



NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD



DISORIENTATION HANDBOOK

A Guide to Becoming a People's Lawyer



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Practice Being a People's Lawyer!

You have unlimited possibilities to better society through your practice of law. Each of you is unique in how you can apply your talents, skills, and creative energies to find ways to use the law to advance justice. If you are like most incoming law students you probably will hear that attorneys cannot mix activism with the practice of law. Your law school experience may reinforce this notion. The purpose of this Disorientation Handbook is to provoke you to challenge traditional notions of how one must practice law and to suggest ways to make your years of study more enriching and challenging. The National Lawyers Guild strongly recommends that you begin your work as a “people’s lawyer” while in law school.

Your most important lessons are going to come through your interactions with the people—and causes—you represent. The most significant preparation you will need in practice is not the careful analysis of the argument of the opposition, as necessary as that is. What is decisive in preparation is knowing your own people and, out of your relationship with them, coming to understand their think-

ing, their analysis of the problems facing them, and their perception of the solution, of what must be done. Avoid the pitfalls that so many lawyers often fall into. Most new lawyers feel that the problems involved are strictly legal and, because they know the law, they have the answers to the problems and know what to do. Consequently, they do not listen to the people involved. And time after time, by focusing so strongly on the legal issues, these attorneys miss the actual problems and fail to develop the approaches really required.

The test for a people’s lawyer is not always the technical winning or losing of the formal proceedings. The real test is the impact of the legal activities on the morale and understanding of the people involved in the struggle. No matter how experienced, clever, and resourceful a lawyer may be, the most important element is still the informed support and active participation of the people involved. Without this, a legal victory has very little meaning indeed.

—Arthur Kinoy (1920-2003), NLG attorney



NLG Legal Observers attend an action in Ferguson, MO in 2014 (Photo: Cece McGuire)

History of the National Lawyers Guild

In 1937, progressive lawyers established the National Lawyers Guild as the first national integrated bar association and an alternative to the American Bar Association. For over eight decades, NLG has been the most extensive network of public interest and human rights legal activists in the United States.

As a radical legal organization, the NLG supported causes unpopular with government and business interests. NLG lawyers provided assistance to FDR's New Deal and his effort to reform the Supreme Court, helped organize the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and drafted model labor and social security legislation. As an organization, the NLG was in favor of unemployment insurance, labor relations acts, and civil rights legislation. NLG lawyers fought racial discrimination in cases such as *Hansberry v. Lee*, the case

that struck down segregationist Jim Crow laws in Chicago. In the late 1940s and 1950s, NLG members founded the first national plaintiffs personal injury bar association, which became the American Trial Lawyers Association (ATLA), and pioneered storefront law offices for low-income clients, which became the model for the community-based offices of the Legal Services Corporation.

During the McCarthy era, NLG members represented the Hollywood Ten, the Rosenbergs, and thousands of victims of anticommunist attacks. Unlike all other national civil liberties groups and bar associations, the NLG refused to require "loyalty oaths" of its members; it was therefore labeled "subversive" and targeted by the US Justice Department. The NLG was openly critical of the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover, who ordered covert actions against the NLG—including several burglaries of the NLG office.

The NLG further attracted FBI attention when it drafted a report on FBI surveillance practices in 1949, showing the FBI was engaged in warrantless wiretapping, illegal mail covers, and warrantless entries. The NLG's criticisms of the FBI infuriated Hoover and led to decades of harassment and repression.

The NLG's targeting by Hoover and McCarthy led to such a decline in membership that the future of the organization was uncertain. However, by the 1960s, membership grew once again as the organization took up the struggle for civil rights. The NLG set up offices in the South and organized thousands of volunteer lawyers and law students to support the civil rights movement long before the federal government or other bar associations. NLG members represented the families of murdered civil rights activists and defended thousands of civil rights activists who were arrested for exercising basic rights. Cases initiated by NLG lawyers established new federal constitutional protections in ground-breaking Supreme Court cases such as *Dombrowski v. Pfister*, which enjoined thousands of racially motivated state court criminal prosecutions; *Goldberg v. Kelly*, the case that established the concept of "entitlements" to social benefits that require Due Process protections; and *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, which held municipalities liable for brutal police officers.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970, the NLG members continued to provide legal support to emerging social movements. NLG members represented Vietnam War draft resisters, antiwar activists, the Chicago 7 after the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention, and GIs who opposed the war. NLG members also defended FBI-targeted members of the Black Panther Party, the American Indian Movement, and the Puerto Rican independence movement.



Arthur Kinoy being dragged from the hearing room of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1966.

and helped expose illegal FBI and CIA surveillance, infiltration, and disruption tactics detailed in the 1975-76 COINTELPRO hearings that led to enactment of the Freedom of Information Act. NLG members argued *U.S. v. U.S. District Court*, the Supreme Court case that established that Nixon could not ignore the Bill of Rights in the name of “national security” and led to the Watergate hearings. The NLG defended prisoners who protested the conditions at Attica and provided legal counsel to the Wounded Knee occupation when the Oglala Sioux asserted their sovereignty.

