



# 2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT

*studying change  
to make change*

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# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The great 18th-century Anglo-American activist and pamphleteer Thomas Paine is famous for asserting, in the midst of the Revolution, that “the TIME HATH FOUND US.” This line has been quoted by politicians over the years, including by former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis in 2021.

The spirit of Paine’s line animates the Luskin Center for History and Policy (LCHP). Indeed, in our moment of perplexity, when the United States faces profound political, social, and environmental challenges, it seems more essential than ever to return to the past to help us understand how we got where we are today. LCHP’s guiding mission is to engage in deep and textured historical analysis in order to shed light on the present and to use that knowledge to chart a more sensible future.

This past year, LCHP had a variety of important research and programmatic activities that are detailed in this report. Two highlights to call to your attention are the research report, “Selling Sunset,” by Ph.D students Abbie Cohen, Samuel Feldblum, and John Schmidt that explores how the University of California has yoked its financial well-being to real estate investments in recent decades. In addition to chronicling the close link between land and the growth of the university, the report proposes new ideas for the UC’s investment policy—in line with LCHP’s credo “to study change in order to make change.”


A second highlight is the forthcoming report by LCHP post-doctoral fellow Dr. Ben Zdenecanovic and a team of undergraduate researchers called “Medi-Cal and the Politics of Healthcare Policy in California.” Ben and team undertook a careful examination of the history of the state’s healthcare system with an eye to imagining a more effective and humane approach to physical and mental well-being.

2023-24, the year in which these reports were produced, was the most tumultuous one in my recollection at UCLA. It has prompted an important research question that LCHP will take up in the coming academic year. How have universities weathered crises of major scale in the past, with a particular interest in how leaders functioned during them? A high-powered research team led by Professors Eddie Cole and Michael Meranze will be exploring this question and helping to lay the foundation for a conversation about how the university can and should function better in the 21st century.

At a time when some have questioned the function and importance of the university, we are astonished once again by our dear friends, Meyer and Renee Luskin, whose vision and generosity gave rise to LCHP in 2017. In July of this year, they announced a remarkable \$25 million pledge to create the new Meyer and Renee Luskin Department of History. The Luskins’ transformational gift at this point in time is without peer—and marks an extraordinary validation of the importance of the study of history at UCLA. It is our ongoing mission to ensure that this investment serve to benefit not just for UCLA, but for the betterment of society. After all, knowledge of history is an essential precondition to informed civic engagement, which is needed more than ever. And we at UCLA, the top public university in the United States, have an obligation to generate knowledge in order to serve society.

Our immense gratitude to the Luskins for their visionary generosity!

Sincerely,



**David N. Myers**

Director, UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy  
Distinguished Professor and Sady and Ludwig Kahn Chair in Jewish History

# ABOUT LCHP

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**Vision:** The UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy (LCHP) imagines a world in which leaders, policymakers, and citizens regularly use history as a guide to civic engagement, policy formation, and an alternative and better future.

**Mission:** The UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy (LCHP) aims to bring vital historical knowledge, perspective, and analysis to bear on key contemporary issues and policy deliberations.

**Approach:** We approach our work in the following ways:

Research:

Conducting influential research that models a new form of historically grounded policy analysis.

Education & Training:

Training students and scholars to apply historical research to key present-day questions.

Public Outreach:

Promoting history as a central tool of informed public debate.

# THE 2023-24 LCHP TEAM



**David N. Myers**  
Director

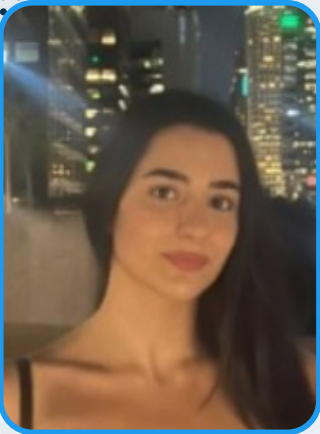
David has been directing LCHP since its inception in 2017, and continues to host episodes of the LCHP podcast Then & Now as well as LCHP lectures and events. In addition to his LCHP work, David also directs the Initiative to Study Hate. In 2024-25, he will serve an advisory role on the Future of Higher Education research project through LCHP.



**Rose Campbell**  
Assistant Director

In 2023-24, Rose focused on developing ways for LCHP to grow by organizing multiple public events, training student workers, and helping our LCHP grantees learn the skills they need to translate their historical research into concrete policy recommendations. She also published her first edited volume, which focuses on how researchers can study violence as a tool of power in ancient cultures.

