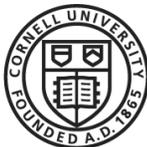
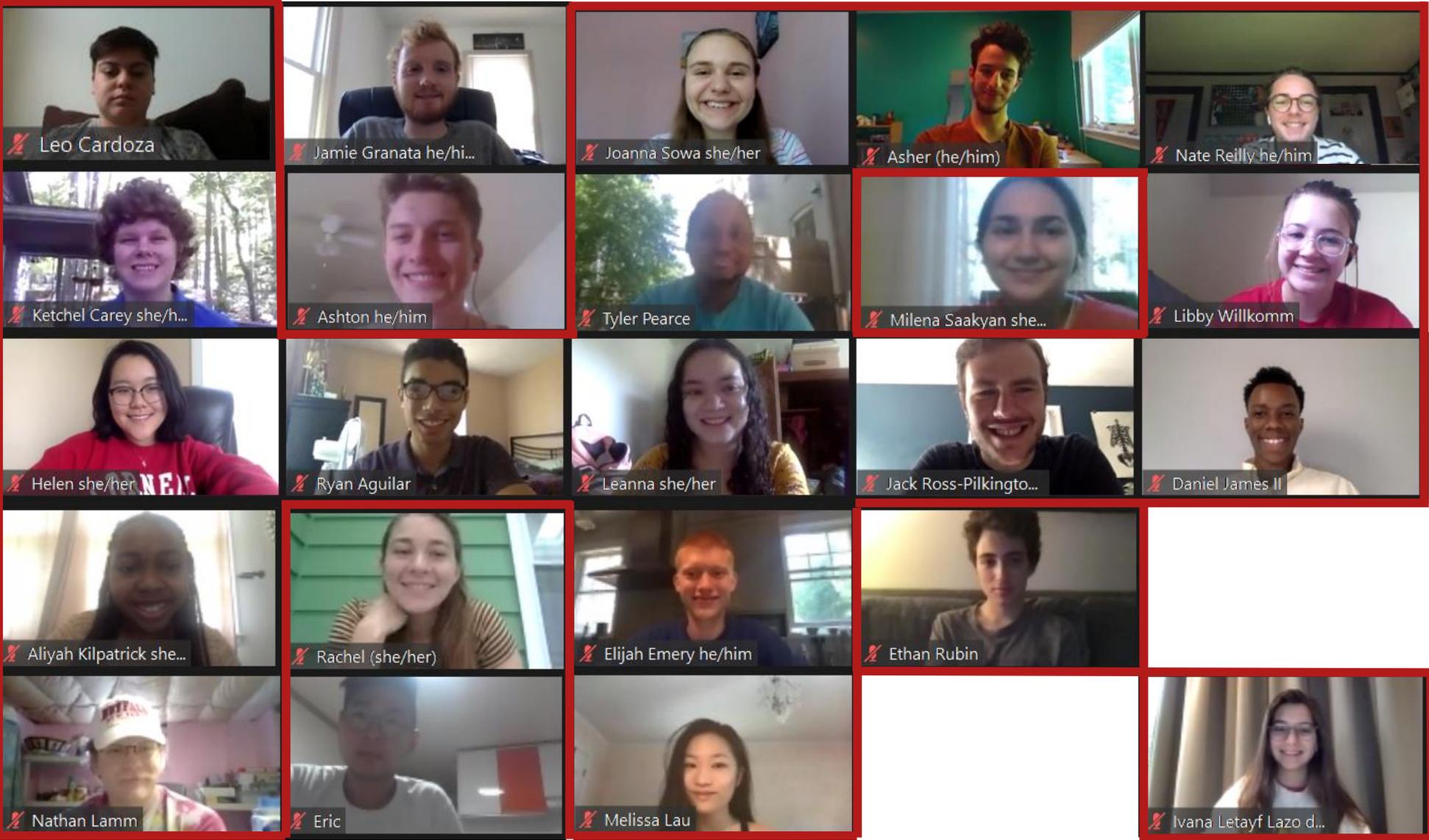


# HIGH ROAD 2020

RECORD



**ILR Buffalo Co-Lab**

# **HIGH ROAD 2020**

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'Leave a Smile, Take a Smile' mural by Nate Reilly

# A High Road Summer to Remember. . . Navigating Without a Road Map



This summer was like no other. COVID-19 mandated a conversion to virtual work. Physically scattered from the Carolinas to California, New Jersey and New York to Idaho, Wisconsin to South Korea, High Road Fellows converged on Buffalo via Zoom across five time zones. We faced the summer with no road map for conducting the program virtually, as the world had no road map for reaching a cure for the coronavirus. We saw an economy shut down, save for essential frontline workers whose exploitative working conditions glared in the spotlight. We launched one week to the day after George Floyd's death, and no road map showed how our country gets closer to its claims of liberty and justice for all. The signposts indicated we have a long, long way to go.

On this journey, students encountered unexpected challenges including the deaths of loved ones, housing instability, the need to care for family members, and increased social isolation. Host organizations, the nonprofit partners who serve the social needs of Greater Buffalo, navigated the pandemic and economic crises with spontaneous mutual-aid collaboration. The urgency of equity matters lit the way like a beacon.

This High Road collective of students, educators, and community partners met the challenges with toughness, creativity and compassion. They formed team bonds and a solidarity spirit in all their work. Individual project goals and group programming were adjusted to fit an online platform, still, the outcomes helped build a better Buffalo, for real, and inspired application to the Fellows' own communities.

Although the past provided no road map for High Road 2020, we were not without the north star of high road values and the guidebook of strong foundational practices of previous years. Key tenants of the High Road include encouraging student involvement in strengthening democratic institutions and supporting community needs. In past summers, students used their free time to be involved with local organizations, attend community speak-outs, and volunteer to support their neighbors in Buffalo.

This year, the Fellowship encouraged students to get involved in their own communities. Over the course of the summer, many students attended protests against systemic racism, two students became certified Legal Observers, and several students campaigned for local elections in their hometowns. In 2020, students took the High Road not in one city, but in many. As Fellows shared actions they were taking to uplift their own communities, their geographical diversity allowed us to learn about grassroots change taking place across the country.

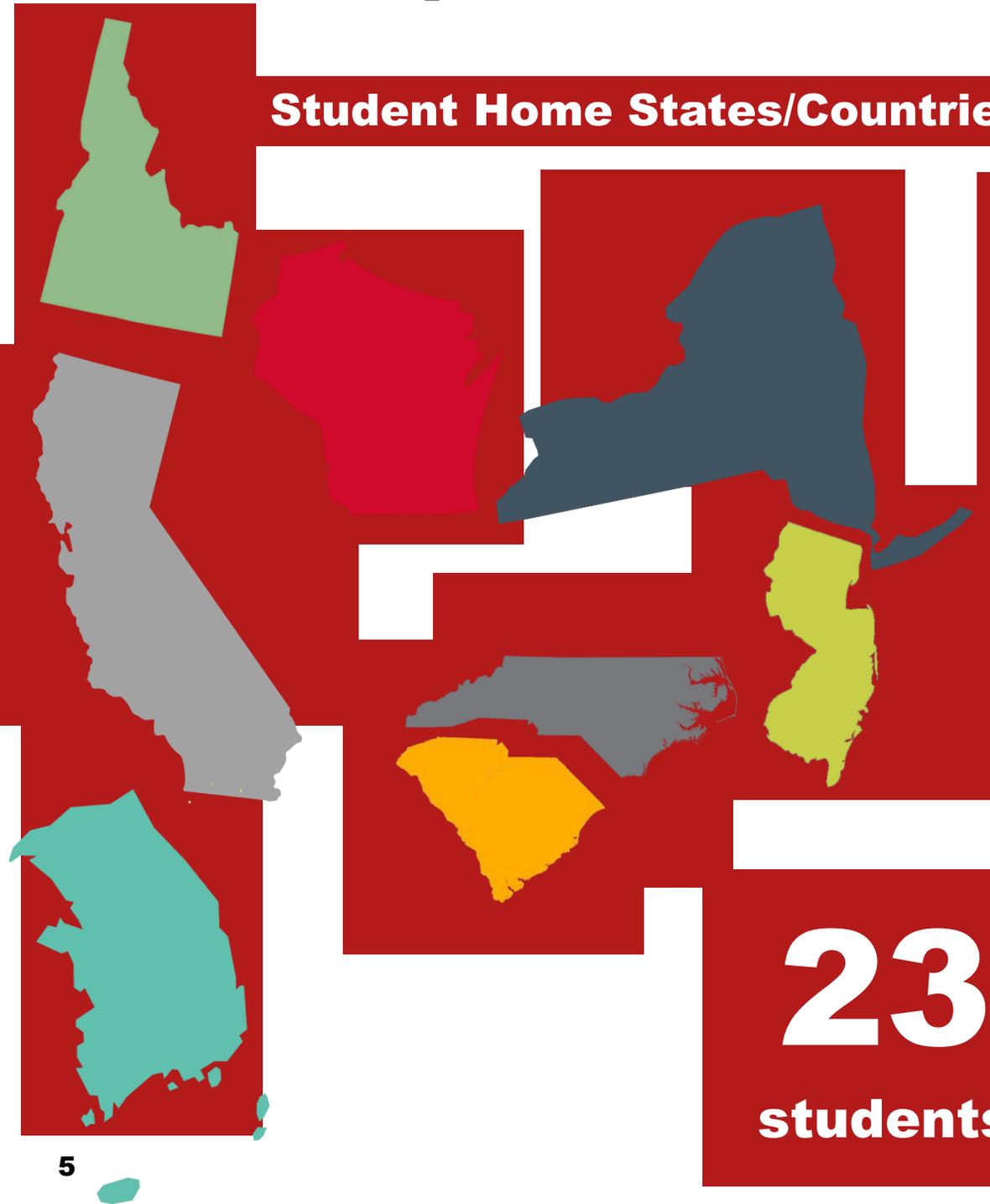
We look forward to the day when we welcome High Roaders back to Buffalo in person. In the meantime, 2020 Fellows and our remarkable community partners proved that "social distance" is not a barrier to solidarity and progress on the High Road toward a more robust democracy and a more equitable economy.