By the 1980s, the priorities of the NLG shifted as new social movements came to the forefront. Members joined the struggle for recognition of the United Farm Workers, supported movements for LGBTQ rights, and provided legal assistance to the anti-nuclear struggle. NLG lawyers pioneered the “necessity defense,” and began challenging the use of nuclear weapons under international law, eventually resulting in the World Court declaration that nuclear weapons violate international law. During this period, the NLG published the first major work on sexual orientation and the law, as well as the first legal practice manual on the HIV/AIDS crisis.

In 1989, the NLG prevailed in a lawsuit against the FBI for illegal political surveillance of legal activist organizations. The suit, which had been filed in 1977, revealed the extent to which the government had been spying on the NLG. Since 1941, the FBI had used over 1,000 informants to report on NLG activities, disrupt Guild meetings and conferences, and infiltrate policy-making bodies of chapters and the national organization. Under the 1989 settlement, the FBI turned over copies of roughly 400,000 pages of its files on the NLG, which are now available at the Tamiment Library at New York University.

In the 1990s, NLG members mobilized opposition to the Gulf War, defended the rights of Haitian refugees escaping from a U.S.-sponsored dictatorship, and



The Committee to Assist Southern Lawyers, c. 1963. The Committee depended heavily on the work of young law students to ease the immense burden of civil rights cases filed by just a handful of Southern attorneys. During the first summer, at least 65 NLG attorneys went south to support the increasingly bold and dangerous work of CORE, SNCC, and the SCLC. From left: Len Holt, William Goodman, Denise Kessler, Joe Jordan, Ed Dawley and Emma Gregory.

began to define a new civil rights agenda that includes the right to employment, education, housing, and health care. As a founding UN-NGO, the NLG participated in the 50th anniversary of the UN and NLG members authored the first reports that detailed U.S. violations of international human rights standards. The Guild established the NLG National Police Accountability Project to address the issue of widespread police violence and played an active role in opposing NAFTA and in facilitating and supporting the growing global justice movement. NLG members were playing an active role in encouraging cross-border labor organizing and in exposing the abuses in the maquiladoras on the U.S.-Mexico Border.

As the 21st century began, the NLG was partnering with global justice, environmental, animal rights, racial justice, and information activists, as well as whistleblowers, anarchists, and Muslims targeted by the U.S. government. The NLG joined with environmental groups to oppose numerous harmful pipelines projects, supported cases against surveillance by the National Security Agency and the US Army, and engaged in many other projects

that directly challenged government and corporate practices. NLG members lobbied Congress and worked with the House Judiciary Committee in an effort to repeal the worst aspects of the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act. Members also filed the first challenges against the use of military tribunals and the detention of prisoners from Afghanistan.

NLG members defended protestors falsely charged in response to their political organizing. The NLG Mass Defense committee created the Green Scare Hotline—a legal resource for activists being targeted by police or the FBI as well as the AnNLG project dedicated to defending hacktivists. When Occupy encampments spread across the country in 2011, the NLG was on hand to offer legal support. After the election of Donald Trump, the NLG assisted with the organization of legal support for the massive protests on inauguration day, and worked with the over 200 people mass arrested by DC police on Jan. 20.

In recent years, the NLG has continued its long tradition of partnering with BIPOC movements. NLG members provided legal support nationwide when protests erupted after the continual killing of Black people by the police, most



Law Strikes Back rally organized by the NLG at Foley Square in NYC in response to the election of Donald Trump

notably in Ferguson, Baltimore, Charlotte, NYC, Louisville, and Minneapolis. NLG members traveled to Standing Rock and helped form the Water Protector Legal Collective, which provides ongoing assistance to those arrested for their resistance to oil pipelines. Through formal resolutions, the NLG membership voted to support the abolition of prisons and police. In 2018, the NLG endorsed the nationwide prison strike and contributed to legal support in the aftermath. When the Trump administration began targeting immigrants and other marginalized communities, NLG members organized courthouse demonstrations across the country in a day of "Law Strikes Back" actions. The NLG supported anti-fascist counter-demonstrators who challenged the increasing number of white supremacist groups and rallies. In 2020, the NLG Mass Defense Program played a central role after the police murder of George Floyd, providing legal assistance to 20,000 arrestees during the uprising. NLG staff and members set up legal and jail support hotlines across the country, provided training and education to thousands of organizers and attorneys, and assisted activists targeted by federal prosecution and grand jury investigations. The NLG continues to support abolitionist movements, most recently by challenging the repression of activists working with the #StopCopCity movement

centered in Atlanta.

From the beginning, the NLG has been consistently active on the international front as well. In the 1940s, NLG lawyers fought against fascists in the Spanish Civil War and World War II and helped prosecute Nazis at Nuremberg. The NLG was one of the nongovernmental organizations selected by the U.S. government to officially represent the American people at the founding of the United Nations in 1945. Members helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and founded one of the first UN-accredited human rights NGOs in 1948, the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL). The NLG supports self-determination for Palestine, opposed apartheid in South Africa at a time when the U.S. Government still labeled Nelson Mandela a "terrorist," and began the ongoing fight against the blockade of Cuba. In the 1980s, spurred by the need to represent Central American refugees and asylum activists fleeing U.S. sponsored "terror" in Nicaragua and El Salvador, the NLG National Immigration Project began working systematically on immigration issues. The NLG exposed the illegality of U.S. intervention in Central America that became even more widely known as the "Iran-Contra" scandal. In the 21st century, NLG members continued to support social justice struggles internationally, regularly sending delegations to Gaza to document

Israeli atrocities, monitoring elections in Haiti, Venezuela, and Honduras, holding "People's Tribunals" to highlight injustices in Brazil, the Philippines, and Mexico, and coordinating with progressive legal groups in Cuba, South Korea, Japan, and Puerto Rico.

Unlike many other bar associations, the NLG's mission and work has been openly and proudly anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-fascist, and anti-imperialist. Through its membership of thousands of legal activists organized through 20+ national committees, 65+ local chapters, and 125+ law school chapters, the NLG continues to fight for the rights of people and ecosystems to be held more sacred than profit.

For more on the NLG's history, visit the interactive timeline on the website (nlg.org).

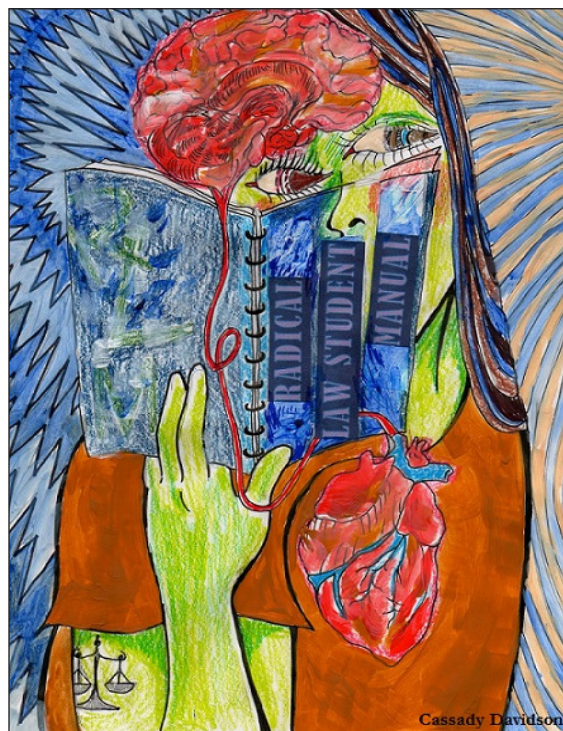
NLG Radical Law Student Project

It has become a truism that many are drawn to law school initially to further social justice, only to end up working in areas of the law that have little potential to serve these ideals. The most common reason cited for this is economic: the average law student now emerges into practice with well over \$150,000 in debt. However, this is not the only factor. In most universities, the culture and pedagogy of legal education tend to emphasize commercial law over public interest fields and the intellectual pressure of law school undermines student's commitment to their ideals. Very often students feel very little support within the institution, and a subtle pressure to abandon the political and moral values that informed their decision to pursue law in the service of the people.

In order to combat these trends, the National Lawyers Guild has initiated the Radical Law Student Project, which includes a collaborative Radical Law Student Manual (RLSM) outlining organizing campaigns undertaken by NLG students as well as a growing faculty network of NLG scholars. The RLSM builds on the NLG Disorientation Manual by presenting an extended analysis of contemporary legal education as well as concrete strategies to change the culture of law school using examples from other students who have successfully fought for improvements in their institutions. Topics covered include the dominant legal career narrative, the psychological effects of law school, teaching and grading practices, barriers to legal education, tuition increases, law student debt, radical faculty and curriculum, contemplation and the law, starting and reviving NLG chapters, and advice for life as a new lawyer.

The Radical Law Student Project (RLSP) is designed as a tool to change law school culture from the inside out. We start from the assumption that the current practices of legal education can be challenged and improved through the organization and determination of students and their allies. We identify the structures and unspoken assumptions that maintain the elite and conservative nature of law schools, and by extension, of the law itself. The belief that legal education can and must change is a radical assertion. The overall effect of being in law school is to isolate students from their values and from each other and to re-frame social, ethical, and political issues in the dry and obtuse language of the law. We challenge this version of law school and offer analyses and tools to create a new kind of legal education—one that will teach how law can be used for the benefit of people over property.

Changing the practices, pedagogy, and expectations of law school in order to transform the culture of legal education will not be an easy process. Remember that you are not alone! The NLG offers a nationwide community of lawyers, law students, legal workers, and scholars who can



assist you in changing the conditions at your law school. Our experience comes directly from the research and organizing of other NLG law students and faculty, who can support your efforts to make similar changes at your law school.

To learn more about the NLG's legal education initiatives, please email NLG Director of Research and Education Traci Yoder at traci@nlg.org. You can read the entire Radical Law Student Manual online at nlg.org/radical-law-student-project/

Further suggested reading:

A Handbook for Social Justice Activists Thinking about Law School by Nikki Demetria Thanos

For Those Considering Law School by Dean Spade

Letter to a Law Student Interested in Social Justice by Bill Quigley.



■ Lewis and Clark NLG and BLSA on the 2016 NLG Day of Action to Support the Movement for Black Lives.

Students in the NLG

Law students currently represent one-third of the NLG's membership and carry out a substantial amount of the programmatic work done in the name of the NLG. NLG students continually pour new ideas and energy into the entire organization and bring their experiences from other contemporary movements for social change to their NLG work. They represent both one of the most active elements of the present NLG as well as, literally, the future of the NLG.

Law students take part in every level of decision-making in the organization and, since law students were admitted into the NLG in 1970, they have consistently pushed for various kinds of organizational change and development. Law students have been at the forefront of efforts to integrate an anti-racist and abolitionist perspective into NLG work and make us more accountable to allied communities.

The NLG organizes on various levels and each aspect of the NLG is open to your input and ideas. Here's a brief outline of the different ways law students fit into the NLG's overall structure:

At the Law School Level:

At the majority of law schools in the country you can find an NLG presence, challenging the rest of the law school to "disorient" themselves, think outside the box, and, above all else, organize. You should seek out the NLG chapter at your school as soon as possible. If the chapter is inactive, talk to affiliated students about getting it going again and use the advice given in this handbook for starting a new chapter. The National Office can also help you with organizing resources and recruitment ideas.

Student chapters are widely recognized as crucial to much of the NLG work that happens from year to year. Because chapter members see each other so often, ideas for and implementation of projects are often discussed and planned at length—creating an environment that is more conducive to coming up with a well-organized and dynamic program than if most of the communication was over email or the phone. This helps form some of our tightest-knit chapters that can mobilize quickly and efficiently around issues. For these and other reasons student chapters have

proven to be one of the National Lawyers Guild's greatest strengths.

At the Local Level:

The NLG can be an inroad to relationships with the progressive lawyers, legal workers, and jailhouse lawyers in your area. If there is an active chapter in your area, get in touch! Many chapters have ongoing programs that you can get involved with. Some students serve on the steering committee or board of the local chapter as a representative from their law school chapter. Others primarily work with the local chapter, participating in designing, or coordinating their programs. Meeting the attorneys and legal workers active in the local chapter could prove invaluable to your legal education; this could be your source of mentors, volunteer opportunities, future job prospects, not to mention a fountain of wealth for your political and social life.

If there isn't an active chapter in your area, chances are that there are NLG members near you waiting to be contacted. Contact the National Office to find them, then search them out and start organizing with them!

At the Regional Level:

The NLG is divided geographically into nine regions: Far West, Northwest, TexOma, Midwest, Southwest, Mideast, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern. A Regional Representative, elected by the region's members, represents each geographic area. Every spring each region holds a regional conference that students are often very active in planning. These conferences will be instrumental in meeting and forming relationships with your future comrades, colleagues, and maybe even co-counsels across your state and in the surrounding states. Students are also eligible to serve as Regional Representatives!

At the National Level:

Organizing happens on many different fronts at the national level. The national student network operates as a "student caucus" that meets formally once a year at the National Convention. The caucus elects two Student National Vice Presidents (SNVPs) who serve a two-year term and represent the students to the National Executive Committee (NEC).

The national student email list, as well as the strong personal connections made at regional and national meetings allow the chapters to coordinate as a national network. NLG students also coordinate for national actions: every year in March, student chapters from across the country hold simultaneous events that call for the abolition of the prison-industrial complex in our national student Week of Abolition. Student chapters hold press conferences, have speakers and speak-outs, and educate their fellow classmates by tabling or fliering the school. Other student-led projects include the NLG Radical Law Student Project and days of action against rising student debt. In addition to attention-grabbing national actions, chapters support each other across state lines by sharing resources, strategies, and action plans that worked for their chapter.