## Student Workers



**Mary Bejanyan**  
Undergraduate Student Worker

Our undergraduate employee throughout the 2023-24 academic year, Mary handled the complete update of our LCHP website, including content creation, and ran most of our social media. She also helped create a strategic engagement plan to help us reach a broader audience. Mary graduated in June 2024, and we are incredibly proud of her achievements and grateful for her competence and insight over the past year!



**Hiba Zaidi**  
Graduate Student Worker

Hiba joined us at the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year during her first year in graduate school. Hiba worked with us to publish and advertise each episode of Then & Now, and help develop social media strategies to reach more followers. While Hiba is moving on to other opportunities for the 2024-24 academic year, we are immensely grateful for her hard work, excellent writing skills, and thoughtful contributions to LCHP!

## then & now

# LAND, ENDOWMENTS, AND ETHICS: UNPACKING THE HISTORICAL LEGACY OF UC REAL ESTATE INVESTMENTS

University of California At Los Angeles, Westwood Hills, Calif.

74440 7611



**Samuel Feldblum,  
John Schmidt, and  
Abbie Cohen**



**UCLA** Luskin Center for  
History and Policy

## 2023-24 LCHP Research

LCHP's research during the 2023-24 academic year explored a variety of important issues relevant to Los Angeles and the surrounding region. We supported five research teams during the year:

- A team led by Prof. Tawny Paul continued its examination of the history of Los Angeles street naming policies and practices.
- A team comprising graduate students Sammy Feldblum, John Schmidt, and Abbie Cohen examined the place of real estate and real estate investment in the history of the University of California.
- A team led by LCHP post-doctoral fellow, Dr. Ben Zdencanovic, researched the history of California state welfare policies.
- LCHP senior fellow Alisa Belinkoff Katz studied governance in LA city and county.



## HISTORY IN THE STREETS

### *Street Renaming in Los Angeles: Commemoration, Policy and the Politics of Identity*

Tawny Paul, Tessa Fier, Maggie Seay and Rachel Tokofsky

#### **History in the Streets: Street Renaming practices in Los Angeles: Commemoration, Policy, and the Politics of Identity**

*Tawny Paul, Tessa Fier, Maggie Seay, and Rachel Tokofsky*

Whether it be city planning or school curricula, tension over how history is represented, remembered and taught has gripped the American social and political landscape over the past several years. The 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings brought renewed and critical attention to public commemoration, particularly the abundance of statues, memorials and place-names dedicated to the legacies of the Civil War, and how these offer one-sided historical narratives. In order to address these issues of memory, power and identity in the urban landscape, this report focuses on street names as forms of commemoration, using Los Angeles as a case study.

[Read the full report here.](#)



LOBBY AT FIELD HOSPITAL  
RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

## **Medi-Cal and the Politics of Healthcare Policy in California**

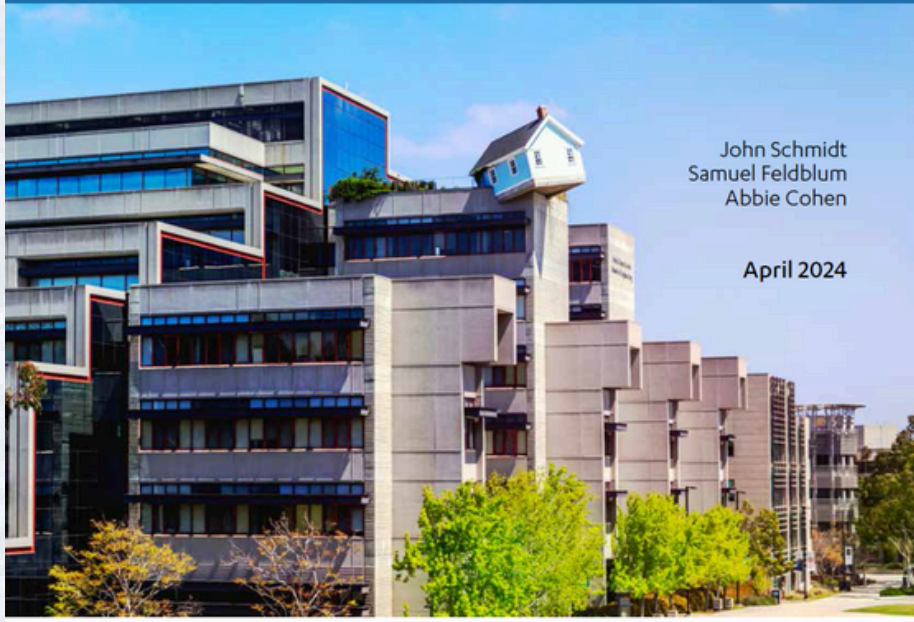
*Ben Zdencanovic, Sara Ohannessian, and Lauren Heiberg, with additional research by Emilia Fergadiotti and Emiko Levings*