## Innovative modifications to adjust to the reality of 2020 included:

- asynchronous programming and scheduling adjustments for students with competing community and family obligations;
- assistance to partner organizations for productive adjustments to online learning, research, and service;
- greater coordination of varied opportunities for relevant online public/educational workshops and government agency meetings;
- deeper and more shared discussion of Fellow's journaling, self-reflection, and active analysis of daily current events;
- creation of five internal "clusters" of student projects by common themes, each led by a faculty/staff cluster captain who convened weekly work meetings and provided individualized assistance;
- virtual mentoring provided to individual Fellows by Cornell alums through the High Road Advisory Committee;
- increased leadership opportunities through three student committees that guided group activities of graduation, arts inclusion, and student-only game nights to sustain collective spirit;
- weekly dinner hour meetings that zoomed a total of 17 former High Roaders in themed interactive conversations with the 2020 crew.

# Snapshot of the Program

## Student Home States/Countries



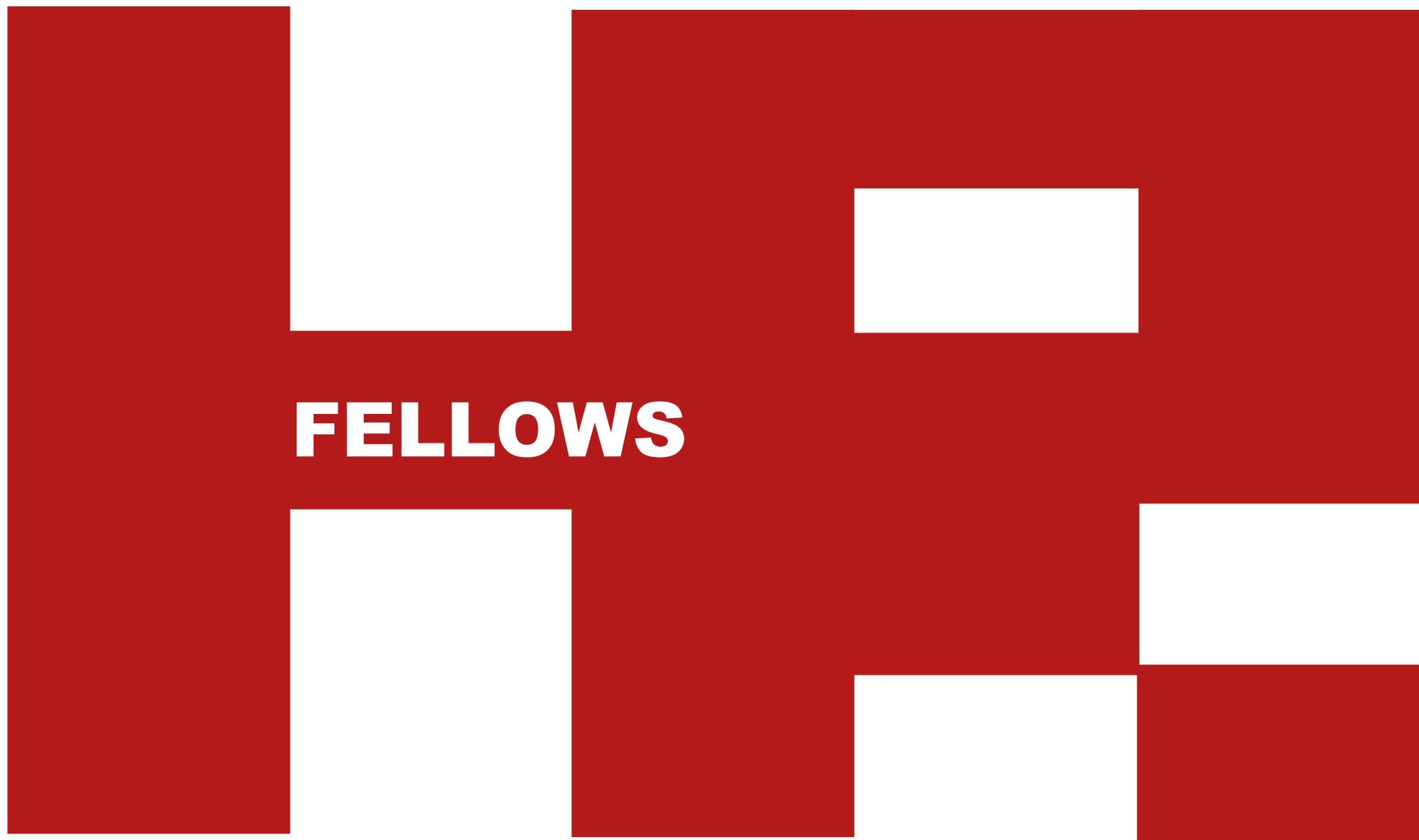
**19**  
partner  
orgs

**23**  
students



## Student Schools

17	ILR School
2	Arts & Sciences
2	Human Ecology
2	CALS

The image features a large, stylized graphic composed of red and white rectangular blocks. The letters 'R' and 'E' are formed by these blocks. The word 'FELLOWS' is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the 'R' and 'E'.

**FELLOWS**

# Ryan A. Aguilar



## Summer Takeaway

There are numerous opportunity barriers faced by small business owners in today's world, whether it be predatory lenders or the ramifications of the current economic crisis; however, there are benevolent organizations (such as Community Development Financial Institutions) that legitimately care about and can provide quality services to those in need.



## Career Goal

I aspire to be a strategic management/business consultant and to be in a position where I can change people's lives for the better.

## Work Highlights

- Spearheaded a four-year business development program for incoming vendors outlining business planning, credit management, income statement forecasting, and strategies for navigating through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Devised four comprehensive reports detailing predatory lending and systemic inequality in Buffalo to educate local entrepreneurs.
- Conducted interviews with Community Development Financial Institutions, predatory lending organizations, and a former Congressman to carry out a thorough analysis of the landscape of predatory lending as it applies to historically disadvantaged small business owners.



## Shout-Out

Shout-out to Milena Saakyan, the best partner at WEDI I could have asked for; the passion and knowledge that she brought to our projects were invaluable and personally inspiring!

## Supervisor Quote

Ryan has met all of the interviewing and research he has been doing with such great enthusiasm and excitement. It has been wonderful checking-in with him regularly and hearing the passion he has for the work he is doing with us. He has contributed a lasting resource that our team at WEDI can use when working with microenterprise business owners. –Bob Doyle and Yanush Sanmugaraja



# Leo Cardoza

### Summer Takeaway

This summer I learned how expansive food systems are and how important public food purchasing is to the well-being of Black and brown community members and businesses.



“Transformational equity can help bring us to a place where every person is granted the rights and freedoms a human should have to be happy and healthy. But we can only get there if we rely on community-based relationships to lead us. If not, we fall prey to the colonial individualist systems that rely on personal responsibility, extractive practices, racism, and a false sense of shared freedom to operate. To be rid of inequity, we must promote the existence of systems like mutual aid networks.”

### Career Goal

In the future I hope to work in the social work sector with either a focus in international social work or social policy and planning.



### Work Highlights

- Researched food procurement policies affecting Erie County, Buffalo, and Buffalo Public Schools and examined how values-based procurement as per the Good Food Purchasing Program can be implemented locally.
- Created a fact sheet, op-ed, and policy brief to share research findings and policy recommendations internally and externally to MAP.
- Engaged in various meetings with Buffalo community groups including Seeding Resilience and Good Food Buffalo Coalition to discuss improvement needs in the local food system.

### Supervisor Quote

The Good Food Buffalo Coalition is indebted to Leo Cardoza for his critical policy research that will bring about food systems change for our region. Through his ability to envision the big picture while also being able to convey minute details, Leo helped us grasp the state and local food policy landscape, and begin planning next steps for policy advocacy. We also just had such a good time with Leo and his easy-going nature enabled him to put up with his two kooky supervisors with good grace. –Rebekah Williams and Jess Gilbert

### Shout-Out

Shout-out to my supervisors, Jessica Gilbert and Rebekah Williams, for guiding me in my research, providing unique and crucial insight to the importance of inclusive food systems, and for supporting me every step of the way.

# Ketchel Carey



## Summer Takeaway

I don't think I can have a career in which I'm not serving the public good. The High Road meant so much to me in part because I got to get up every day and feel like I was doing something meaningful.

"Which side are you on? You can't say you're not on one because then you side with power, whatever it is."



## Career Goal

I'm considering being a consulting lawyer who works for nonprofits or think tanks. (But who knows! Life is long.)

## Work Highlights

- Researched housing policies readily available to address issues in Buffalo, NY.
- Conducted stakeholder interviews to assess the advocacy space attached to those policies.
- Created reports detailing pertinent policies including suggestions on organizing strategy for Habitat.
- Developed timelines and budgets for suggested initiatives.



## Shout-Out

Thank you, Barry, for being such an amazing supervisor! It really made my summer.

## Supervisor Quote

Ketchel's passion, tenacity, thoughtfulness, and sense of justice has made her not just a great fit with our organization or the perfect person to help develop our advocacy platform, but an inspiration. Ketchel was a breath of fresh air to everyone who has had the great fortune to work with her. She has represented Habitat Buffalo and our mission with grace, compassion, and wisdom. Her ability to identify and research complex issues and then contextualize and synthesize them while making practical recommendations for our affiliate has been remarkable. We appreciate everything she has done to help teach us and to help Habitat Buffalo continue to grow and serve more people in our community. THANK YOU KETCHEL! –Barry Weiss

# Elijah Emery

## Summer Takeaway

There are a lot of people working very hard in each of our communities to make them the vibrant, creative, and kind places they are or could become: we must give them the tools to do the best work possible so that we might all thrive.



