

AABANY 2025 Fall Conference

People Power! How Movement Lawyering Strengthens Democracy While Pushing for Systemic Change

New York Law School

Saturday, September 27th, 2025

4:15 PM – 5:45 PM

Speakers

Phil Desgranges, Esq., Attorney-in-Charge of Criminal Law Reform Unit, Legal Aid Society

Marika Dias, Esq., Director of the Safety Net Project, Urban Justice Center

Kevin Jason, Esq., Deputy Director of Strategic Initiatives, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

Jenny Lam, Esq., Associate, Cohen, Weiss & Simon LLP

Bethany Li, Esq., Executive Director, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Moderator

Vishal Chander, Esq., Founder, The Chander Law Firm

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Bethany Li, Esq.,

Moderator: Vishal Chander, Esq.,

Program Agenda

4:15 – 4:20 PM Welcome and Introductions

4:20 – 4:35 PM Framing the Conversation: What is Movement Lawyering?

- Defining movement lawyering
- Explanation of movement lawyering v. traditional legal practice or impact litigation
- Core principles of movement lawyering - Client as community; Law as one tool among many; Bottom-up accountability; Power analysis; Transformative vision; Intersectionality.
- Movement lawyering enhances the professional legal competency of attorneys

4:35 – 4:50 PM Building Trust with Historically Marginalized Communities

- Building and sustaining relationships with communities by centering lived experiences of effected communities
- Centering community leadership by building collective power withing marginalized communities by equitable resource allocation while meeting legal needs
- Movement lawyering help attorneys gain greater awareness of law that has played in creating and perpetuating systemic biases and conditions of oppression and inequality

4:50 – 5:05 PM Stories from the Field: Movement Lawyering in Action

- Moves beyond viewing bias as a personal flaw by aiming for systemic change
- Example of a specific legal project that was part of a broader movement strategy
- The project work towards challenging and eliminating structural and institutional biases in the legal system

5:05 – 5:20 PM Ethics, Strategy, and Storytelling in Serving Historically Marginalized Population

- Balancing legal ethics (e.g., confidentiality) with movement transparency

- The role of storytelling or narrative strategy played in restorative and transformative justice
- Expecting risks, tensions, or limitations in movement lawyering
- Cultural competency and bias awareness help in serving community strategically

5:20 – 5:35 PM Movement Lawyering Best Practices

- Other best practices of debunking bias in movement lawyering
- Impact of movement lawyering on the current political climate
- Legal and professional skills sets that support movement lawyering

5:35 – 5:45 PM Q&A

NY CLE Credit

1.5 Diversity, Inclusion and Elimination of Bias
(Non-transitional ONLY)

CLE Materials

People Power! How Movement Lawyering Strengthens Democracy While Pushing For Systemic Change

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12. Marika Dias, Stepping Aside, Standing Back and Raising Up: Lawyering within Grassroots Community Movements, 12 Geo. J. Poverty Law & Policy 405 (2015).
13. Steve Willborn, Labor Rights Under Trump II, <https://legalblogs.wolterskluwer.com/global-workplace-law-and-policy/labor-rights-under-trump-ii/>
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15. Labor Notes, <https://labornotes.org/about>
16. Federal Workers Legal Defense Network, <https://workerslegaldefense.org/lawyers>
17. NYC Tenant Movement History Timeline, https://assets.nationbuilder.com/righttocounselnyc/pages/36/attachments/original/1551125165/Tenant_Movement_History_Timeline_Slides_-_English.pdf?1551125165
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Faculty Biography

Vishal Chander, Esq.

Founder, The Chander Law Firm

Vishal Chander is Managing Attorney of The Chander Law Firm, where he focuses on the needs of multinational companies, foreign investors, persons of extraordinary ability and other priority workers. Vishal advises companies and individuals on immigration issues related to foreign investment and expansion of operations into the United States. He is experienced in all areas of immigration practice, including employment-based immigration matters, foreign investment, complex family-based immigration, removal, naturalization and humanitarian matters. Vishal's clients include Fortune 500 companies, technology startups, oil and gas companies, maritime organizations, athletes and entertainers, health care providers, as well as educational and research institutions.

Vishal has provided pro bono assistance on asylum, human trafficking, and domestic violence issues for organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center, Human Rights Initiative of Dallas, Catholic Charities of Dallas, and domestic violence advocacy organizations. Vishal is a graduate of Southern Methodist University School of Law. He is admitted to practice law in the states of Texas and New York. He is admitted before the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas, U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, and the United States Supreme Court.

Vishal currently serves as co-chair of the AABANY Issues Committee and Director on the AABANY Board.

Phil Desgranges, Esq.

Attorney-in-Charge of Criminal Law Reform Unit, Legal Aid Society

Philip Desgranges is the Attorney-in-Charge of Criminal Law Reform at The Legal Aid Society. In this role, Desgranges leads a team of directors, supervising attorneys and other staff in working to develop and advance innovative civil rights impact litigation and policy reform initiatives, build and maintain coalitions with other community organizations and leaders, engage in public education and media advocacy, and collaborate with defenders to address the systemic legal issues affecting Legal Aid's public defense clients. Desgranges is also a member of the Board of Directors of the New York City Bar Association.

