

LABOR ARTS

Fifteenth Annual
Clara Lemlich Awards



May 6, 2025 6 – 8 pm
New York Society for Ethical Culture
2 West 64th Street, NYC

Honoring those who
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shadows...
who do what has to be done, again and again.

– Marge Piercy



*“I want to live the rest of my life,
however long or short,
with as much sweetness as I can decently manage,
loving all the people I love,
and doing as much as I can of the work I still have to do.
I am going to write fire until it comes out my ears, my
eyes, my noseholes—everywhere.
Until it’s every breath I breathe.
I’m going to go out like a fucking meteor!”*

— Audre Lorde

2025 PROGRAM

“Ode To Workers” (“Ode To Joy” revisited) and “Rockin’
Solidarity Forever” New York City Labor Chorus

Welcome Audrey Kindred, NY Society for Ethical Culture

MC Rachel Bernstein, Esther Cohen and Ethical Culture students

“A Burst of Light” by Audre Lorde, read by Breena Clarke

Clara Lemlich Michael Miller, Clara Lemlich’s great grandson

Honorees Clare Coss and Blanche Wiesen Cook - introduced by
Elizabeth Lorde-Rollins

Gale Brewer, New York City Council

"Amazing Grace" Lana Crowster

Honoree Rashida Ishmaili introduced by Simba Mafundikwa

Puffin Social Activism Project Gladys and Neal Rosenstein

Honoree Rudean Leinaeng introduced by Chesray Dolpha

Report from the Front Lines Xiomara Loarte, NYC CLC

Honoree Bev Grant introduced by Carolanne Solebello
"Sewing Machine"

Closing remarks Triangle Fire Memorial and Labor Arts

"We Were There" Grant, Solebello and audience

Reception – Food by JungleDom Network and Manousheh Catering

The Clara Lemlich Awards

The Clara Lemlich Awards honor women who have been working for the larger good their entire lives, in the tradition of those who sparked so many reforms in the aftermath of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire over one hundred years ago.

“I’VE GOT SOMETHING TO SAY” shouted the 23-year old Clara Lemlich in her native Yiddish during a tense, crowded meeting of garment workers in Cooper Union’s Great Hall in 1909. Rising from the audience, she interrupted Samuel Gompers and the other union leaders on stage. Her speech inspired the crowd, leading to an unexpected vote to strike, and to what would become known as the Uprising of 20,000.

Born to a Jewish family in Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire), Lemlich migrated to the United States in 1903, found work in the garment industry, and soon became active in the International Ladies' Garment Workers’ Union. The 1909 strike led to reforms, but the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory was a hold-out, and refused to implement safety improvements.

The fire that took 146 lives on March 25, 1911 was seen across the country as a tragedy that could have been avoided, and it sparked a movement that pushed politicians to accept a new notion about the responsibilities of government. Lemlich continued to be active in the labor movement until she was pushed out for her leftist politics. She continued to work for women’s suffrage, led a boycott of butcher shops to protest meat prices, campaigned for unemployment relief, and fought for tenants’ rights.

More than a century later we are proud to celebrate her legacy and honor those who follow with such determination in her footsteps.

2025 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES



Clare Coss is a playwright, psychotherapist and activist, convinced that we have it in our power to create a just and safe world. “As a playwright my tools are character and dialogue, conflict and story. My imagination often leads to women characters who go where the silence is. They are drawn to confront inaction and/or tyranny;

face the challenge to speak and act for justice and dignity.” In 1971 the Berkshire Theatre Festival gave Coss her first full production – *The Star Strangled Banner*, about the U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1848. Her other plays include *Growing Up Gothic* (Theatre for the New City), *The Blessing* (American Place Theatre), *Our Place in Time* (Women’s Project), *Lillian Wald: At Home on Henry Street* (New Federal Theatre), *Dr. Du Bois and Miss Ovington* (New Federal Theatre), and *Emmett, Down in My Heart* (TADA!; Castillo). Her anthology of lesbian love poems, *The Arc of Love* (Scribner), was a Lambda Literary Award Finalist. She is a member The League of Professional Theatre Women, PEN, The Dramatists Guild, and the Columbia University Seminar on Women and Society.



Blanche Wiesen Cook is Distinguished Professor of History and Women’s Studies at John Jay College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her definitive three volume biography of Eleanor Roosevelt was called “monumental and inspirational...[a]

grand biography” by the *New York Times Book Review*. Her 1978 book *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution*, reprinted in 2020, was declared by Joseph Lash “a book that should stay in print forever.”

An extraordinary scholar who is also a feminist, peace and civil rights activist, she played key roles in the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and Peace Action, New York State. For more than twenty years, she produced and hosted her own program for Radio Pacifica, originally called "Activists and Agitators" (later called "Women and the World"). She appears frequently on such programs as *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, C-Span’s *Booknotes*, and *MacNeil/Lehrer*, where she participated in the joint PBS-NBC coverage of the 1992 Democratic National Convention. She met Clare Coss at a WILPF meeting in 1966 and they have been together ever since.



Rashidah Ismaili, poet, playwright and community activist, was born in Dahomey (now Benin) in 1940 and came to New York in 1957. She has taught or presented about African and African American literature and culture at Rutgers University, Hunter College and Wilkes University.

She retired from formal academic life in 1999 after 15 years as a director of the Higher Education Opportunity Program at Pratt Institute.

Supporting African and African American arts and artists, Ismaili was active in the African Literature Association, African Heritage Studies Association, and Caribbean Studies Association,

a board member of WBAI, and a member of Freedom to Write, an advocacy committee of PEN. She is a leader in Pen & Brush, an all women's artists organization, and served for years as chair of the New York W.E.B DuBois Foundation. She organized annual celebrations of Dr. DuBois' birthday and worked closely under the guidance of her mentor, the late Esther Cooper Jackson.

She continues a decades long tradition of conducting *Salon d'Afrique* from her Harlem apartment, gathering African and African diasporic artists and writers. Her book *Autobiography of the Lower East Side* is the first of a projected trilogy *An African Woman in New York*.



Rudean Leinaeng is a chemist, an educator and an anti-apartheid activist who has spent long stretches of her life in Africa. She began her 30-year teaching career at Bronx Community College in 1967, and on sabbatical leave in 1974 she and her two sons moved to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where she taught chemistry and physics to high school students, and become active in the Pan-African movement. Returning to

New York in 1976, she married Pule Leinaeng, a South African refugee from Bloemfontein and an African National Congress (ANC) activist. Together they worked in the anti-apartheid movement, and their Bronx home served as a home-away-from-home for young South African refugees and a meeting place for the ANC in exile.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Leinaeng also became active with Women for Racial and Economic Equality (WREE), a national, multi-racial working class women's organization. She worked on

WREE's boycott of companies that did business in South Africa, US voter registration and education drives, advocacy for 1990-91 US civil rights legislation, and the publication of WREE's Women's Services booklet.

In 1997 Leinaeng resigned her teaching position at Bronx Community College to follow her husband Lee to Bloemfontein, South Africa, where they lived together until Lee's death in 2000. She returns there for several months each year. She is currently an advisor to the Bethel AME Church emergency food pantry in Harlem, where she served as assistant director for many years.



Bev Grant is a musician, photographer, filmmaker, single parent, grandmother and activist. Winner of the 2017 ASCAP Foundation Jay Gorney award, the 2017 Labor Heritage Foundation Joe Hill Award and the 2022 Brooklyn For Peace PathMaker to Peace award, Bev

Grant grew up singing and playing in Portland, Oregon in a band with two of her sisters.

She moved to New York City in 1962 and worked full time as a clerical worker until 2007 while devoting herself to topical songwriting and social activism. She joined New York Radical Women and NY Newsreel (now Third World Newsreel) in 1967. A book of her black and white photographs, *Bev Grant Photography: 1968-1972* (2018) includes documentation of the 1968 Miss America Beauty Pageant protest, the Black Panther Party's free breakfast for children programs and the Moratorium Against the Viet Nam war.