## Work Highlights

- Updated prior research utilized for PUSH Buffalo's program funding applications to secure new affordable housing.
- Shadowed meetings with PUSH and stakeholders to strengthen my direct knowledge of sustainable housing policy and development.
- Produced a memo on the possibility of developing a Permanent Real Estate Cooperative.

"Change is necessary, more now than ever. But we must build up after we tear down and ensure that change happens according to the will of the communities we try to serve. That they have a stake in that change, rather than being at the will of those far away and distant."



## Supervisor Quote

We're so excited we got to meet and work with Elijah this summer and wish he was in the office with us, instead of on zoom. He brought great energy and excitement to the work, rolled with changes made to the project, asked good questions, and dug deep into the necessary research for our housing development work. –Jen Kaminsky

## Shout-Out

I really want to thank all the Fellows and staff who sent me access links when I was missing them. Couldn't have done it without you all!

## Career Goal

I want to do good for the world and hopefully be happy doing it.

# James Granata

## Summer Takeaway

If instances of collective action aren't being criticized by those in power, it probably is not radical enough.



## Work Highlights

- Compiled a list of over 700 target properties for the Fruit Belt Community Land Trust.
- Researched and produced a list of resources for members of the Fruit Belt for aid during the pandemic.
- Explored the relationship between Land Banks and Land Trusts around the country through interviews and independent research. Created a synthesized document with these findings.

## Career Goal

Through either the affordable housing movement or the criminal justice system, I want to work towards reform – potentially through law.

## Shout-Out

Definitely Nicole for making me feel as if we were in person with how accessible she was over Slack/Zoom when I had literally any issues.



## Staff Quote

Jamie was an asset to the Fruit Belt Community Land Trust this summer. Jamie demonstrates a strong commitment to the value of housing as a human right. He was continually reflective and mindful, sharing with his cohort how urban challenges have cascading effects into smaller towns like the one he resides in. –High Road Staff



# Rachel Hidek

## Summer Takeaway

Being from Syracuse, I appreciated this opportunity to learn from the powerful work being done in Buffalo – another small city in upstate NY!

## Supervisor Quote

Rachel has been a wonderful addition to WNYCOSH this summer! She has brought new perspectives, ideas, and experiences to our work and has made contributions that will have a lasting impact. Rachel adapting to the remote environment while still fully engaging and participating in WNYCOSH's work and that of community partners was amazing. We've thoroughly enjoyed working with her this summer and look forward to seeing what she does in the future! –Susanne Donovan

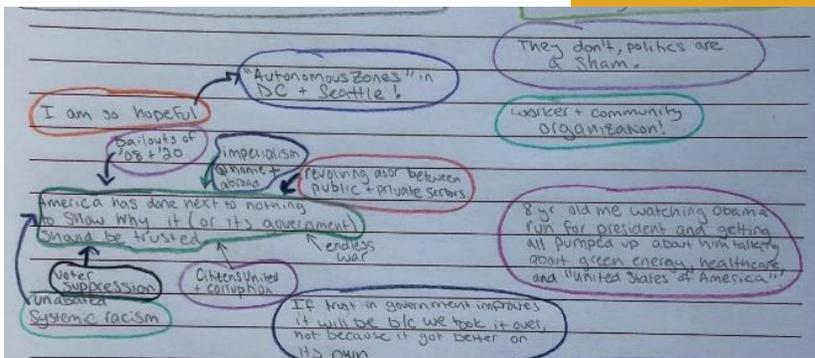
## Work Highlights

- Collaborated to create an asynchronous online training about organizing around health and safety during COVID-19.
- Compiled a toolkit to accompany this online training, including sample social media posts, call scripts, letters to management, and information about legal rights in the workplace.
- Completed a small research project to identify key resources used by local organizations to safely adapt to COVID-19, and made recommendations about gaps that WNYCOSH might fill.

“We should create the world we want within our labor movement. This labor movement should actively dismantle the systems of oppression that hold workers--and non-workers--down. If the labor movement doesn't fight especially for LGBTQ+, disabled, undocumented, and Black workers, then it won't be enough.”

## Career Goal

Grounded in my passion for building community power and fighting for workers' rights, I hope to work as a labor organizer after graduation.



## Shout-Out

Many thanks to Susanne Donovan for her support and guidance, and to Kristin Ksiazek for helping me get my research project off the ground!

# Daniel R. James II



## Summer Takeaway

Over policing and incarceration are merely the fruit of a larger problem of racial inequity in Buffalo.



PARTNERSHIP  
FOR THE  
PUBLIC GOOD

## Work Highlights

- Documented stories of community-led advocacy that led to policy wins for Partnership for the Public Good including implementing restorative justice in Buffalo schools, ending money bail in Buffalo, reducing arrests for low level marijuana, creating the Living Wage Commission and legislation, and enhancing community policing.
- Compiled research reports on bills passed by the New York State Assembly.
- Completed briefings of Buffalo Common Council meetings and Resolutions Hearings.

“The white owning class must see our faces and hear our voices in order to fix our problems. Then and only then can our country, and my people in particular, hope for more from this land. Until then, we will keep ensuring our faces are represented in every part of the culture, and that our children are not taught history through the lens of oppression. Most of all we will keep the words of Karima Amin’s mother, who said that, **“all days are good days and we will have better days”** — believe that.”



DANIEL JAMES II

## Shout-Out

Thank you to my wonderful and fantastic supervisor, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin!

## Supervisor Quote

Daniel brought a wonderful curiosity to his time at PPG. Driven by his longterm goal of working for justice and fairness, Daniel is thoughtful and inquisitive; he is determined to learn how real community change happens. His desire to bring tried and tested advocacy tools back to his own community in South Carolina was the perfect fit for our project of documenting how policy changes have been won here in Buffalo. We are so grateful to Daniel for his work, as well as his kind and bright presence on our team this summer! —Andrea Ó Súilleabháin

## Career Goal

I aspire to a lifelong career as a legislator, investing in and building Black rural communities.

# Aliyah Kilpatrick

## Summer Takeaway

I learned a lot about housing and how much of an impact certain laws can have on people's lives.

## Career Goal

I would potentially like to work in law or human resources.

## Shout-Out

I would like to shout out Sarah Wooton for being such a great supervisor. She was always there to answer my questions and help me with the research process.



## Supervisor Quote

Aliyah's enthusiasm, diligence, and sunny disposition made her an invaluable addition to our team this summer. Despite the remote work set up, Aliyah became an integral part of our work on tenants' rights; she researched projects independently with ease, and she was always eager to dive into new tasks. I wish Aliyah's time with us was longer, but we wish her all the best in her future endeavors. –Sarah Wooton

## Work Highlights

- Conducted and arranged interviews attorneys in Maryland and Cleveland discussing Clean Hands Eviction Policy.
- Researched principles of "Right to know who owns your building" for possible inclusion in a regional Tenants Bill of Rights.
- Aided in the planning process of a WNY Town Hall featuring Senator Tim Kennedy and Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes.
- Participated in bi-weekly Tenants Bill of Rights research and planning coalition.



# Nathan Lamm



## Summer Takeaway

When organized labor wants to, it can be the most effective tool of the working class in struggles for justice, but wanting to is half the battle.

"Activism isn't accessible to everyone and neither are political issues for reasons of education, but it is our duty as educated activists to help educate and make it easier for the most oppressed to voice their concerns."



## Work Highlights

- Conducted multiple interviews of current and former Buffalo Police Department officers and Police Benevolent Association leadership regarding the labor relations of police.
- Drafted and disseminated a survey about the labor relations of police to the membership of the PBA.
- Quantified and analyzed the responses of the PBA members and used the context from free response answers and interviews to demonstrate trends in the labor relations of Buffalo police.



## Career Goal

I hope to be involved with organized labor groups, specifically in facilitating their greater participation in campaigns for justice, especially racial justice.

## Supervisor Quote

I have been involved with the High Road since its inception, but this is the first time I had a Fellow. I was lucky to get Nate. Together we collaborated on a long term project. Nate decided to conduct a survey of police officers working for the Buffalo Police Department. More particularly, Nate researched how officers viewed their police union's representation. Also, how officers viewed their role within the City of Buffalo. Nate found some interesting disparity based on race. This was a timely research. Nate was excellent. –Cathy Creighton

## Shout-Out

My supervisor Cathy Creighton with her wealth of wisdom and connections and her guidance and criticism.

# Melissa Lau



## Summer Takeaway

The ability to implement the values I guard as an individual into the work that I do for the community.

“I now know the change that I can make. The information I learned through my research of nursing homes is just one of the many things discussed during the high road that will fuel my desire to dedicate my future work to combating injustice within communities. The High Road Fellowship changes you and leads us one step closer to the amazing places we can go with our careers.”

## Work Highlights

- Conducted research on the design of current nursing homes and possible alternatives to the traditional methods.
- Learned about the inequality that is embedded within the structure of nursing homes.
- Wrote a paper based on my research in support of legislation proposed by Center for Elder Law and Justice.

## Career Goal

To learn more about how I can help the community within the legal field through healthcare and my passion for research.

## Shout-Out

The poetry session led by Aitina Fareed-Cooke was amazing, surprising, and inspirational.

## Supervisor Quote

Melissa has excellent written and verbal communication skills. She never hesitated to ask questions and proactively reached out to others in the long-term care field to improve her insight into nursing homes and further develop her research into alternative models of nursing home care. In addition, Melissa was an active participant in CELJ meetings and meetings with CELJ partners. Melissa was a wonderful addition to the CELJ team! –Lindsay Heckler



CENTER FOR  
ELDER  
LAW &  
JUSTICE



# Ivana Letayf Lazo de la Vega



## Summer Takeaway

As best said by my supervisor, Maria Ta, the arts are the vehicle for change and are vital in giving a voice to the underserved and underrepresented.

