This exhibit, co-sponsored by the Research Commons and the Labor Archives of Washington, focuses on recent University of Washington graduate student research projects employing primary source materials from the University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. Primary sources are materials directly related to a topic by time or participation. These materials include letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, artifacts, or other sources that provide firsthand accounts about a person or event.

The innovative research of three graduate students from the departments of History and Geography are highlighted, hinting at the broad topical range of the type of scholarly disciplines that employ the unique treasures housed in Libraries Special Collections (located below the Research Commons in the Allen Library South Basement).

Similarly, the Research Commons is a central hub of presenting and supporting student research, offering an array of consulting services for UW students and organizing regular forums for presenting research in the quarterly Scholar’s Studio: an informal forum featuring 10 rapid-fire ignite-style presentations given by graduate students and postdocs doing research on topics related to an interdisciplinary theme.
Megan Brown is a PhD Candidate in Geography. Brown spent three years in the labor movement, working as a strategic researcher for SEIU Healthcare 775NW. Megan’s research interests include the modern labor movement and social movements. Specifically, how collective action organized on the local level is conceived in relation to and directed against global forces of capital mobility, neoliberalism, and globalization.
Hanauer Quote: “To make an extraordinarily long story short, when you go from conceptualizing an economy in a neoclassical sort of orthodox way, as a linear, mechanistic closed system, essentially a zero-sum system, the way in which most orthodox economists and policy makers think about it, to conceptualizing it in a twenty-first-century way, as an open, dynamic, nonlinear, non-equilibrium system, you come to entirely different conclusions about how the system works and what you might do to make it better.

And Eric Liu and I evolved a framework called “middle-out economics”, which again, is a long story, but it is largely the view that a thriving middle-class isn’t the consequence of growth. A thriving middle-class in a technological capitalist economy is the source of growth. And that a policy focus therefore on the middle class is the thing that drives a robust capitalistic economy. In another parlance, the orthodox view, entrepreneurs and business people like me are job creators and that just isn’t true; we are idea-creators and solution-creators, but jobs are a consequence of a feedback loop between consumers and businesses. The true job creators in a capitalist economy are middle class consumers. When they thrive, so does business and employment and so on and so forth.”

Nick Hanauer Interview

SeaTac Seattle Minimum Wage History Project, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections

Megan’s Commentary: “On one hand, corporations and conservative policymakers argue that businesses create jobs. In this scenario, jobs are given by companies to the community, and wages are simply another cost that employers bear. This is the reigning “common sense” perspective on the economy.”

Megan’s Commentary: “Advocates of raising the minimum wage take two distinct tactics. The first combats the idea that corporations make the economy by centering the importance of workers in creating demand. Here, Nick Hanauer, a proponent of the $15 minimum wage in Seattle, explains the theory of ‘middle out economics,’ an updated version of Keynes’ economic theory. By collectivizing responsibility for the economy, activists make the case that everyone benefits by increasing the minimum wage.”
Andrew’s Commentary: “My research explores alternative histories of Seattle that center the experiences of people on the margins of power, documenting the activities and organizations of working-class people and communities of color. I am particularly concerned with the growth of the city’s service economy and political liberalism since the 1970s, and I emphasize the dominant role of the federal government and U.S. empire in economic development, as well as the roles of race and gender.

Overall, I seek to complicate what it means to cast Seattle as an urban exception: a ‘middle class’ city with a high quality of life that has seemingly escaped the urban crises and conservative political turns prevalent elsewhere in the United States. If cities are to provide the political base of resistance to the next four years of the Trump administration, as many have called for, I think what’s needed is a long hard look at the historical strengths and limitations of liberalism and cities in the United States. Seattle, present home to the tech-based New Economy and died-in-the-wool Democrats, is as good as any a place to start.”

Andrew Hedden is the Associate Director of the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies and a graduate student in the UW Department of History’s PhD program.
Andrew's Commentary: “U.S. empire built Seattle as we know it today, most notably through the millions of dollars in Cold War military contracts granted the Boeing Company throughout the 20th century. But long before Boeing was a household name, the international reach of U.S. commercial and military power contributed to the economic development of Seattle through the trade benefits and labor flows created by the U.S. occupation of the Philippines. Part of my research has explored this history through the life of Carlos Bulosan, a famed Filipino novelist, poet, and labor and anti-colonialism activist, who first came to the city in 1930, returning many times again over the course of his life, before dying here in 1952. The UW Labor Archives collections of Bulosan’s writings and correspondence provide an indispensable window into the Seattle world of Bulosan, revealing a city full of colonial inequalities, racial violence, and labor exploitation, but also radical working-class resistance.

The rise of the Boeing Company defined Seattle after World War II, but often lost in the traditional story is the place of Boeing workers themselves. Another part of my research into Seattle’s history, therefore, has explored the role of Boeing’s machinists, unionized since 1936 in the International Association of Machinists, District Lodge 751. This history is documented in a number of collections in the Labor Archives in UW Special Collections, including local union records and the papers of union activists. The union has gone unheralded in traditional Seattle history, yet its efforts have saved Seattle on at least one occasion. When the Boeing Company nearly went bankrupt in the early 1970s, driving double-digit unemployment in the Seattle area, it was the union-generated protections of high wages, seniority, and unemployment insurance that kept the city’s economy from fully imploding.”
Eleanor Mahoney | UW Department of History

The Art of Richard Correll

Eleanor’s Commentary: “I first came across the incredible work of Richard V. Correll while reviewing issues of the Voice of Action, a radical newspaper published in 1930s Seattle. Cornell’s stunning and at-times provocative wood block cartoons vividly captured the spirit of the paper and I found myself returning to them during my research. I encountered Correll’s work a second time while writing a history of New Deal art programs in Washington State. Correll participated in the Federal Art Program for three years, completing a mural project, linoleum and wood block prints, lithographs, etchings and more. Particularly striking were a series of prints based on Paul Bunyan, an iconic Northwest folk figure. I have selected two works from this series, "Clearing Tacoma Flats, 1938" and "Creation of San Juan Islands, 1938" to showcase as I believe they vividly capture not only Correll’s unique style, but also the ethos of much public art created in the 1930s.

The Labor Archives of Washington accessioned much of Correll’s work at roughly the same time I was completing my research. Labor Archives staff not only supported my work, but also arranged for me to meet Correll’s daughter Leslie, an incredible opportunity to learn more about his life and art. Additionally, I presented at the 2013 Seattle Folklife Festival with the support of Labor Archivist Conor Casey, a wonderful experience.”

Eleanor Mahoney is a PhD Candidate in United States History. Her dissertation examines the connections between economic change and environmental policy in the period after World War II. She has also researched Depression-era art and politics in Washington State.
The Art of Richard Correll

Eleanor’s Commentary: “I have selected two works from this series, ‘Clearing Tacoma Flats, 1938’ and ‘Creation of San Juan Islands, 1938’ to showcase as I believe they vividly capture not only Correll’s unique style, but also the ethos of much public art created in the 1930s.”

"Clearing Tacoma Flats, 1938"
Richard V. Correll Prints and Papers, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections

“Creation of the San Juan Islands, 1938”
Richard V. Correll Prints and Papers, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections