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Katie Super, Miriam Shestack, Anna Saunders, and Kurt Walters\*

## Introduction: The 2021 Law and Political Economy Writing Prize

We are delighted to introduce this collection of compelling articles drawn from submissions to the 2021 Law and Political Economy Writing Prize. One of the most rewarding aspects of organizing with the Harvard Law School Political Economy Association has been to connect with other law students, emerging scholars, and student groups within the burgeoning Law and Political Economy network, and to build initiatives for curriculum reform through our project Reclaiming Legal Education. But the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic left us, like so many others, in search of new ways to build community across physical distance. With so many conferences cancelled, loved ones separated, and plans placed on hold, we sought a way to engage more students and young scholars in the work of creating a more democratic and liberatory political economy. The result was the Law and Political Economy Writing Prize.

For us—a group of JD, LLM, and doctoral students based both inside and outside the United States—LPE scholarship offers a political as well as intellectual engagement with the practices, institutions, ideologies, and forms of legal authority that underpin contemporary capitalism.<sup>1</sup> It also means attending with care to the different racialized, classed, and gendered ways that the present legal order affects lives. Coming from different backgrounds of organizing, practice, and academia, we felt it was especially important to support and recognize work done by students and early-career scholars. This was particularly so in the context of a pandemic that exacerbated pre-existing conditions of precarity as well as unequal distributions of care and labor.

The contest took place during a year when the world was, sometimes quite literally, on fire: the impacts of climate change, felt in bushfires across Australia and California; protests for Black lives and against repressive and militarized policing responses; the intransigence of powerful states against demands for vaccine equality; Indigenous land defense and resistance to extraction; and violent attempts in the United States to retain political power by the far right. Due to these shared struggles and the value of looking beyond the parochialism of US legal education, we encouraged entries from scholars based both within and outside the United States, although the language for entries remained, regrettably, limited to English. The result was that we received a rich set of papers engaging with a range of sites, methodologies, political geographies, and legal practices, reflecting the manifold ways in which law structures and is shaped by capitalism.

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\* Katie Super and Miriam Shestack are Co-Presidents of the Harvard Law School Political Economy Association. During the 2020–21 academic year, Kurt Walters (now serving as a judicial law clerk on the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York) was a co-president of the organization, and Anna Saunders (now based at University College London) served as its Director of Academics. All played key roles in organizing the 2021 Law and Political Economy Writing Prize. For more on the work of the Association, see <https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/lpesa/>. Email: [anna.saunders.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:anna.saunders.21@ucl.ac.uk).

<sup>1</sup> Although the launch of the LPE project and manifesto in 2017 (Britton-Purdy, Kapczynski, and Grewal 2017) has helped to solidify new spaces for scholarship, we also want to acknowledge the many legal scholars thinking through questions of political economy before this time (for example, Orford 1997; Anghie 2002; Matsuda 2007; and see Mutua 2021).

It was an honor to partner with the *Journal of Law and Political Economy* to elevate junior scholars' work reimagining our readings of capitalism and the role of law in a time of interlocking crises (Harris and Varellas 2020). We are grateful for the practical support we received from Harvard Law School: from Yochai Benkler for early discussions on the prize, and from the law school's administrative staff. We also received generous financial support from the Hewlett Foundation's Economy and Society Initiative for our programming, without which the prize would not have been possible. We owe a special debt to the academics, lawyers, and members of the judiciary serving on the judging panel—Professors Ntina Tzouvala, K-Sue Park, and Christine Desan; Premal Dharia; and the Honorable Lynn Adelman—who devoted their time to engaging so generously and thoughtfully with each paper. Most of all, we thank the participants in the writing prize for their tremendously vital, politically engaged, thought-provoking, and—despite everything—hopeful submissions.

The format of a writing prize meant that the judging panel faced a tremendously difficult task of choosing just a few papers out of many outstanding entries. We see the LPE tradition, however, as being fundamentally about organizing and solidarity, and hope that through this activity we created new avenues for scholars and lawyers to come together, both during the past year and into the future. Reading these submissions gave us a renewed sense of being part of a movement of lawyers and activists seeking, in their own fields, institutions and political communities, to struggle for a better world. It is in this spirit that we commend to you the articles in this special section.

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