## Supervisor Quote

Ivana was a dream come true. From the beginning we could tell that she meant business. Throughout this fellowship experience Ivana has been focused, organized and highly motivated to get the job done. She has a maturity and passion for the work beyond her years. We are so thankful to have her with us this summer in which she has helped us truly propel our social justice work forward. We wish Ivana tremendous luck that she undoubtedly will not need and look forward to all the great work she will do in the future! –Maria Ta

## Work Highlights

- Proposed and designed new site content and scheme for Frontline Arts Buffalo website redesign.
- Successfully created, implemented, and developed new look and style for notable web presence.
- Performed routine updates, upgrades, and overall maintenance of the website, adding new content to support the BLM movement.
- Attended Frontline Arts Buffalo meetings to further the arts and engage in conversation with essential community members.

“To restore faith in our government we have to restore faith in our voting rights. To restore our faith in voting rights, we need people whose voice is unhindered to use it.”



## Career Goal:

I aspire to fight for international human rights and empower the most vulnerable through equity and equality.

## Shout-Out

Shout out to Ethan Rubin, for spending every virtual day with me and being the best coworker I could ever ask for, to Daniel, who always supported and helped me throughout this journey, and to Nicole, the best cluster captain!





# Eric Lee

## Summer Takeaway

I was able to enhance my quantitative analytical and communication skills as well as gain valuable insight into local politics and socioeconomic issues.

“Every worker is deserving of basic human dignity both materially and spiritually. That is what should be at the core of what organized labor strives to achieve, above any other political consideration.”



## Work Highlights

- Compiled and analyzed FOIL property data collected from the City of Buffalo’s mortgage default registry database.
- Conducted interviews to gather additional contextual and anecdotal information on the registry’s key shortcomings.
- Drafted a report on the adverse economic effects of the city’s mortgage default registration system and made relevant policy recommendations.

## Supervisor Quote

For starters, I genuinely don't know when or if Eric slept at all this summer. Every day that we interacted, no matter what time I sent something, he responded promptly and thoughtfully. Eric was very patient when we ran into a few delays with data from the City and was very flexible as we adjusted our time frames and shifted portions of the project. He was absolutely great to work with. He did excellent research and writing and took initiative. The report Eric completed is going to be incredibly helpful to us as we advocate for statewide legislation around Mortgage in Default Registries. We would not have been able to do this work without Eric and we are very grateful for his time with us this summer. –Kate Lockhart

## Career Goal

Furthering my academic pursuits with a master’s in public policy and management with a focus on international governance and political economy.

“I have been humbled by the arduous process and effort it requires in any endeavor that tries to bring about lasting societal change. I have been humbled by the sheer amount of hard work that is being done by inspiring individuals.”

## Shout-Out

I would like to thank my supervisor, Kate Lockhart, for all her support and guidance even in these extraordinary times. I would also like to thank Joanna Sowa for being a fantastic partner in making the final presentation for the High Road Showcase a success!

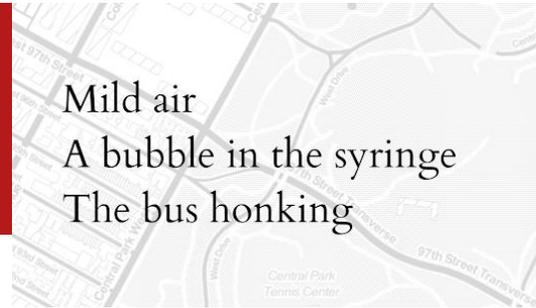
# Asher Lipman



## Summer Takeaway

Opportunities for collaboration exist almost everywhere, between industries I never would have expected and organizations I never would have thought of. The trick is to expect and think of them.

Mild air  
A bubble in the syringe  
The bus honking

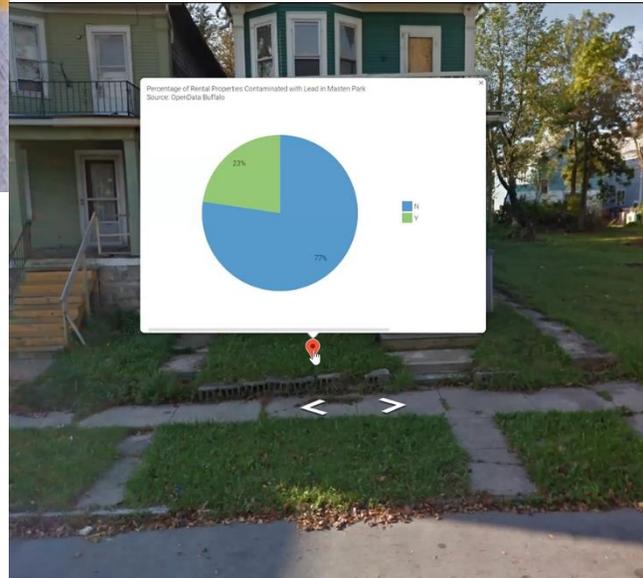


## Career Goal

To work at the intersection between information sciences and governance to create new technological ways to engage with civic life.

## Work Highlights

- Conducted interviews with a wide range of community organizations, municipal agencies, and individuals about how people use data in Buffalo.
- Created an inventory of open data sources for Buffalo community members.
- Learned how to create data visualizations to show disparities across geographic and other demographic boundaries.
- Planned and hosted data education events meant to increase community librarians' understanding of and comfort using open data.



## Shout-Out

I'd like to shout out Elijah because on the first day after we'd spent the first half hour talking about the benefits of unions in the US we went around naming our favorite books and he said that he'd been reading a lot of Ayn Rand recently, and I laughed for a solid minute.

## Supervisor Quote

Asher has been such an invaluable asset to our work related to libraries and their role regarding open data - he has been so focused, organized and supportive with incredible acumen and insight into the topic we asked him to explore! Asher has also been so approachable and accessible to our staff and members. He is so intelligent and personable beyond his years (is he really just entering his sophomore year?!), it is likely he will be visibly recognized as an expert in data and information systems before you know it! -Heidi Ziemer



# Ashton O'Connor



## Summer Takeaway

Throughout the summer, I have gained a glimpse into the tools and strategies community organizations deploy to address the disparities that plague our cities. I have realized how possible it is to create a tangible impact through this line of work. My research has played a small but important role in allowing Grassroots Gardens to combat food apartheid in the Buffalo-Niagara region.



"My experiences in the High Road Fellowship have taught me the importance of action. Our decisions do not occur independent of others, each one we make plays a part in either enforcing or challenging the current structures in place. Until we realize the interconnected nature of our decisions, a truly just society is not possible."

## Shout-Out

I would like to give a Summer Shout-Out to all of the High Road Friday guest speakers who volunteered their time and effort to talk to us each Friday, which allowed the Fellows to gain exposure to all of the key community organizations in Buffalo and discover the interconnectedness of the High Road movement.

## Work Highlights

- Researched sustainable funding and land protection strategies for community gardening through a competitive analysis on twelve cities across the nation. The analysis included existing research reports, financial statements, and interviews with key community gardening figures.
- Constructed and mapped an equitable, sliding-scale membership fee model using ArcGIS software to increase annual revenue \$30K for Grassroots Gardens.
- Pioneered zoning changes and recommended key partnerships to strengthen land protection for community gardens in Buffalo.
- Summarized key findings and case studies in a 60-page research report and presented my recommendations to the Board of Directors.



## Supervisor Quote

We've been so appreciative of all of Ashton's efforts. His dedication to the cause, detailed research, and willingness to go above and beyond has given us a treasure trove of information to help our organization center itself in the national movement of community gardening. It will also provide us a pathway forward as we fight for land justice and equal access for all community members to green space. We've needed this research for years and now we have it. Thank you Ashton! - Jeanette Koncikowski

## Career Goal

Push for a more just and equitable economy by providing nonprofit organizations and small businesses the talent and capital they require to truly impact their local communities through a career in nonprofit consulting or social impact investing.

# Tyler Pearce



## Summer Takeaway

The High Road is a way to help a community with rich history and diversity in a variety of different forms with the idea that collectivism will make Buffalo stronger and even better.

"I believe that the best way to move forward is to create more unions. Unions have a bad rep in this country, but so many rights are protected once unionized."

## Work Highlights

- Conducted in-depth research on for profit nursing homes and their ownership structures.
- Compiled data into a report describing such ownership structures and their impacts on labor relations in Western New York.
- Gained experience with labor management interactions through the union.



## Supervisor Quote

Tyler has shown he's got the most important asset to succeed in union work - heart. In the times we had conversations with workers, he displayed empathy and solidarity with workers in terrible situation. He was thrown into a chaotic time in the nursing home industry, let alone society. He worked through the challenges of being remote and an ever-changing project, lowered his head and plowed through. He's an incredibly self-driven individual. In a matter of weeks, he picked up on nuances in the regulations on nursing homes in NYS that take some people years. We were so happy to have Tyler aboard and hoping it's only his first stint in the labor movement (let alone 1199). Thanks for all your hard, and continuing, work! - Marshall Bertram and Hannah Lorenc

## Career Goal

I wish to work in labor relations on behalf of a union or the employee.

## Shout-Out

I would like to shout-out the High Road administration team (Nicole, Micaela, Lou Jean, and others) for successfully adapting this program to be virtual.

# Nate Reilly

## Summer Takeaway

Civic participation and community involvement is crucial to social justice and progress and can create significant momentum to shape a High Road society.



## Career Goal

To use art and policy work as a medium to positively impact my community and to inspire the next generation with creativity and a passion for art.

## Work Highlights

- Worked with Art Services Initiative to uphold their mission to keep the arts sector apparent and powerful in response to COVID-19.
- Enhanced the Arts Access program to keep arts accessible to low-income WNY residents by developing programming resources for art events and opportunities around the region.
- Engaged with local arts patrons around Buffalo through informing them about community arts events, managing Arts Access social media, and promoting newly developed resources.
- Advanced in becoming a more apparent frontline artist by assisting in public art projects and initiating my own mural to be installed in the months after the High Road ends.

## Supervisor Quote

We couldn't have asked for a better team member than Nate. Nate's passion and experience in the arts really helped us think creatively and out of the box when it came to planning our next season of the Arts Access program and the COVID-19 changes we face. He brought knowledge and compassion to what ASI does for the arts field in a time when so many are struggling. BEST OF LUCK to him, he's an asset to any team, and we can't wait to see what else he does for WNY and Niagara Falls in the future!  
- Jen Swan and Jess Trainor



## Shout-Out

Shout out to Nicole and Micaela for keeping the program interesting and engaging, even virtually!

# Jackson Ross-Pilkington



## Summer Takeaway

In Buffalo (and in communities across the country), local advocates and organizations are on the front lines of creating real political change.



## Democracy Fellow for Assemblymember Sean Ryan

### Work Highlights

- Assisted staff with constituent casework and policy research.
- Completed a research project on the economic integration of new Americans.
- Interviewed community advocates working with refugees and immigrants.

### Supervisor Quote

Jack has been an absolute pleasure to work with. He has taken so much initiative throughout this project, especially working remotely due to COVID-19. He has reached out to and interviewed community leaders and conducted strong research on his subject topic. He is engaged with the office, eager to assist with other projects as needed, and very professional. His verbal and writing skills are superb and everything that has been asked of him has been excellently done and without issue. I know that Jack's professionalism, thoughtfulness, intelligence, and kindness will serve him well as he moves on to do great things. –Gabby Harrington

“Environmental injustice exists in concert with economic and political injustice. Political and economic means must be harnessed to address these issues and to redress the underlying imbalances.”



### Shout-Out

Shout out to Lou Jean, for being an excellent cluster leader!

### Career Goal

Going to law school, working as a public defender.

# Ethan Rubin

## Summer Takeaway

Working at FAB helped me understand how important arts-based programs are to the economic success and wellbeing of the community members in that region.

## Supervisor Quote

Ethan has been a blessing for us at Ujima and by extension the Frontline Arts Buffalo family. He brought in such great energy and thoughtfulness when it came to what we needed to do as a team to push the important work of FAB forward. We particularly enjoyed Ethan's humor and his ability to not only do his work well but with great joy. Ethan will be hugely missed but we wish him well in his future endeavors. He is set to do incredible things so watch for him! –Maria Ta



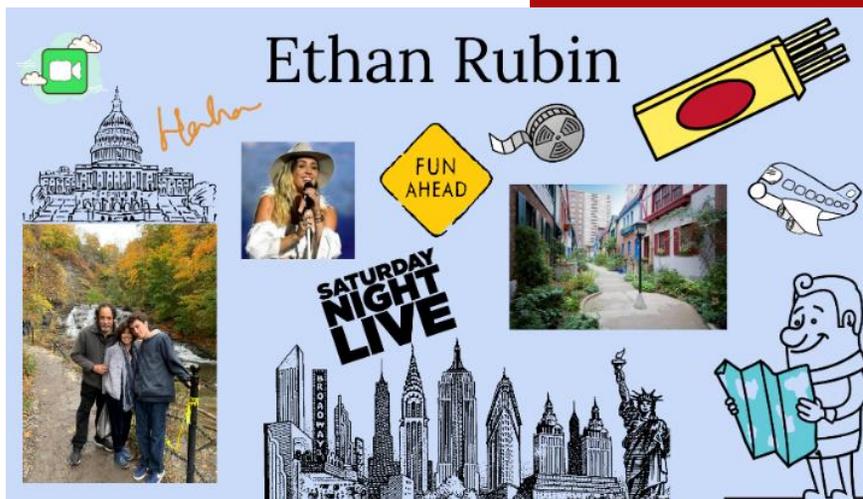
## Work Highlights

- Established a public relations strategy through creation of a brand new Frontline Arts Buffalo website and social media outreach plan.
- Created tangible goals with FAB member organizations that will be accomplished beyond the High Road.
- Edited community relations letters on social justice principles true to FAB's values.

“The High Road popped my New York City bubble perspective. Life's not just about trips abroad to India or to wherever. 'Going' from New York City to Buffalo was really the High Road, the right choice, and the best thing I've done at Cornell so far.”

## Shout-Out

I'm shouting out Ivana, my partner in crime! We worked together everyday to make sure the website was perfect. She is a master coder, a super hard worker, and I could not have asked for any better company on the High Road!



## Career Goal

Although unsure of an exact career path, I am thinking about going into the media/broadcasting field.

# Milena Saakyan



## Summer Takeaway

Local community organizations are incredibly impactful both in the areas they serve directly and in advocating for policy change broadly.

“At times it can be daunting to think that these problems don't have clear cut solutions *because* they're so interdependent. But at the same time they allow us the opportunity to form connections and work together to address a problem from multiple angles.”



## Work Highlights

- Analyzed how historical policies such as redlining impact present-day economically disadvantaged communities, especially as it relates to their ability to participate in the financial mainstream.
- Researched predatory lending in the city of Buffalo and nationwide, focusing on reasons for their prevalence and tactics used to trap borrowers into cycles of debt.
- Conducted interviews with CDFIs in Buffalo and peer cities to understand their work, future goals, and how they can improve to best serve marginalized communities.
- Developed a guide detailing predatory lending warning signs and offering recommendations on how CDFIs can combat predatory lending in their communities, both with individual clients and through long-term policy goals.

“Policy is the way forward. Racist policies such as redlining are what contributed to the economic injustice that necessitated CDFIs to begin with, and more equitable and restorative policy will promote economic growth so that we can fix what we created decades ago. Now that I understand how local organizations can promote policy change, I think our impact can be even bigger. We have no where to go but up.”

## Career Goal

Long-term, I hope to work with impact investing firms like Social Finance or the Reinvestment Fund that direct capital to drive social progress.

## Shout-Out

Lou Jean, for always trying to connect us to people who could help our work, and for being overall amazing and inspiring.

## Supervisor Quote

Milena has jumped right in to the research of CDFIs and predatory lending and has shared so much helpful information for WEDI's team who are working directly with microenterprises. It has been wonderful to have had such an efficient researcher support our work these past couple months and we are truly impressed with the resources she has provided our team with. –Bob Doyle and Yanush Sanmugaraja

# Joanna Sowa



## Summer Takeaway

This summer, I learned how important it is for community members and organizations to fight for equity in whatever avenue of advocacy that they are called to. It was incredible to hear from community organizers through our Friday programming who were all making significant change in Buffalo through poetry, art, union organizing, and so many different ways.

“People’s movements are incredibly powerful. They have impacted and enacted change and progress in our society.”

## Career Goal

I want to continue on the High Road by pursuing a career in labor law where I can fight for workers' rights and equitable labor laws.

## Work Highlights

- Authored a report which analyzed survey data of 90 respondents on how COVID-19 has impacted Buffalo residents' abilities to continue making payments on their payment plans.
- Submitted and received a FOIL data request from the Erie County Comptroller on surplus funds from tax foreclosure auctions from the past 5 years.
- Compiled property class data on tax foreclosed properties for Erie County.
- Attended meetings with the City, County, and Distressed Properties Task Force.



## Shout-Out

Kristin was such an incredible Cluster Captain who was so supportive and helpful in guiding us in our research!

## Supervisor Quote

Joanna was an absolute pleasure to work with this summer. From the very first day she showed initiative and started asking insightful questions about the work assigned to her. I was impressed with how well she carried herself in meetings and her interactions with staff. Working in a new environment, especially with attorneys, can be intimidating but Joanna did a great job jumping right in with our group meetings to accomplish our goals. She completed every task assigned to her early and always had questions or suggestions about her next steps. We are so grateful for all she did this summer and the work that she did has already had an impact on our conversations with both the City and the County regarding tax foreclosures this year. –Kate Lockhart

# Libby Willkomm



## Summer Takeaway

My greatest takeaway from the summer is the need for greater resources and equitable hiring practices for students pursuing transformative workforce development opportunities, especially for students of color.

“How can we expect students who have to balance college, family, and multiple part times jobs to also have an immense amount of career experience and extracurricular involvement? Isn't that what an internship is for...gaining experience?”

## Career Goal

I hope to pursue a career in social impact with an emphasis in education or youth development.

## Work Highlights

- Researched paid internship programs around the country to accumulate best practices for inclusion.
- Interviewed forty program constituents to discern areas of program success and improvement.
- Developed a report with research findings to guide Say Yes Buffalo's Internship and Career Pathways program.

“Ever since my experiences in youth leadership and civic engagement as a 4-H member, I knew grassroots change was how I wanted to positively impact the world.”



## Supervisor Quote

Libby is truly an answered prayer. She jumped right into the work and not only enthusiastically took on projects, but made suggestions to elevate every single task. She was a joy to work with and her work ethic is amazing - we often forgot that she's only a rising sophomore. Libby is officially the Princess of Workforce Development and we hope that she can return to Say Yes in some capacity in the future! –Johanna Caplan and Stephanie Peete

## Shout-Out

I want to shout out my two supervisors, Johanna and Stephanie, for being great supports and making this such an incredible experience!



# Helen Zhou

**Summer Takeaway**  
Nonprofit work is vital.

## Supervisor Quote

Helen was a perfect fit to advance this project with Say Yes. Helen is self directed, resourceful, a visionary thinker, and a great thought partner. Helen demonstrated her thoughtfulness in addressing the tasks of her project, focusing on impact and results of programming on children and families and stressing the importance of using a trauma-informed and equity lens. Helen developed two amazing documents that are critical to the post COVID-19 work we will do in Community Schools and Parent Centers. Helen has been a valuable member of the Say Yes Buffalo Team. We are truly appreciative and thankful for her and her work. –Tanya Staples and Gellenia Smallwood

## Work Highlights

- Researched and closely examined the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Community Schools program and the Buffalo community at large.
- Conducted interviews on trauma-informed practices and responsiveness, a hybrid model, tracking engagement, and more.
- Developed multiple needs assessment surveys for students and parents with post-crisis questions/considerations.
- Wrote a Community Schools guide for reopening schools through trauma-informed and racial equity lenses that has new logic model considerations, steps for conducting a needs assessment, and more.

## Career Goal

For now, I plan on going to law school after college and hopefully doing public interest work after that.



“My work with Community Schools has also shown me how community and family engagement can create more equitable spaces for students in Buffalo.”



## Shout-Out

Shout-out to Tanya Staples, Gellenia Smallwood, and the entire Community Schools team at Say Yes!

# Leanna Zilles



## Summer Takeaway

There's a lot to be done in our current political moment, and it's up to all of us to take on responsibility in building a society and economy that works for everyone.



## Career Goal

In the future, I hope to pursue work at the intersections of social justice and economic development.

## Work Highlights

- Conducted secondary and primary research to document and analyze the history of cooperative movements in Buffalo, NY.
- Curated research for the purpose of creating an informational display on Cooperation Buffalo's website.
- Assisted in developing and presenting at Cooperation Buffalo's community education webinars.

## Supervisor Quote

Leanna is a wonderful and thoughtful human, who is going to be one among many that through their combined strength and leadership will change the world. Through her passion, precision, hard work, empathy, and the courage that allows her to bring her personal story to her work, she inspires others to do the same. We have learned much from Leanna during our two months together, and we hope this experience has given her more tools to do her part. –Andrew Delmonte

"If you ever meet someone who seems disinterested or disenchanted with politics, here's my unsolicited advice: talk to them about their lives, their friends and family, their values, and the things that matter most to them. And tell them about yourself. The personal is inherently political, and it's all the more necessary that we confront that truth."



## Shout-Out

I'd like to shout out my supervisors, Andrew and Michael, for being super attentive and helpful throughout the whole summer.



# Collective Engaged Learning



Watercolor paintings by Helen Zhou

# Showcase

Fellows produced a culmination of their knowledge with artistic presentations held via Zoom Webinar the morning of July 24<sup>th</sup> joined by supervisors, friends, family, and the general public. A variety of projects were created including skits, poems, videos, whiteboard drawings, virtual road trips, Ted Talks, social media campaigns, and speeches.



# Graduation

Graduation festivities following the Showcase included speeches by three exquisite Cornell and Buffalo change agents described below, recognition of our two High Road Builders including an announcement of donations to Ujima Theatre Company and New York Immigration Coalition, and individual recognition of completion for Fellows by ILR Outreach Dean Ariel Avgar.



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In 2008, Cariol Horne was fired by the Buffalo Police Department. The reason: she had jumped on the back of a white cop, one of her colleagues, in order to stop him from holding a Black man in a chokehold. For the past 12 years, Cariol has held firm that she did the right thing. She and her peers have fought for Cariol's Law, making it mandatory for police officers to intervene and stop acts of brutality by fellow officers. She has been featured on CNN, the Washington Post, and CBS This Morning. In October 2020, Cariol's Law passed with an 8-1 vote by the Buffalo Common Council.



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Mark Pearce is the Executive Director of the Workers Rights Institute at Georgetown University Law Center. Mr. Pearce is a former Board Member and Chairman of the National Labor Relations Board who served for two terms. He was a founding partner at Creighton, Pearce, Johnsen & Giroux and began his 40 year career first as a Field Attorney and later, District Trial Specialist with Region 3 of the NLRB. After entering private practice Mr. Pearce served by appointment of the Governor of New York State to the NYS Industrial Board of Appeals as well as several state committees and commissions.



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Sam Magavern serves as senior policy fellow at Partnership for the Public Good, which he co-directed or directed since its founding in 2007 through 2018. The local think tank has provided research and advocacy support to help revitalize Buffalo-Niagara in many areas including housing, education, policing, and the environment. Sam teaches at SUNY Buffalo Law School and Cornell University ILR School, having taught the course Lawyers as Change Agents in Spring 2020. He serves on the City of Buffalo Living Wage Commission, the Niagara River Greenway Commission, and the Open Buffalo Advisory Board.

**The High Road Builders Award is an annual tradition, which recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to Cornell ILR High Road Fellowships and who educate and inspire us through their work and civic engagement.**

# **HIGH ROAD BUILDERS**

**The awardees for this historic summer are two extraordinary women whose compassion and influence cross borders and span divides.**



**Shannon Gleeson**, Associate Professor in Labor Relations, Law and History, has worked with High Road Fellowships since she joined the ILR School in 2014. Every summer, she has come to Buffalo to conduct special workshops for High Roaders on ways to link their education with real world progress on critical challenges to local communities. Well beyond that, Shannon’s research, teaching, and policy engagement year round aims to improve our democracy. At the heart of her research is the role of citizen involvement in the actual implementation of legislation that grants us rights and protections. She analyzes the power imbalances that often render legal protections meaningless in the everyday lives of workers.

Shannon’s latest book, *Precarious Claims: The Promise and Failure of Workplace Protections in the U.S.*, puts a microscope to one example of the vast difference between the ideals of America and the reality of America. A sad, familiar refrain here in the summer of 2020. Shannon’s work exposes the many dimensions of inequality at work and in communities. She is an expert on immigration and global migrations—focused not merely on policy, but on the people, the immigrants, the migrants. This summer, she is working with the New York Immigration Coalition to get families out of the Federal Detention Center in Batavia to rescue them from COVID-19.

Shannon’s research on ‘bad jobs’ helps us understand that merely increasing the minimum wage will not fix that problem. She documents wage theft, discrimination, illegal safety and health practices, and violations of labor law. Her work reinforces the democratic premise that collective action is required to change those conditions. Shannon lives, and she teaches, civic action. She believes that the reason for research and learning is to make the world better.



Widely acclaimed and awarded, Lorna was a maker of justice on the theatrical stage and on the stage of everyday life. Her *Uncrowned Queens: Voices of African American Women* brought to life the cultural richness and the wisdom of people overlooked in our community. In a 2017 radio interview, as part a celebration of Beauty and Democracy, Lorna explained that everything she did in her life was to look for the beauty. With no rose-colored glasses, and no selective viewing, Lorna still saw beauty everywhere, and she made beauty all around her. In her art and in her community. Lorna built, and her spirit still guides, the Beloved Community.



**Lorna Hill** is the star over the 2020-High Road summer. This legendary, visionary, revolutionary star left this earthly community on June 30. Her inspirational spirit will never leave us. Hence, in present tense, Lorna is a playwright, an actor, a poet, a storyteller, a music composer, an educator, and a producer of the common good. Lorna is the founder of Ujima Theatre Company in Buffalo, one of the longest running African American theatre companies in the country. Named by the Swahili word for “collective work and responsibility,” Ujima is a radical collective of creators of beauty and art, spanning generation after generation.



Lorna was the first African American woman to graduate from Dartmouth College and she never quit learning, earning an MA and ABD for a PhD. She was ever a teacher. Forty years ago, she taught for Cornell University ILR School—specially designed workshops for women in nontraditional (aka male-dominated) trades. In those labor education programs, offered repeatedly at the Langston Hughes Center, Lorna taught power, taught women the power that you have in the way you talk. Lorna taught that equality and justice are not abstract concepts, rather that they depend on our actions, the collective actions of every one of us.

# Calendar of Collective Learning

## April 11 – May 2

All Fellows virtually participated in the pre-course, ILR3052: Community Controlled Economic Development: The Case of Buffalo, NY.

The course introduced students to a brief economic history of Buffalo and explored the challenges, opportunities, and assets of a classic rust-belt city experiencing a dynamic revitalization. Students learned about the types of nonprofit, social enterprise, labor, and community organizations they worked with during their time in Buffalo, and were introduced to the problem-solving, planning and community-building efforts of the social sector and government sectors committed to moving Buffalo toward a new economy based on equity, sustainability and democracy. Students had the opportunity to further their understanding of the major fields and themes embedded in community development and economic development work: civic engagement, equity, education, health, immigration, labor/workforce development, urban planning, organizing, civil and legal rights, and legislation/policy development.

## June 1

Videos on tech and logistics prepared by Co-Coordinator

Discussion of **Guiding Values to Take on the High Road**

Buffalo Storytelling  
 • Guided by Karima Amin, *Prisoners are People Too*

**Supervisor Meet and Greet**

Powerpoint **Tour of Buffalo**  
 • Created by Sam Magavern, *Partnership for the Public Good*

Choose your own adventure:  
 • Reflection  
 • Listen to music by Daughters of Creative Sound  
 • Check-ins with loved ones

## June 5

**Introducing the Nonprofit Response**

• Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, *Partnership for the Public Good*

Q&A with PPG Board Members

• Gamileh Jamil, *NY Immigration Coalition*  
 • Steve Halpern, *Western New York Law Center*

Student creative introductory activity: **personal presentation of self** via webpage

Choose your own adventure:

• Virtual tour of City Hall  
 • Video address from Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes  
 • Buffalo Common Council budget hearing  
 • Article about 69 Johnson Park  
 • Recording of Killer Mike's speech during Atlanta protests

## June 12

**Working Toward a Just Transition**

• Rebecca Newberry, *Clean Air Coalition*

Choose your own adventure:

• Learn about **Juneteenth** and tune into virtual programming  
 • Check in where you live to see what actions you can take to promote racial justice  
 • Catch up on Buffalo News articles

**Moving Resources and Power for Community Control**

• India Walton, *Fruit Belt Community Land Trust*  
 • Kathryn Franco, *Buffalo Niagara Community Reinvestment Coalition*

Friday June 19, Fellows had the day off as per Governor Cuomo's declaration of Juneteenth as a holiday for New York State employees

## June 26

### A Blue-Green Buffalo-Niagara

- Lynda Schneekloth, *WNY Environmental Alliance*
- Margret Wooster, *Our Outer Harbor*

Students given the opportunity to spend some time outside and connect with the environment

### Seeding Resilience

- Samina Raja, *University at Buffalo Food Lab*
- Rebekah Williams, *Good Food Purchasing Program*

### Communicate the Seeds Being Sowed

- Fellows interviewed Seeding Resilience participants to capture stories of community food needs exacerbated by the pandemic, as well as community members' actions to increase food access.