This research project traces the political, economic, legal, and social evolution of healthcare policy in California from the nineteenth century to the present, with an eye to how a historical perspective can inform current healthcare policy issues and debates. The project explores state healthcare policy as contested terrain fought over by a variety of stakeholders, and pays particular attention to the ways that California has been, at various points, both a catalyst and microcosm for broader, national healthcare policy debates. The report presents a set of actionable policy recommendations, informed by historical analysis and targeted to state and local policymakers, that address ongoing current policy issues such as Medicaid “unwinding,” the healthcare implications of the state’s drug and homelessness epidemic; COVID and workers’ compensation; and disparities in access to healthcare along lines of race and immigration status.

[Read the full report here.](#)



## Selling Sunset: Land and Financialization at the University of California



### **Selling Sunset: Land and Financialization at the University of California**

*Samuel Feldblum, John Schmidt, and Abbie Cohen*

In the 1980s, the UCLA endowment and pension funds grew in size and complexity as state funding declined, amid what higher education scholars refer to as the privatization of the public university. Real estate came to occupy a position of increasing importance as a financial asset for the university after the turn of the millennium, and especially in the years after the financial crisis. This report elucidates the UC's buildout of real estate investment capacity, culminating in the current moment: a massive investment in Blackstone's Real Estate Investment Trust, allowing passive management and high returns, alongside renewed plans for an actively managed LLC with which the UC would control its own investment properties.

[Read the full report here.](#)

# 2024-25: LCHP Research Team to Explore the Past and Futures of the University



The pro-Palestine encampment in front of Royce Hall at UCLA on April 30, 2024.

2023-24 was one of the most tumultuous years in UCLA's century-long existence. The convulsive events of October 7 and its aftermath unleashed deep division, friction, and protest on the UCLA campus and others across the nation. Many people on our campuses feel unsafe and disillusioned. How does the university regain the trust of its diverse constituents? Can a new compact be built? To help gain traction on these questions, LCHP will be examining how universities have weathered crises of major scale in the past, with a particular interest in how leaders functioned during them. A high-powered research team led by Professors Eddie Cole and Michael Meranze will be conducting research on a number of historical case studies that help us understand the moment through which we just passed and how we might re-imagine the university in the United States in the 21st century. In addition to Professors Cole and Meranze, the project will include experienced graduate researchers Abbie Cohen and John Schmidt, as well as new undergraduate researchers Elizabeth Karlin, Helio Luti, and Kaitlyn Powell.

# Research Grants: 2023-23

Every year, LCHP awards grants to teams who conduct collaborative research or hold public programming that brings historical analysis to bear on key issues of contemporary relevance. During the 2023-24 academic year, LCHP awarded funding to support four major research projects.

## **How Soviet Prison Subculture Shapes the Russian Political Landscape**

Researchers: Lydia Roberts, Marianna Petiaskina, Professor Igor Pilschikov

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has confused many in the Western world, who struggle to find the logic behind the military choices being made. This project suggested that social attitudes towards 'gangster-like' management of social processes in Russia contributed to Russian decision-making in Ukraine, and that the roots of this logic might be traced back to prisons of the Soviet era.

[Read the report here.](#)

## **Defining the Role of Indigenous Nomadic Groups in Egyptian Policymaking**

Researchers: Maryan Ragheb, Matei Tichindelean, Professor Willeke Wendrich

This project examined the lifeways and interactions of indigenous groups across the Eastern Desert of ancient and modern Egypt and Sudan, exploring practices of resource extraction as they relate to ancient and modern strategies for cooperation between nomadic communities and policy-makers.

Report forthcoming.