University of North Carolina NLG students in 2019

The national committees provide various opportunities for you to be active nationally and work with the experts in the areas of law that interest you. From the mass defense committee to the Labor and Employment Committee, there is a niche for you! The committees all have email lists (some have several if they have sub-committees or working groups) and meet in person annually at the National Convention and sometimes in other locations throughout the year. Many operate their own websites and some even have paid staff persons. Each committee has a chair that you can contact about getting involved; this information is on the NLG's website (www.nlg.org). For descriptions of each committee, see the end of this manual.

There is a national office in New York City that operates as the administrative wing of the organization, produces the publications, plans the National Convention with the host chapter, handles the finances, and helps network all the various levels, committees, projects, and people of the organization. The NLG Director of Research and Education works at the National Office and is in touch with all the student chapters, committees, and members of the NEC and can help you navigate the different levels of the NLG, answer your questions, and provide support!

At the International Level:

That's right—it doesn't stop with the national level. The NLG is a member of several progressive international legal coalitions and NLG members attend these meetings across the globe. Our International Committee is especially active. We have sent delegations to the Middle East, Haiti, Cuba, Honduras, Venezuela, and Mexico (to name just a few countries) and students have been launched into exciting, cutting edge legal work through their participation.

Get Involved!

There are so many paths the NLG can offer. What other legal organization can provide you with a life-long series of amazing opportunities on top of campus, local, national, and international communities to call home? Join the NLG and join thousands of radical, committed individuals who are using the law in creative ways to build and strengthen the movement for justice. To officially become a member, just go to nlg.org/join and become a part of the most progressive legal network around!

—Traci Yoder,
Director of Research & Education

Getting Critical

By this point in your school reading, you may be wondering how it is possible that most every professor clings to the notion of the law as a neutral, objective force that is the embodiment of justice. In fact, there are exceptions. Most law schools these days have at least one critical theorist on the faculty. The professor may be a critical legal scholar, a critical race theorist, a feminist legal theorist or a critical queer theorist.

Critical Legal Studies (CLS) has been called a movement, a political location, and a method, among other things. Whatever its appellation, CLS has become a recognized area of study among law students and professors. CLS contends that the law is shaped by the political and moral beliefs of the lawmakers. CLS seeks to show how the legal order systematically reflects, generates and reinforces poverty and class inequity as well as sexism, homophobia, racism, and more. This method of criticism has its roots in the deconstructionist movement in philosophy.

In a similar fashion, Critical Race Theorists argue that the “objective” view of a judge is merely the judge’s privileged ability to protect their subjective understanding as the understanding of all people. As the vast majority of judges are affluent, white cis men, CRT argues that this privileged viewpoint ignores the experiences and interests of marginalized people. There is also a movement within CRT against the intellectual deconstructionism of CLS in favor of pursuing the more immediate need for positive rights legislation.

Feminist Legal Theory criticizes the “male voice” of the law. It starts with the premise that the law is created and taught in a voice that is rigid, limited and without emotion. In particular, the use of precedent perpetuates patriarchal, colonial white supremacy. Because the Constitution was written by men and has, for the most part, been interpreted by men, reliance on historical precedent is bound to benefit men first. This has been particularly criticized in the areas of sexual violence law, pornography regulation, and reproductive rights.

Finally, a new group has recently appeared in the field of Critical Studies.

Queer theory builds upon feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self, and upon queer studies’ close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities. The theory’s goal is to destabilize identity categories, which are designed to identify the “sexed subject” and place individuals within a single restrictive sexual orientation.

Transgender theory emphasizes the importance of physical embodiment in gender and sexual identity. Transgender theory integrates this embodiment with the self and socially constructed aspects of identity through the lived experiences of those with intersecting identities.



Angela Davis and NLG member Doris Walker arrive at Santa Clara Court for the first day of Davis’ trial on murder charges and aborted escape of George Jackson, 1972.

Thus, it provides a theoretical basis for reconciling feminist and queer theoretical scholarship with social work practice and advocacy, with regard not only to issues of working with transgender people but also to larger issues of group identity and social oppression.

The following is a partial listing of published critical legal scholars. They are categorized for the sake of convenience, but the work of many of them focuses on the intersection between two or more bases for oppression:

On queer/trans studies: Gabriel Arkes, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Leslie Feinberg, Michel Foucault, Rosemary Hennessy, Robert McRuer, Scott Morgensen, Jose Esteban Munoz, Jay Prosser, Jasbir Puar, Derek Rosenblum, Eve Sedgwick, Dean Spade, Eric Stanley, Susan Stryker, *Gender and Sexual Identity: Transcending Feminist and Queer Theory* by Julie Nagoshi, Craig Nagoshi, and Stephan/ie Brzuzy.