She formed her band The Human Condition in 1971, featured on the Grammy-nominated Best of Broadside collection, and recorded *The Working People Gonna Rise* and *Kulonyaka*. She

was founder and director of the Brooklyn Women's Chorus from 1997 until she retired in 2022, producing two cds. She joined the staff of the UALE Summer School for Working Women in 1991, developing a multi-media women's labor history show. The title song "We Were There" has become an anthem for women in the labor movement. Her most recent album is *It's Personal* (2017). She is currently working on a film documenting her journey as a cultural worker.

CLARA LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES 2011 - 2024

2024

Priscilla Basset *civil rights activist*

Muriel Fox *feminist leader*

Dorthaan Kirk *champion of jazz*

Theodora Lacey *integrating schools and housing*

Estela Vazquez *social justice warrior*

2023

Angela Fontanez *Black and Latino cultural correspondent*

Olive Freud *quality of life activist*

Velma Hill *civil rights and UFT organizer*

Alice Ip *Chinatown union leader*

Barbara Martinsons *Prison reform advocate*

Anita Weisbord* *Holocaust educator* **2022**

Dorothy Burnham *107 year old civil rights activist and educator*

Maria Mazziotto Gillan *people's poet*

Dolores Huerta *labor pioneer*

Jeannette Phillips* *community health leader*

Kathie Sarachild *feminist and abortion rights advocate*

2021

Barbara Dane* *activist singer*

Suleika Cabrera Drinane *advocate for the elderly*

Debby King *union fighter*

Wilhelmina Perry *LGBT convener*

Muriel Tillinghast *movement organizer*

2020

Madeline Anderson *pioneering filmmaker*

Arlene Goldsmith *social worker to the neediest*
Kitty Weiss Krupat *defender of immigrants*
Sister Mary Lanning* *supporter of community members in need*
Gloria Miguel *Spiderwoman theater founder*

2019

Elba Cabrera *legendary supporter of Latino artists*
Philoine Fried* *behind the scenes activist*
Doris Diether* *Greenwich Village housing activist*
Ronnie Eldridge *activist and feminist politician*
Melissa Freeman *Harlem physician, addiction treatment pioneer*

2018

Anne Cunningham *women's rights and affordable housing*
Mirene Ghossein *advocate for Arab-American culture and poetry*
Evelyn Jones Rich *educational and social justice advocate*
Alix Kates Shulman *feminism, literature civil rights*
Doreen Wohl *fighter against hunger*

2017

Aisha al-Adawiya *strengthening the voice of women in Islam*
Vinie Burrows* *actor working for civil rights and peace*
Lidia Correa *community activist and garment union organizer*
Mary Douglas *hospital and hospice volunteer*
Ingrid Frank* *human rights and peace organizer*
Lubow Wolynetz *preserving Ukrainian cultural traditions*

2016

Teresa Chan *Chinatown community organizer*
Etta Dixon *Brooklyn community organizer, dancer, wellness guru*
Bea Klier *climatologist, science educator, women's leadership*
Naomi Replansky* and Eva Kollisch* *literary and cultural creators*

2015

Winifred Armstrong *environmental and economic policy activist*
Julie Azuma *advocate for Japanese Americans and autistic children*
Sylvia Gutierrez Grant* *hospital workers 1199 union organizer*
Lillian Lifflander* *peace activist*
L. Ann Rucker *environmentalist*
Gloria Sukenick* *feminist and tenants' rights organizer*
Mimi Stern-Wolfe* *organizing with music*

2014

Barbara Bailey* *NYC Labor Chorus co-founder*
Marilyn Frankenstein *social justice through mathematics*
Jane Kalmus* *voter registration*
Judy Lerner* *peace and women's rights activist*
Joan Levine and Sarah Martin *environmental community
organizing in West Harlem*
Agnes Wong *Chinatown community and labor activist*

2013

Molly Klopot *lifelong activist for peace and justice*
Natalie Gordon *social worker, NORC advocate*
Lois Gray* *labor scholar, educator and activist*
Glendora Folsom Buell *philosopher, judicial activist*
Julia Rosario Jorge *labor activist*
Marian Thom* *labor activist, bilingual paraprofessional*