## Kamau Daáood's Archives:

### Documenting Black Los Angeles

Researchers: Samuel Lamontagne,  
Prof. Robin D.G. Kelley

This project focused on the work of Kamau Daáood, an influential artist, activist, and educator, whose legacy continues to impact his community in South Central Los Angeles. Daáood's rich collection, reflecting decades of work with Black Los Angeles arts, culture, and activism, was cataloged to form the beginnings of a community archive.



[Read the report here.](#)

### The Evolution of the Fairfax District: Exploring the Origins, Changes, and Impact on the Jewish Community in Los Angeles

Researchers: Stephanie Zager, Michaela  
Esposito, Ella Kitt, Benjamin Kersten, Prof.  
David Myers

This project, featuring an outstanding trio of undergraduate researchers, assessed the impact of rising anti-semitism and the Covid-19 pandemic on Jewish-owned business in the historic Fairfax district of Los Angeles, and explored options for preserving historical aspects of the neighborhood and increasing community engagement with the district's history.

[Read the report here.](#)



# Upcoming Research Grants: 2024-25

We are thrilled to introduce our 2024-25 LCHP research grantees!



## Understanding How Teacher Unions and Educational Justice Coalitions Can Play Roles in Addressing Educational Equity, Civil Rights, and Democracy

Researchers: Emily Szpiro and Alex Caputo-Pearl

Faculty Advisor: John Rogers

This project addresses the problem of understanding how teacher unions can play a role in building power and fostering movements that address educational equity, civil rights, and the expansion of democracy in schools and in surrounding communities. Critically, the project will also attempt to provide support for decision-making that shapes the future of the teacher union and educational justice coalition movements.

## Historical Border Instability and Democratic Backlash

Researchers: Luwei Ying and Sadaf Vafa

Faculty Advisor: David B. Carter

This research addresses the contemporary “democratic backlash” problem by examining an often-overlooked historical factor: the impact of frequent historical border changes on localities. By exploring how these border changes have shaped local political attitudes over centuries, this project aims to provide a historical context for the modern anti-democratic phenomenon and to propose policy solutions to address this pressing issue.



## Changes to the Public Charge Rule Between 2019 and 2023 and Associations with Basic Needs Outcomes Among Low-Income Immigrant Adults in California

Researchers: Joelle Wolstein and Susan Babey

This study explores changes in avoidance of public programs out of fear that it would impact immigration status between the Trump administration's proposed rule change and the Biden administration's rule change. It also aims to explore changes to the relationship between avoidance of public programs and basic needs outcomes (access to care, food security, and housing security) among low-income immigrant adults.



## The Effect of British Colonialism on Transphobia in India

Researchers: Ananya Hariharan, Emily Ortiz, and Josh Goetz

Faculty Advisor: Daniel Posner

This project will examine transphobia in India as a direct product of British colonialism. Specifically, the project seeks to understand different attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals in areas that had different levels of influence from British colonial rule as a way to understand how colonial attitudes may have impacted local attitudes.



# Then & Now Season 4

Then & Now, LCHP's podcast, connects past to present, using historical analysis and context to help guide us through modern issues and policy decisions. Every other week LCHP interviews historians, policymakers, and thought leaders about what happened then, and what that means for us now.



## By the numbers:

**43,000**

lifetime  
downloads

**8,000**

Season 4  
downloads

**19**

Season 4  
episodes

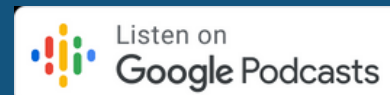
**114**

lifetime  
episodes

*"Understanding  
the Israel-Gaza  
Conflict."*

most popular  
episode

*Listen to Then & Now wherever you listen to your podcasts!*



# Then & Now Season 4 Notable Episodes

## Episode 6: Understanding the Israel-Gaza Conflict with Dr. James L. Gelvin and Dr. David N. Myers

This episode, recorded in November 2023, explores the historical background to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, addressing questions such as:

- What is Hamas?
- What led to Hamas' attack on Israel?
- Why was Israel so ill-prepared?
- What does the future hold for Israel and Palestine, and for the wider region?

Listen to the full episode [here](#).

*then & now*

**UNDERSTANDING  
THE ISRAEL-GAZA CONFLICT**



with  
**Dr. James L. Gelvin & Dr. David N. Myers**

**UCLA** Luskin Center for History and Policy

*then & now*

**CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES  
IN THE NEW AGE OF AI**



with **John Villasenor**

**UCLA** Luskin Center for History and Policy

## Episode 11: Challenges and Opportunities in the New Age of AI: A Long-Term View with John Villasenor

As advances in technology continue to shape our world, understanding the implications of artificial intelligence (AI), cyber security, and digital privacy has never been more important. In this episode of *then & now*, we delve into the crucial intersection of technology, law, and policy with John Villasenor, a distinguished professor at UCLA and co-director of the UCLA Institute for Technology, Law and Policy.