## July 3

### How to Get the Most Out of Mentorship

- Laurie Reister-Collins, *Columbus McKinnon*

### Choose your own adventure:

- Midsummer check-ins
- Learn about Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ history

### Poetry as Visionary Resistance

- Aitina Fareed-Cooke, *Get Fokus'd Productions*

### Choose your own adventure:

- Midsummer check-ins
- Learn about the Reclaiming Native Truth Project

## July 10

### The Buffalo Economy During the Pandemic

- Jaison Abel, *Federal Reserve Bank of New York*

### Union 101

- Explanation of key terms used by unions and the purpose of unions

### Labor Roundtable

- Richard Lipsitz, *WNY Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO*
- Denise Abbott, *Buffalo Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO*
- Angela Blue, *WNY Area Labor Federation, NYS AFL-CIO*

### Boosting a Community: Northland Workforce Training Center

- Fellows reviewed online videos and readings and wrote questions to the Northland stakeholders

Asynchronous work on Showcase presentations

## July 17

### Inclusion = Growth

- Read the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable's 2018 report

### Buffalo's Racial Equity Strategy

- Felicia Beard, *Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable*
- Tommy McClam, *My Brother's Keeper*

### Equity in Education

- Gellenia Smallwood, *Say Yes to Education Community Schools*
- Elizabeth Vignaux, *NYS United Teachers*
- Demario Strickland, *Harvey Austin School*

### Now What To Do About Higher Ed

- Sherell Farmer, *High Road '19 alumni*

### Choose your own adventure:

- Call a person to talk about racial equity
- Decide on action steps to take to pursue racial equity

# Clusters

## Overview

One new component of the High Road Fellowship this year was the grouping of students in clusters. Clusters served the following purposes of providing:

1. Additional supervision and support to students in their placements.
2. Time for additional skill building in areas such as GIS, power mapping, data analysis, survey development, etc.
3. Fellows with greater interaction with peers in their cohort to foster relationship building among Fellows. As this is the first summer Fellows did not live together, discussions during cluster meetings helped Fellows to form bonds with one another.
4. Space for group check-ins and reflection on key themes learned during placement.

Cluster captains met with their students weekly, and provided additional individual support as requested.



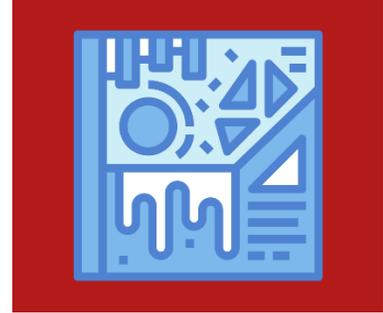
## Mapping Spaces for Equity

This cluster sought to convey how race has shaped public space in the city. Students' individual projects showed how ideas about race have shaped zoning regulations, real estate law, housing, and green space policy. These projects grouped together illuminated a larger database of information interspersed with maps which will serve as a powerful community resource. Products developed create a foundation for productive community conversations and fact-based policy making on public spaces and land.

Cluster Captain: Rusty Weaver

Fellows:

- Ketchel Carey, *Habitat for Humanity*
- James Granata, *FB Community Land Trust*
- Eric Lee, *WNY Law Center*
- Asher Lipman, *WNY Library Resources Council*
- Ashton O'Connor, *Grassroots Gardens of WNY*
- Joanna Sowa, *WNY Law Center*



## Frontline Arts

The arts have a positive social impact and help eliminate barriers to health, wellness, education, social change, and inclusion in communities. These projects explored and showed how the arts are crucial to a resilient and equitable local economy while making arts and cultural organizations more accessible to all community members. Building on individual project work, the cluster evaluated current public funding and capacity building programming offered by local governments and backbone organizations to gauge how diverse and inclusive the cultural organizations are that are receiving support.

Cluster Captain: Nicole Golias

Fellows:

- Ivana Letayf Lazo de la Vega, *Ujima Company*
- Nate Reilly, *Arts Services Initiative*
- Ethan Rubin, *Ujima Company*



## New Economy

New Economy principles of equity, cooperation, racial justice, ecological sustainability, and democracy are changing local communities around the country. The projects of this group shared a focus on the new economy that works for all in Buffalo: advancing Community Development Financial Institutions, ending predatory lending, promoting worker ownership and cooperatives, training frontline workers and employers on Covid-19 safety measures, opening economic and political opportunities for refugee communities, furthering racial justice through police reform.

Cluster Captain: Lou Jean Fleron

Fellows:

- Ryan Aguilar, *Westminster Economic Development Initiative*
- Rachel Hidek, *WNY Council on Occupational Safety and Health*
- Nathan Lamm, *Creighton, Johnson, and Giroux*
- Jackson Ross-Pilkington, *Assesmblymember Sean Ryan*
- Milena Saakyan, *Westminster Economic Development Initiative*
- Leanna Zilles, *Cooperation Buffalo*



## Community Justice

The organizations in this group quickly rose to meet the needs of the community in the face of COVID-19, emphasizing their commitment to people first. Their efforts towards securing the basic needs in their community ranged from food, water, housing, education, and protecting vulnerable populations. These organizations had been working on their individual fronts prior to the crisis and will continue to work on them in the crisis's wake to build a society that has sustainable and meaningful policies in place so that no one is left without their needs met due to perpetual inequality. These partners engage through research, advocacy, and programming.

Cluster Captain: Micaela Lipman

Fellows:

- Leo Cardoza, *Good Food Purchasing Program*
- Aliyah Kilpatrick, *Partnership for the Public Good*
- Melissa Lau, *Center for Elder Law and Justice*
- Helen Zhou, *Say Yes to Education*



## Engaged Research

This group was connected by their common methodology of applied an participatory research created at the request of the partner organization. Many will be published on Buffalo Commons. Students gained skills in interviewing, analyzing city and state policy, auditing existing practices, and more. Their research will subsequently be used to strengthen advocacy for issue areas and advance strategic planning.

Cluster Captain: Kristin Ksiazek

Fellows:

- Elijah Emery, *PUSH Buffalo*
- Daniel James II, *Partnership for the Public Good*
- Tyler Pearce, *1199 SEIU*
- Libby Willkomm, *Say Yes to Education*

# Fellow Leadership Opportunities

In order to increase engagement and democratize processes, several committees were created that were led by Fellows. Fellows volunteered to serve on each committee. Student led committees allowed staff to better respond to student's needs and virtually create additional avenues for positive group interactions.

## Graduation Committee

The graduation committee was comprised of Melissa Lau, Ketchel Carey, Leo Cardoza, Ashton O'Connor, Helen Zhou, and Daniel James II. This committee was tasked with nominating speakers for graduation, and creating superlatives for each Fellow to be awarded at the graduation ceremony.

## Spirit Committee

The spirit committee was comprised of Leanna Zilles, Libby Willkomm, Ketchel Carey, Aliyah Kilpatrick, Nate Reilly, and Joanna Sowa. The spirit committee organized fun activities for the Fellows to bond outside of the obligations of their placements. For example, the Fellows organized a weekly game night over Zoom with rousing games like Mafia. The group also designed a Thank You card that was individually sent out by students to all activists and community leaders who spoke in group programs.

## Arts Openers

The High Road Fellowship believes that art, in all of its forms, has the power to incite social change, community reflection, and mutual understanding. To that end, every Friday programming session opened with a Fellow sharing a piece of art. We listened to classical music, saw street art from Niagara Falls, explored data visualizations, read poems, and more. Helen Zhou, Nate Reilly, Elijah Emery, Rachel Hidek, Ketchel Carey, and Asher Lipman each led an arts opener.



Tour of Niagara Falls art including Street Art Alley



Barcelona opera performs for an audience of 2,000 plants



Spoken word and video "i cant' breathe" by i-SAY -uh on YouTube

# High Road Alumni Engagement

The High Road Fellowship is proud to have hosted 185 students over the past twelve years, in addition to the 23 Fellows who completed the program during the summer of 2020.

Alumni who have graduated span a wide array of current professions from professional football to union organizing, human resources, journalism, and more. Several students are currently pursuing medical school, law school, doctoral degrees, and other graduate degrees. Alumni still at Cornell hold a variety of leadership positions with organizations such as Cornell for Black Lives, Peoples' Organizing Collective, Cornell Prison Education Program (CPEP), and many more.

This year we decided to more directly connect alumni to current students. We held one hour meet-and-greets each Tuesday night and invited a variety of alumni from across the years to speak with current Fellows. The goal of these sessions was to provide a space for Fellows to explore options for further engagement at Cornell as well as future career paths on the High Road. Each Tuesday, alumni would introduce themselves, speak to their time on the High Road, and then spend the majority of the hour insightfully answering student questions. Several alumni connected with current Fellows one-on-one after meet and greets to provide further networking opportunities. Alumni who spoke with students are listed below. We are grateful for all of our alumni working to create stronger communities across the globe, and want to extend an additional thank you to those listed below who took time to speak to our Fellows this summer.