Before joining Legal Aid, Desgranges was a senior staff attorney at the New York Civil Liberties Union, where he focused on statewide civil rights and civil liberties impact litigation.

Desgranges previously worked as an associate at Goodwin Procter LLP, where he litigated commercial matters and a wide range of pro bono matters, including a death penalty appeal. He also previously worked as a public defender at The Bronx Defenders, where he represented indigent clients at all stages of criminal proceedings, including trying cases to verdict.

Desgranges graduated cum laude from Boston University in 2006, and he graduated from New York University School of Law in 2009.

Marika Dias, Esq.

Director of the Safety Net Project, Urban Justice Center

Marika Dias is the Director of the Urban Justice Center's Safety Net Project (SNP), which provides tenant legal services, public benefits and homeless advocacy, and also organizes with welfare recipients and homeless New Yorkers. Marika is a public interest attorney who has worked in civil legal services since 2001, with a focus on providing legal services that support community organizing efforts and grassroots organizing groups. Prior to her role at SNP, Marika was the Director of the Tenant Rights Coalition at Legal Services NYC and before that, she was the Managing Attorney at Make the Road New York. Marika is a member of the Steering Committee of the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition, works on the Right To The City Alliance's national legal committee, and is a movement lawyering trainer which includes work with partners such as Movement Law Lab, the Law and Political Economy Project, The Action Lab, and the Shriver Center on Poverty Law.

Kevin Jason, Esq.

Deputy Director of Strategic Initiatives, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

Kevin E. Jason is Deputy Director of Strategic Initiatives at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. He leads and supervises racial justice litigation and other forms of advocacy in various areas of law. Generally, his docket focuses on police practices and educational equity matters that combine impact litigation with policymaking, community organizing, and strategic communications.

Before joining LDF, Kevin worked at the ACLU of New York (New York Civil Liberties Union). Immediately after law school, Kevin served as a law clerk to the Hon. Steven M. Gold of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York (retired) and to the Hon. Andrew L. Carter, Jr. of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Kevin received his J.D. from Stanford Law School. He also earned an M.A. in Public Policy from Stanford University and a B.A. in Economics and Political Science from Columbia University.

Jenny Lam, Esq.

Associate, Cohen, Weiss & Simon LLP

Jenny Lam practices in the area of employee benefits at Cohen, Weiss and Simon LLP since August 2022.

Prior to joining the firm, she practiced traditional labor law and employee benefits at Archer, Byington, Glennon & Levine LLP. Ms. Lam was a Peggy Browning Fellow at Workers Defense League, where she represented workers challenging denials of their unemployment benefits. She was also a law clerk at Levy Ratner, P.C.

Ms. Lam graduated from Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in 2020. She was the Senior Articles Editor of the Cardozo Journal of Equal Rights and Social Justice (formerly the Journal of Law and Gender), where she also published her Note, Mending Violence Against Women Workers in the Bangladesh Garment Industry: An Anti-capitalist Perspective on Fabrications of "Improving" Labor Conditions. Ms. Lam represented unemployment benefits claimants and

provided hotline assistance to individuals regarding their benefits at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic at the Unemployment Action Center. She advocated on behalf of low-income elderly and disabled individuals and immigrants at federal, state, and administrative proceedings with the Bet Tzedek Civil Litigation Clinic. She also served as the two-term president of the Suspension Representation Project and volunteered with the Asian American Bar Association Pro Bono Clinic and the People's Parity Project.

Ms. Lam graduated magna cum laude from Stony Brook University in 2016 in three years with a bachelor's degree in philosophy. Shortly after completing her undergraduate studies, she was selected as a 2016 Fellow with Philosophy as an Inclusive Summer Key summer institute with the theme of social justice. Prior to law school, Ms. Lam was a retail worker.

Bethany Li, Esq.

Executive Director, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Bethany Li is the executive director of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), bringing over 20 years of experience in community/movement lawyering working with Asian American communities and other communities of color. She has led litigation and policy efforts on issues such as deportation defense, immigration, workers' rights, housing and displacement, language access, and hate violence.

Bethany has represented Southeast Asian immigrants facing deportation; sued Florida over its anti-Chinese alien land law; won millions in back wages for low-wage workers; represented a multiracial coalition to defend and promote racial equity in Boston Public Schools; and represented multiple coalitions resisting displacement, including a successful effort in Philadelphia's Chinatown to defeat the proposed 76ers arena.

Bethany began her career at AALDEF as an Equal Justice Works Fellow, returning as Legal Director in 2022 and becoming executive director in 2024. She previously led the Asian Outreach Unit at Greater Boston Legal Services, Massachusetts' largest legal program serving Asian American communities, and taught in the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School.

Bethany earned her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.