On race and ethnicity: the works of Robin Barnes; Derrick Bell; Stephen Carter; Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado; Angela Harris; Alex Johnson; Emma Jordan; Kenneth Kalst; Mary Matsuda; Shelby Steele; Patricia Williams; Iris Marion Young; and *Strangers From Different Shores*, edited by Ronald Takaki.

On feminism and essentialism: the works of Leslie Bender; Naomi Cahn; Kimberle Crenshaw, Diana Fuss; Angela Harris; Catherine MacKinnon; Mari Matsuda; Martha Minow; Deborah Rhode; Elizabeth Spelman; Patricia Williams; Heather Ruth Wishik; and Iris Marion Young.

And from the general critical legal movement: the works of Peter Gabel; Duncan Kennedy; Mark Tushnet; and *The Politics of Law*, edited by David Kairys.

Changing the Fabric of the Law

What does it mean to work “for the people” when, as people of color, and women of color, we are working within a field disproportionately dominated by white cis men? It means our very presence is an act of resistance.

For people of color in the field of law, we are confronted with a sea of white faces—on both the Left and the Right—who purport to “speak” for us, to “save” us from our communities, and to “save” our communities from themselves. We are “instructed” on who we are and what we should become in order to be the most “effective” advocates of the law. We are “taught” that when we speak out on issues of importance to communities of color, we have “an agenda,” and that the “impartial” legal advocate must be objective and dispassionate when discussing issues of justice and equity. But we know from experience that the law is decidedly not race and gender neutral, and that the legal system in this country was founded on structures that enshrine racism and oppression. The language of the law perpetuates marginalization along the axes of race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, and class. As a result, we often find ourselves challenging professors, fellow students, co-workers—and all too often, our comrades in the movement—calling on them to confront their own racism and other exclusionary practices.

As people of color, we are diverse and have complicated identities; we face discrimination, glass ceilings, sexual harassment, homophobia, classism, and ageism. We uniquely experience the criminalization and incarceration of Brown and Black people in the criminal justice system. For those of us who speak out against oppression, to work in the field of law and take part in the struggle for justice without analyzing race and privilege would be to disconnect ourselves from our histories and our experiences in this society. We challenge the misguided

notion that racism is a problem of the past and that it is our “focus” or “obsession” with race that perpetuates racism. We reject the “color blind” approach to race in the United States for the distorted and deceptive ideology that it is. We are forever mindful of the massive structural change that needs to happen in the law in order for the law to truly represent the people.

In the face of this constant struggle, the experience of being a person of color in the field of law can be alienating, enraging, and isolating—until you realize that you are a part of a movement of other folks of color struggling along side with you, and that with our allies we can push for radical, progressive change in the law, in our communities, and in our own social justice movements.

The United People of Color Caucus (TUPOCC) of the NLG was born out of this resistance—formed out of a pressing need to address issues of race and equality within the organization. As progressive people of color, we bring unique experiences to the Guild. We are motivated by the possibilities of justice and solidarity, and emboldened by the history of our ancestors who taught us to raise our fists and voices against racism and oppression. We are empowered by the reality of a contemporary struggle against racism that is present and real. We are a reminder that the NLG, like all other institutions, must look internally at its own patterns and practices, in order to ensure the social justice ideals we seek to support on a global level are reflected within the organization. We realize that our work together and with our white co-collaborators will only help the Guild increase its capacity to achieve its longtime mission to eradicate racism and the system of oppression that enables it.

—Ranya Ghuma and Renée Sánchez, Guild attorneys and TUPOCC Co-Founders



▮ Pace Law NLG students during the 2015 NLG Black Lives Matter Law Student National Day of Action

Checklist for Starting a New Chapter

- ❑ **Contact the National Office.** Now. They can get you everything you need to get started, as well as list you among the student chapters on the website and put you in touch with NLG contacts in your area so that you can get involved in local activities. It's possible that there are other member students and member professors already on your campus, and the N.O. will help you find them. The N.O. exists for support – it has tons of publications, recruitment resources, and can help you connect with other NLG members. Ask the N.O. to also send you Disorientation Handbooks and other publications for you to hand out at your first meeting or while tabling campus involvement fairs.
- ❑ **Get recognized on campus.** Talk to other student organizations and your school administration to learn what is required of a new student group on campus. If you need to submit a constitution and bylaws to the student bar association or administrators, see the student section of nlg.org or contact the N.O. for samples. If you need a faculty advisor, try your critical studies department (or an equivalent) or ask the N.O. if there's an NLG professor on staff.
- ❑ **Host your first meeting.** Put up fliers with information about the meeting around school and announce it in as many places as you can: school email lists, social networking sites, campus web forums, classroom chalkboards—everywhere! If it's the beginning of the school year, schedule a time during 1L orientation to table for new members—talk up the NLG and plug the first meeting.
- ❑ **Organize around an issue.** See what people want to work on—a campus issue, something in the local community, a national campaign, or NLG programs. Once you find an issue or two, get going! It's important to harness your energy and run with it. Invite people from nearby NLG chapters and committees, and search the web for community organizations, sister legal organizations, and campus groups who are working on these issues to the initial planning meetings: you'll build critical relationships, learn what's already being done, and plot the best ways to support current projects as NLG students. In all things social justice, unity is key.
- ❑ **Communicate.** It is impossible to stress the importance of regular meetings, but realistically, not everyone will make all of them, and not everything will be resolved at them, either. Contact the National Office so we can set up an NLG listserv for your new chapter so that organizing can continue even when you can't all get together.