Listen to the full episode [here](#).

*then & now*

**LAND, ENDOWMENTS, AND ETHICS:  
UNPACKING THE HISTORICAL LEGACY OF  
UC REAL ESTATE INVESTMENTS**



University of California At Los Angeles, Westwood Hills, Calif. 74448 1911

**Samuel Feldblum,  
John Schmidt, and  
Abbie Cohen**

**UCLA** Luskin Center for History and Policy

## Episode 17: Land, Endowments, and Ethics: Unpacking the Historical Legacy of UC Real Estate Investments. A Conversation with Samuel Feldblum, John Schmidt, and Abbie Cohen

The call for divestment from Israel in recent campus protests has led to questions about the growth and composition of large university endowments, including that of the University of California (UC). This episode explores the UC's significant investment in Blackstone, a real estate trust that generates profits by raising rents and housing prices—outcomes that have a direct impact on many UC students and faculty.

Listen to the full episode [here](#).



# Programming

## Understanding the Israel-Gaza Conflict

November 21, 2023

During this live Zoom event, participants were able to learn more about the history and background of the Israel-Palestine conflict from UCLA historians James L. Gelvin and David N. Myers. Following the presentations, audience members had the chance to ask questions and get live answers from our speakers. One of our most successful events, we had over 100 attendees!

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## UNDERSTANDING THE ISRAEL-GAZA CONFLICT



Dr. James L. Gelvin

**Nov. 21  
2pm  
Zoom**

Join us for short presentations followed by Q&A.



Dr. David N. Myers

**Registration required.**

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## RACISM, LAW, AND THE HIDDEN POWER OF THE ARCHIVE



PROFESSOR ELIZABETH HINTON  
YALE UNIVERSITY

Focusing her discussion on crime control policies enacted in the 1980s and 1990s, Dr. Elizabeth Hinton will explore opportunities within archives to combat racial discrimination and advance social justice through the law.

## Racism, Law, and the Hidden Power of the Archive

January 10, 2024

We kicked off 2024 with a fascinating lecture by Dr. Elizabeth Hinton, who discussed how archives can be used to demonstrate discriminatory intent in legal cases and policies.

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## **EVICTON AS COLLATERAL FOR MUNICIPAL BONDS:**

### **THE MAKING OF A PREDATORY DEBT MARKET IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY LOS ANGELES**



**PROFESSOR  
MARQUES  
VESTAL**  
UCLA

**DATE: FEB 7, 2024**

**TIME: 12:30 PM**

**LOCATION: BUNCHE 6339**



RSVP HERE

## **Eviction as Collateral for Municipal Bonds: The Making of a Predatory Debt Market in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles**

Feb 7, 2024

Dr. Marques Vestal explored how the predatory debt market developed in Los Angeles in the 20th century and how the policies around housing continue to affect certain communities.

## **How European Wars End and What This Might Tell Us About Conditions for Peace in Ukraine**

May 15, 2024

Dr. Stella Gervas shared her research on peace-making after European wars, and considered how historical examples might provide a framework for what peace might look like after the eventual end of the Russia-Ukraine war.



# 2024 Summer Research Institute



**The 2024 LCHP Summer Research Institute attracted 25% more applicants than the 2023 SRI!** More than 50 outstanding undergraduate and graduate students immersed themselves in historical research methods over the course of 2 days in this free, online workshop. On June 17 and 18, 2024, students were exposed to the myriad ways in which historical research and knowledge can make a difference in the world. They learned about archival and data-driven research methods and examined different modes of applying historical knowledge to present-day problems and issues. SRI featured outstanding UCLA presenters who offered a wide range of expertise. They included: **Anthea Hartig, Tawny Paul, Tyree Boyd-Pates, Jimmy Zavala, and Bharat Venkat**, as well as our own LCHP research team of **Samuel Felblum, John Schmidt, and Abbie Cohen**.

# Stay in touch!

*Follow us to hear about LCHP activities in the coming year*



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@luskinhistory



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History and Policy



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history.ucla.edu