2012

Judy West* *jazz singer, tenant organizer*
Jackie Steiner* *musician, anti-fascist activist*
Betty Reardon* *feminist peace educator*
Juanita Nelson* *war tax resister*
Connie Ling* *garment worker organizer*
Connie Hogarth* *agitator for civil rights and the environment*

2011

Kathy Andrade* *pioneer immigrant activist*
Virginia Baron* *still fighting for peace and for women*
Dorothy Burnham *grass roots civic leader*
Monnie Callan* *lifelong union organizer*
Dorothy DeVouse* *defender of parents*
Frances Goldin* *tireless literary agent*
Kathy Goldman* *empowering the poor, feeding the hungry*
Shui Mak Ka* *Chinatown garment worker organizer*
Elaine Katz* *keeping Yiddishkeit alive*
Lillian Kimura* *advocate for WWII internees*
Rebecca Lepkoff* *humanitarian photographer*
Rita Margules* *Clara Lemlich's daughter, housing organizer*
Annie B. Martin* *pioneer chemist, unionist, and activist*
Louise Meriwether *dedicated peacenik, powerful writer*
Charlene Mitchell *peace movement agitator*

Shirley Novick * *centenarian troublemaker*
Ethel Paley* *created patient advocacy organization*
Lillian Pollak* *novelist of radical politics*
Suki Terada Ports *professional AIDS agitator*
Lillie Pope* *educator and activist*
Maria Portalatin* *educator/activist for Latin American rights*
Wendy Rodriguez *parishioner activist*
Marie Runyon* *intrepid tenant leader*
Mary Sansone* *lifelong activist and community organizer*
Maddy Simon* *music and culture orchestrator*
Jessie Taft Smith* *union campaigner*
Sylvia Thompson* *community rabble rouser*
Eleanor Tilson* *feminist healthcare expert*
Ida Torres* *labor stalwart*
Joan Wile* *songwriter and granny militant*

* deceased

SPEAKERS

The **New York City Labor Chorus**, with 50 members representing over 20 labor unions, was founded in 1991. The Chorus promotes union solidarity by expressing through song the history and ongoing struggles of workers for peace and justice. Its dynamic repertoire combines the power and culture of union music with the great gospel, jazz, classical and folk traditions.

Audrey Kindred has been an ethical educator for the Ethical Culture movement for over two decades, developing peace curricula for intergenerational life, families, youth and children. She runs such programs at the New York Society and represents the movement in interfaith contexts on college campuses in NYC and at the United Nations.

Students from the NY Society for Ethical Culture - Djeneba Toure, Inis Chen, Rosanne Lemoigne, Hazel Kaminsky and Adérinsólá Marian Babawale

Esther Cohen writes, teaches, raises money, curates, art directs, and works hard to secure roses for every struggle. A co-founder of Labor Arts, she is author of eight books, most recently of *All of Us: Stories and Poems Along Route 17*. She writes a poem a day at *Overheard*.

Rachel Bernstein, a founder of LaborArts, teaches and writes about public history, and is author, with the late Debra E. Bernhardt, of *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: A Pictorial History of Working People in NYC*.

Breena Clarke is a prize-winning author of four novels, including *Alive Nearby*, her most recent novel. She's co-founder of The Hobart Festival of Women Writers.

Michael Miller is Clara Lemlich's great grandson. He works as a Senior Strategy Analyst at Accenture Federal Services.

Elizabeth Lorde-Rollins M.D., M.Sc. is a poet, a physician and the daughter of Audre Lorde. Her greatest love is practicing medicine in disparate communities.

Gale Brewer represents NYC's 6th Council District. As Manhattan Borough President (2014-2021) she helped pass legislation to add "caregivers" to the City's anti-discrimination law, and remove criminal history questions from initial employment applications (the "Fair Chance Act").

Lana Crowster is a singer, song-writer, producer, band leader and music educator from Cape Town, South Africa. She began her professional career in performance at the tender age of 6. A recent graduate of NYU Steinhardt's Master in Music Business program, Lana has spent more than 20 years working within the global music industry, writing, recording and releasing numerous albums & creative projects.