NLG students tabling at American University in Washington DC

- ❑ **Join the NLG.** Applications are available online and on the last page of this Disorientation Handbook, so have everyone fill one out and send it with their sliding scale dues to the N.O. or to the local staffed chapter if you live in New York City, Michigan, Massachusetts, or in the Bay Area. Los Angeles students join for free as dues are subsidized by LA attorney members.
- ❑ **Get organized.** Once you have a solid group of people, elect or organize your decision-making structure. You can organize your “leadership” or chapter body in whatever way fits best: some chapters elect a President, VP, Secretary, and Treasurer; some chapters have two chairs and several board members that oversee projects; and other chapters adopt a collective model with two contacts chosen to communicate with and receive notices from the Regional Representativess, National Office, and other NLG entities. Your chapter, your call. Contact the National Office with the names and information of two principal contact people for the new chapter.
- ❑ **Get what's coming to you.** Law schools earmark thousands of dollars for student groups and activities. Once you're official, talk to your school administration about setting up a budget and securing funds for all your plans. Also look into funding for travel to the NLG's national and regional conventions. And don't forget to ask established student groups for tips—there are almost always tricks to the process.

Work For the NLG This Summer!

Over five decades of Haywood Burns Fellowships

The Haywood Burns Memorial Fellowships for Social and Economic Justice emerged from the NLG's established tradition of providing legal, political and educational support to the important progressive movements of the day. In 1964, the NLG, working with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, sent lawyers and law students south to provide legal support for the emerging Civil Rights Movement in what became known as the Mississippi Summer. In late 1972, New York State indicted 62 prisoners who survived the police assault at the Attica Prison. None of the police officers were indicted despite detailed reports of excessive force. In 1973, the Committee was formed in part to respond to this situation. The Summer Projects Committee sent law students to assist on the defense of the Attica Brothers, to support the growing farmworker struggles in California and to support Native American treaty rights in the Pacific Northwest.

Over the years, the Summer Projects Committee has expanded to fund the work of hundreds of students at organizations that are working to protect and further the civil and criminal rights of oppressed people in the United States. In 1996 the program was re-named the Haywood Burns Memorial Fellowships for Social and Economic Justice after the death of Haywood Burns, long-time radical lawyer, law professor, and NLG president.

Although providing legal work under the direction of their attorney-organizers is still important, the primary mission of the Summer Projects is to strengthen the students' long-term commitment to promote justice and equality.



Haywood Burns speaking to the media outside Roosevelt Hospital, October 1971. Emerging from the recovery room where H. Rap Brown was supposedly recuperating from a gunshot wound, Burns refused to say whether the patient he saw was or was not Brown.

On Being a Haywood Burns Fellow:

Jilisa Milton, Fellow at Equal Justice Initiative
Current NLG National Vice President

Being a Haywood Burns Fellow in 2018 was one of the most impactful ways the NLG supported me as a Black, feminist, southern movement activist trying to find my way as a law student at the University of Alabama School of Law.

Melissa Bond, Fellow at Sylvia Rivera Law Project

My level of client interaction was invaluable. I coordinated communication between clients and other nonprofit groups; such communication skills are not taught in the classrooms. I'm glad that I was able to transcend the "academy" this summer.

JML Santiago, Fellow at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services Employment Opportunity Project

Current NLG Interim Executive Director

The Haywood Burns Fellowship afforded me the opportunity to not only do impactful legal work that I have carried with me throughout my experience as a practicing attorney, but it also gave me access to a cohort of passionate advocates that inspire me to this day.

Applying for Fellowships

Application information on the summer Fellowships will be posted on the NLG website each year in November.

Check www.nlg.org/fellowships for more information on the Fellows, the history of the Fellowships and upcoming due dates.

Email traci@nlg.org for more information.

Student Week of Abolition

Following the NLG Law for the People Convention in October 2015, NLG membership adopted a resolution calling for “the dismantling and abolition of all prisons and of all aspects of systems and institutions that support, condone, create, fill, or protect prisons.” In honor of this resolution, in 2016 the NLG expanded our annual Student Week Against the Death Penalty to become the Week Against Mass Incarceration (WAMI). In 2023, NLG students decided to change the theme again to “Week of Abolition” to reflect our evolving political commitments. Each year, we ask NLG law school and local chapters to organize events and actions on the topic of mass incarceration and its effects. NLG chapters have organized interactive workshops, community discussions, film screenings, tabling, letter writing campaigns, banner drops, visits to incarcerated youth, and panels on topics such as solitary confinement, school to prison pipeline, immigration detention, transformative justice, and alternatives to incarceration.

