full membership once she began teaching. Lindsay has been the LEA treasurer and member of the executive board for a little over two years now. Since becoming more involved at the local level, Lindsay's passion for union work grew and she became more involved at the state and national level. Lindsay is a member of the Kansas National Education Association (KNEA) Social Justice Taskforce. At the national level, Lindsay is a member of the NEA's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Committee

and is a Western Regional Director for the NEA LGBTQ+ Caucus. She is committed to racial and social justice, women's rights, and worker justice. She is a non-profit board member for Trinity In-Home Care, providing non-medical respite and support services to elderly and disabled folks, and a board member for Let's Talk Lawrence, an inclusive, comprehensive sexuality education and outreach organization. Lindsay enjoys spending time with her two teenage children, Alexis and Devon, and her partner, Lauren.



## Maria Sol Freire Figueroa.

Sol Freire has been with New York Communities for Change since 2016, first as its Digital Organizer and currently as its Digital Director. In these roles, she organized a national network of over 1,000 bank workers to successfully expose the wrongdoings of Wells Fargo, and now oversees the social media and online-to-offline strategies for campaigns such as Housing Justice for All and #NoAmazonNYC. Her commitment to social movements began when she coordinated the online outreach strategy for the women and LGBTQ-led Marcha de las Putas in her hometown Quito, Ecuador. She received her Bachelor's in Journalism from Universidad San Francisco de Quito and a Master's in International Relations, Security and Development from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.



## Mariko Yoshiokat.

I grew up in the Sierra Nevada Foothills of Northern California. After I received my undergraduate degree from a small liberal arts college in Ohio, I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area. There, I worked in social services as a domestic violence survivor advocate and later as a welfare rights advocate. I moved to Oregon in 2007 to pursue a law degree. I practiced labor law long enough to discover that I enjoyed organizing much more than I enjoyed litigating, and I took an external job with AFT, helping to organize the faculty union at the University of Oregon. After that campaign, I became an internal organizer for SEIU 503 and am now a field coordinator and work with two teams of incredibly talented field organizers. I am married to a wonderful woman who is also an organizer and field coordinator with SEIU 503. During our free time my wife and I enjoy playing board games with

friends, crafting, and exploring the natural beauty of the pacific northwest.



## **Sara Myklebust.**

Sara Myklebust is a Senior Research Analyst at the Georgetown University's Kalmanovitz Initiative, working on the Bargaining for the Common Good campaign. She has previously worked with the Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC) as the Deputy Director for Education and Research, and at the AFL-CIO's Organizing Department as a Senior Lead Researcher. Sara is an Arizona native and was part of the Arizona AFL-CIO's efforts around workers' compensation reform and a leader in the Ironworkers' Union's campaign to organize rebar workers in the Southwest. She received her Master's in Public Policy from UT Austin and worked with the Partnership for Working Families (PWF) affiliate organization located in Denver, CO. She has extensive experience in the construction industry working with planning and economic development processes in the western U.S. Sara is passionate about immigrant rights and economic justice.



## **Sarah David Heydemann.**

Sarah David Heydemann works to advance the Center's workplace justice agenda to ensure that women can enjoy full security, equality and dignity at work. She engages in state and federal policy advocacy and litigates on issues such as sexual harassment, equal pay, and pregnancy discrimination. Most recently, Sarah practiced union-side labor and employment law at a firm representing unions and workers in litigation in state and federal court as well as in administrative hearings. Before law school, Sarah was an organizer with, among others, the National Guestworker Alliance, DC Jobs with Justice, and UNITE-HERE Local 25, leading campaigns to support low-wage workers across multiple industries. Sarah earned her B.A. in English from Georgetown University, where she organized on behalf of campus workers, and her law degree from Northeastern University School of Law in 2016. While at Northeastern she organized the Northeastern Employment and Labor Law Alliance, and received a Peggy Browning Fund Fellowship. She was also among the first class of recipients of the Michael Weiner Scholarship for Labor Studies from the MLB Players Trust. Sarah serves on the founding committee of Radfund, a social justice giving circle. She is also a member of the steering committee of the National Lawyers Guild Labor and Employment Committee, and represents the committee on the NLG's National Executive Board.



## **Shaine Madelaine Griffin.**

Shaine Griffin is the Los Angeles-based Organizer for SAG-AFTRA's Ads Go Union campaign; a grassroots initiative meant to grow Union commercial opportunities. For the past six months, Shaine has been leading the charge on all strike actions, picketing and leafleting in southern California amassing around 1000 members at each event. Shaine's focus is primarily on member activation and mobilization as well as outreach and education in the Content Creator space. Before working at SAG-AFTRA, Shaine was an organizer for the California Nurses Association where she was based primarily in Southern California. Shaine has a Masters in Social Work, with a focus both on clinical as well as community organizing.



## Shanika Holder-White.

Shanika Holder-White started her professional career as an early educator and worked in that field relentlessly for 10 years. As a single mother of 3 only making \$12.50 an hour, she worked a 2nd job as a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) to make ends meet. She became a union member with 1199 SEIU as a PCA worker and quickly became involved with fighting for worker justice and policies that enabled care workers to feel safe and respected while working in clients' homes. It didn't take too long after being involved in my union for me to fall in love with social justice work. She participated in various actions, political canvassing and campaigns to win justice for working people. After 2 years of working with SEIU, she became an organizer with the MECEU campaign with the American Federation of Teachers. She spent 3 years fighting for salaries and benefits that matched the education and

training requirements for early educators, and the right to unionize. She was promoted to an internal organizer role, planning walk-ins, bargaining for better contracts, organizing and training a member base of over 7000 inner city public school teachers with the Boston Teachers Union. She currently serves as the Deputy Director for Organizing in the South for United for Respect. She loves the work she does and enjoys working with such an innovative organization to tip the scale of power and bring change to those who need it most.



## Taylor House.

My name is Taylor House and I'm a Union Representative with Teamsters Local 117. I come from a union strong family and am a 3rd generation Teamster. Since I was in elementary school my memories at strike lines and leafleting are just as vivid as holidays and family vacations. I have been on staff with the local for about 3 years and in the roles as a union rep for almost a year now.

The shift in the labor movement and the next generation of advocates for working people are what excite me and what I look forward to talking more about in this Emerging Leaders Cohort.

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