Simba Mafundikwa was born in New York City to a Guadeloupean mother and Zimbabwean father, and was raised in Zimbabwe, embracing a truly multicultural heritage. Growing up immersed in an eclectic, creative environment surrounded by the arts profoundly shaped his identity and worldview. Simba is an architect currently residing in Seattle Washington.

Gladys Miller-Rosenstein is Executive Director of the Puffin Foundation, and serves on the board of the Teaneck Conservancy, which turned a 46-acre dumpsite into a vital wetlands park featuring artwork created from organic and inorganic waste material from the site.

Neal Rosenstein, son of Puffin founder Perry Rosenstein, has been involved with the Puffin Foundation since its inception and is currently President of the Board, overseeing the Foundation's grant program. He has served on the Board of the Teaneck Creek Conservancy (currently as its Treasurer) since its beginning in 2001.

Chesray Dolpha is a South African-raised theatre maker, director, and storyteller. Her recent credits include *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* on Broadway, *Push Party*, *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine*, *Voices of Gen Z*, *Homecoming*, *Spirit Songs*, and *Memories We've Found*

Xiomara Loarte is community outreach director at the NYC Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, where she focuses on building labor and community partnerships around social and economic justice issues. A first generation Peruvian-American, born and raised in Newburgh, New York, she completed a Master's Degree in Labor Studies from the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies.

Carolanne Solebello is a performing songwriter born and bred in NYC. Her compelling voice and warm acoustic guitar style nod to rural folk traditions while her rhythmic precision and sophisticated phrasing plant her firmly in the urban present. A proud member of AFM Local 1000, Carolann has recorded five solo albums and has won a bunch of songwriting awards.

Food – A warm thank you to the wonderful Simba Sandra Yangala's Performing Arts Company and JungleDom Network and Nour Mohammed and Manousheh Catering

Posters about the honorees are by students from **The Imagine Society**, where young leaders work with adult mentors to help make the world a better place.

Clare Coss poster by Jessica Sarmiento

Blanche Wiesen Cook poster by Hannah Fenton

Bev Grant poster by Kainoa Keo
Student and Resident at Green Hill Juvenile Detention Center

Rashidah Ismaili by Katie Gaffigan

Rudean Leinaeng by Shelby Fenton

TRIANGLE FIRE MEMORIAL

Over a decade in the making, the new Triangle Fire Memorial is one of the few tributes dedicated to workers in the US. It features the names and ages of the fire victims cut out and reflected onto black stoneglass that has been etched with quotes from eyewitnesses to the fire.

A steel Collective Ribbon – created as a collaborative quilting project that was etched into the metal – stretches up the side of the building drawing one’s eyes to the windowsill of the 9th floor, from where many of the victims leapt to their deaths. The ribbon design is reminiscent of mourning bunting placed on buildings at times of public grief. The design has won several awards for its simplicity and beauty.



Visit the memorial at

Washington Place & Greene Street, NYC

Remember the
Triangle Fire
Coalition



www.rememberthetrianglefire.org



THANK YOU !

The fifteenth annual Clara Lemlich Awards are generously funded by the 21st Century ILGWU Heritage Fund and the Puffin Foundation, with contributions from NYU's Tamiment Library and numerous individuals.

They are hosted by LaborArts, the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, and the New York Society for Ethical Culture. They were organized by Rachel Bernstein, Esther Cohen, May Chen, Sherry Kane, and Rose Imperato.

We are delighted to have a new partner in the New York Society for Ethical Culture, and particularly thank Audrey Kindred, Dan Donohue, Ed Beck and all the student activists.

We are thrilled to once again work with Imagine Society youth leaders, and thank Danielle Blumstein for her terrific coordination, and Beiya Tang and other volunteers.

Many thanks to Ruth Sergel, filmmaker extraordinaire; Peter Odabashian, photographer; Raúl Villasboa, videographer; Drew Durniak, LaborArts webmaster; and the New York Labor History Association.