## June 9: Research and Policy in Action

- Luise Yang, *Senior Researcher, Future of Canada Center*
- Daniel Power, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)*
- Lillian Kahris, *Research Fellow, American Voices Project*

## June 16: Unions and Power

- JC Tretter, *President, NFL Player Association; Center, Cleveland Browns*
- Carunya Achar, *National Organizer, California Nurses Association*
- Grace Bogdanove, *Administrative Organizer, 1199 SEIU*

## June 23: Building Community

- Cole Norgaarden, *Planning Consultant, 4ward Planning Inc.*
- Victoria Neenan, *Development Coordinator, Partnership for Income Restricted Housing Leadership*

## June 30: Frontline Arts and Culture

- John Yoon, *Humanities Class, Co-Owner; aspiring journalist*
- Carolyn Krupski, *Director of Marketing and Communications, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center*
- Jacob Barnes, *Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations*

## July 7: Women and Creating Pathways

- Kate Ryan, *M&T Bank*
- Gabrielle Hickmon, *English Language Assistant, Spanish Ministry of Education; Freelance writer, editor, and strategist*

## July 14: Law and Equity

- David Huang, *Law Clerk, Honorable Jane Stranch on the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit*
- Robert Johnson, *University of Chicago Law School*
- Matthew Scherer, *Senior Associate, Hodgson Russ*
- Marc Masson, *Senior Research Analyst, IMPAQ International*

# Journals

Reflection is a key component in engaged learning and research. Every year, students write weekly journals as part of their Fellowship. This year, the journaling process was more important than ever. With students working remotely, the online journaling platform became a safe space for students to share their opinions, express their differences, and organically discuss the theme of the week. Students were encouraged to include drawings, photographs, poetry and other forms of expression. Each Friday we began the day with a check in and discussion of the journals that week. Journaling provided Fellows with a space not only to reflect on that weeks' theme, but also a forum for creative release during a summer of immense upheaval. Each week, several journals were chosen to be featured on the public blog (<https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/buffalo-co-lab/initiatives/high-road-fellowships/high-road-blog>). Fellows chose which journals they thought should be featured each week to further democratize the process.

**Why is equity important?**

**What do you think is the way forward for the labor movement?**

**Please share a poem, piece of art, music, or other form of creative expression that is a culture changer.**

**Why do politics matter?**

**What movement are you in? Or helping to create?**

**What is the most effective action that can be taken right now to combat systemic racial inequity in the United States?**

**From Womb To Tomb**

**This melody keeps ringing in my ear**

When I say Black Lives, You Say Matter,  
Black Lives...

No,

If it's so bad go back to Africa

He's an immigrant and look how well he's doing

I'll never respect someone who does not honor the flag

Y'all use the n-word with each other, why can't we?

It's not a skin problem, it's a sin problem

Let's not focus on the past

Kumbaya, my Lord

Stop being so lazy

If Martin Luther King, Jr. was alive

Y'all kill each other

All lives matter

Blue lives Matter

I don't see color

You're black, but not BLACK BLACK, you know?

It's not white privilege, it's white blessings

There are some good cops out there

Maybe they shouldn't have run

Stop pulling the race card

Listen, if they loot, we shoot

Is it really that serious?

You've gone too far.

**And so far this song**

**Is out of tune.**

-Daniel R. James II

# Gratitude

The High Road Fellowship would not be possible without our partners in Ithaca and in Buffalo. Through research, teaching, and community engagement partners at Cornell University and the ILR School provided Fellows with the foundational knowledge necessary to contextualize their summer experience.

From welcoming students virtually into the Buffalo community, providing students with knowledge of what it's like to live in a rust belt city, and inviting students to engage in grassroots level change, partners in Buffalo provided Fellows with the opportunity to put key lessons learned at Cornell University into practice.

Thank you to all who made such a successful summer possible. Thank you for your flexibility, your willingness to adapt programming, your commitment to our Fellows, and your work to support Buffalo.

## Special thanks to:

Community and civic leaders, activists, artists, educators and experts who participated in High Road programming

Participating organization and supervisors

ILR Deans Colvin, Avgar and Boyer

ILR faculty and staff colleagues

Engaged Cornell

Cornell Club of Greater Buffalo

High Road Advisory Committee

New York State Legislators from WNY

Erie County Elected Officials

City of Buffalo Officials

## Local Cornell Alumni Who Mentored Students

*Kelly Scherer, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, M&T Bank*

*Harvey Sanders, Managing Partner, Sanders & Sanders – Labor and Employment Attorneys at Law*

*Rich Scherer, Partner, Lippes Mathias*

*Catherine March, Network Design and Optimization Manager, Rich Products*

*James Boglioli, Director, Right to Build, Benderson Development*

*Laurie Collins, Director, Total Rewards and Culture, Columbus McKinnon*

*Alex Moeller, Vice President, Corporate Finance, M&T Bank*

*Julie Altobello, Senior Marketing Manager, Health, Authenticity & Sustainability, Rich Products*

*John Collins, Principal Partner, Summer Street Capital Partners*

*Matt Scherer, Senior Associate, Hodgson Russ*

*Jack McGowan, Director and Project Manager, Insyte Consulting and WNY Venture Association*

*Wendy Guyker, Clinical Professor of Psychology, University at Buffalo*

*Matt Nagowski, Group Vice President, Modeling and Treasury, M&T Bank*

*Dennis Maher, Executive Director, Assembly House 150*

# Faculty and Staff



**Lou Jean Fleron**

Director of ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

Lou Jean Fleron is director of Cornell University ILR Buffalo Co-Lab, a collaborative research, teaching, and public knowledge center for progressive economic development in Greater Buffalo. Working on the edge of the new economy, the Co-Lab draws on 75 years of ILR advancing the world of work in Western New York. A Cornell ILR extension faculty member since 1976, now emerita, Lou Jean formerly served ILR as statewide director of workforce, industry and economic development, founder and director of the Institute for Industry Studies, director of the Western Region, and director of labor programs. Her teaching and research fields are economic development, labor management relations, and public economic policy.



**Nicole Golias**

High Road Fellowship  
Co-Coordinator

Nicole Golias is the Communications and Program Support Specialist for ILR Buffalo Co-Lab providing communication, web, marketing, and design assistance as well as database, fiscal, and event management for the unit and its various initiatives. She earned her BS from Cornell University's College of Human Ecology in 2017 studying how to craft and implement effective policy with people at the forefront of decision making. Currently, she is pursuing her MPA at SUNY Buffalo State. Prior to joining the extension office, she taught middle school special education with Buffalo Public Schools. During her time at Cornell, Nicole conducted research as part of the Policy Analysis and Management Lab and was a Brand Ambassador for Teach For America.



**Micaela Lipman**

High Road Fellowship  
Co-Coordinator

Micaela Lipman was a High Road Fellow herself in 2012 while completing her bachelor's degree in Development Sociology at Cornell University. Since graduation in 2015, she worked in academia and the nonprofit sector to explore creative solutions where food policy, economic equality, and community organizing meet. She has worked on county-level projects with food policy councils, regional projects in upstate New York, and international projects in Uganda, Rwanda, Ecuador, and Colombia. Micaela is currently a doctoral program at the University of Buffalo in Urban and Regional Planning. Lipman researches community development as a tool to counter systemic inequalities within the food system.



**Sam Magavern**

### ILR Visiting Activist Scholar

Sam Magavern is a senior policy fellow at the Partnership for the Public Good and teaches at the Cornell University ILR School and the University at Buffalo School of Law. A graduate of Harvard University and the UCLA Law School, he also serves as an attorney for the City of Buffalo Living Wage Commission and as a Niagara River Greenway Commissioner. Prior to moving back to Buffalo, Sam was a public interest lawyer at the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis. His publications range from scholarly articles to comic books, including a non-fiction book (Primo Levi's Universe), a novel (Ooh La La), a movie (The Last Word), and a book of poetry (Noah's Ark).



**Ron Applegate**

### Lecturer, Cornell ILR

An economic and labor historian, Ron is a lecturer at Cornell ILR in the Department of Labor Relations, Law and History. His research interest in the theory and practice of economic development, with a particular emphasis on collective action to establish inclusive governance and generate equitable outcomes, is rooted in prior work experience: coordinating community development programs for the Coalition for a Better Acre (Lowell, Massachusetts) and the Over-the-Rhine Housing Network (Cincinnati, Ohio). In his current capacity as the faculty advisor to ILR's High Road Fellowship program, Ron has collaborated with ILR faculty in Buffalo to create courses designed to envelop students' participation in engaged learning: both preparing students for their community immersion and deepening their critical reflections after their experience.



**Margot Treadwell**

### Social Media Intern

This summer, High Road was fortunate enough to be joined by a bold student who desired to volunteer her talents and efforts to benefit the Western New York community. From her pursuits, the Co-Lab was matched with Margot, a recent graduate of Iroquois High School. Prior to entering the Cornell ILR School in the Class of 2024, Margot assisted with coordinating, scheduling, and executing High Road's social media featuring students, supervisors, and blogs. Margot was also instrumental in assisting on a project with Partnership for the Public Good creating data sets on water shutoffs in the City of Buffalo. Best of luck to Margot in her undergraduate career!



Pictured above: A mural unveiled during summer 2020 on the exterior wall of The Forge on Broadway, a new affordable housing complex on the East Side of Buffalo. The building was conceived and championed by Dr. Rhonda Ricks who passed away in 2019 from cancer. The mural, designed by local artist Julia Bottoms in Ricks' honor, features industrial gears interspersed with bright long-stemmed roses on a light-blue background, incorporating the site's industrial history while celebrating Ricks' favorite flower and color.



**ILR Buffalo Co-Lab**

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