The NLG is currently engaged in unique and innovative efforts nationwide to alleviate some of the harm inflicted by the prison-industrial complex and immigration regime. NLG initiatives include the national NLG Mass Incarceration Committee, the *Guild Notes* column, “Beyond Bars: Voices from NLG Jailhouse Lawyers,” and the Jailhouse Lawyer Manual. NLG members are involved in various initiatives opposing policing, criminalization, solitary confinement, the drug war, capital punishment, and new prison construction. The NLG members and projects supported the 2016 and 2018 National Prison Strikes. The National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIPNLG) is a

national non-profit organization that promotes justice and equality of treatment in all areas of immigration law, the criminal justice system, and policies related to immigration. The NLG National Police Accountability Project (NPAP) is a non-profit dedicated to ending law enforcement abuse through legal action and educational programming.

In 2020, NLG membership resolved to support the abolition of policing and the 2021 WAMI focused on “Prison Abolition and Beyond,” to include all locations and instances in which people are held against their will, including jails, immigration detention, juvenile detention facilities, psychiatric wards, and more. We also intend the “beyond” to include consideration of the abolition of policing as part of the larger mass incarceration system. The NLG is committed to the abolition of police and prisons and NLG students help educate a new generation of legal professionals about the harms of these systems as well as alternatives.

To learn more about incarcerated NLG members, their concerns, and more resources on prison litigation and organizing, please check out the NLG Jailhouse Lawyer website (jailhouselaw.org). The national Week of Abolition will always be the first week of March. Please email NLG Director of Research and Education Traci Yoder at traci@nlg.org to share the events your school plans. Everyone should post flyers, pictures, and event invites on the WAMI Facebook event page and join the conversation on Twitter and Instagram using #EndPrisons and #Decarcerate. Tweet to us @[NLGnews](https://twitter.com/NLGnews)!



Dr. Angela Davis joined the Lewis and Clark NLG's abolition group at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility to talk about prison abolition, collective organizing, and critical resistance. The group meets every other week with youth who are incarcerated to have discussions, bring in guest speakers, and work on projects.

Why Join the NLG?



NLG legal observers at Brooklyn rally to demand ICE out of courts, December 2017. (Photo: Tasha Moro)

The National Lawyers Guild has a long and rich history of supporting movements for social justice. While we are very proud of this history, we are also excited about the new members who will shape the future of the NLG! We need your passion and creativity if we are to continue to adapt in this ever-changing political climate.

Student chapters are usually our most active, and becoming a dues paying member will ensure you have access to all NLG announcements, events, and resources. The network that the NLG provides is integral to the success and sustainability of people's lawyers. NLG student chapters and state/city chapters can provide a radical political community when it can be harder to find in one's own professional lives. Fighting for social justice cannot be done alone. Involvement in the NLG includes students in a nationwide network of progressive legal activists with broad experience in key areas of people's lawyering.

Through the NLG, students have the opportunity to be on the national student email list to connect you with other law students around the nation. On this email list, students share news of what their chapters are working on, along with both successes and struggles. Our network also can prove useful to NLG members in finding jobs, in answering questions about how to proceed in various legal problems, and in learning about opportunities to be involved in movement legal work. The NLG is larger than the sum of its parts—as a whole we hold more power and accomplish more than we could alone!

Here are some further reasons to join! As a NLG member, you receive:

- Access to our members-only job board
- Access to members-only content on nlg.org (e.g. webinars, organizing tools, and other resources)
- Opportunity to propose an NLG webinar or convention programming
- Eligibility to participate in conversations on member-only email lists for NLG committees, chapters, and regions
- Eligibility to vote in Guild elections, run for elected office, and propose organizational resolutions
- Eligibility to apply for fellowships, such the Weinglass and Haywood Burns Memorial Fellowships
- Media exposure for your NLG-related work
- Most importantly, developing connections with a community of radical legal professionals!

Your annual dues help us to sustain the National Office, which allows us to be 100% membership funded, and therefore grassroots and member driven.

Join today at nlg.org/join! Dues are sliding scale for students (with a suggested fee of \$25 annually) and dues waivers are available by contacting NLG Director of Membership Lisa Drapkin at membership@nlg.org.



**“An organization of lawyers, law students, legal workers and
jailhouse lawyers...in the service of the people, to the end that
human rights shall be regarded as more sacred than property
interests.”**

—Preamble to the NLG Constitution

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