



CUAA NEWSLETTER

Fall 2025 / November

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MEETING
DISTINGUISHED LECTURE**

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From the President

Greetings to Members of the Critical Urban Anthropology Association!

We're looking forward to the AAA Annual Meeting in New Orleans!

Others of you will not be able to attend the Annual Meeting, and I want to take this opportunity to say especially that the CUAA Board has not forgotten about you! I want to mention to all members, but especially to those of you who are not able to join us in New Orleans, what CUAA will be undertaking after the November 20-23 Annual Meeting is over. Increasingly we realize that it's not just the Annual Meeting that brings anthropologists together, it's our common interests and concerns that always need to be attended to, even if we need to do this remotely or combine Zoom events with in-person meetings.

**For all members, but especially if
you are not going to New Orleans,
please be sure to read the last
section of this Newsletter!**

-Don Nonini, CUAA President



CUAA MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

CUAA needs your help to recruit more CUAA members! If you have colleagues or students (graduate or undergrads) who might be interested in CUAA but aren't members, please ask them to join CUAA today. And whether or not you are going to New Orleans this November, we ask you to renew your membership in CUAA when it comes time for renewal this year, if you haven't already.

Join or renew your membership [HERE](#), or copy this link: <https://americananthro.org/membership/>

CUAA as you will see below has been active not only in organizing the CUAA Program for New Orleans, but also in other ways set out in this Newsletter that offers value to all members. The CUAA Board and President are looking for new ways to be of service to you as members.

If you have concerns or suggestions – or offers to help! – feel free to write Don Nonini at dnonini@email.unc.edu.

If You are Attending the AAA Annual Meeting 2025 in New Orleans: What's Going On with CUAA Program?

A Great CUAA Program in New Orleans!

To recap, the topics addressed in oral presentation sessions of individual papers and in roundtables are wonderfully varied. They are at the cutting edge of our understanding of urban life and cultural production across the world. Such new subdisciplines and theoretical interests

as urban political ecology (e.g., politics of habitable air); the power and practices of infrastructures (e.g., flows of food and people); new approaches to urban materialities (e.g. concrete); illiberal urban political orders and the violence they foster; urban social movements and their potential; failed futuristic urban utopias associated with neoliberalism's decline (e.g., Forest City in Malaysia. And, throughout many sessions, the AAA Conference theme of Ghosts is brought out in reflections about the phantasms and hauntings through which the urban past lives in the present. The locations and times for oral presentation and roundtable sessions are available in the AAA 2025 Final Program downloadable [here](#).

And, for a special treat, be sure to check out the CUAA Flash session of eight individual flash presentations that is scheduled for **Thursday, November 20, from 12:45 PM-2:15 PM** in Marriott Balcony II!

Distinguished Lecture by Desiree Fields at AAA 2025

Professor Desiree Fields (Geography, University of California), will deliver the 2025 CUAA Distinguished Lecture, "California Forever? Speculating on 'new cities in the wild frontier'" on **Saturday, November 22, from 7:30 PM-8:30 PM, in Marriott Galerie 2.**

A brief quote from her abstract suggests the fascinating insights that her paper will reveal:

"The urban utopias desired by tech elites are ideologically aligned with much of the second Trump administration's governing agenda. Could their experiments in city-building be edging closer to realization than previous failures might suggest? In this lecture, I draw on California Forever, one such effort in the San Francisco Bay Area, to speculate about the futures of tech-led cities in an era of immigration sweeps, the criminalization of unhoused people, and an unprecedented expansion of federal surveillance. What urban forms might be concretized by these forces?"

Professor Fields is an economic geographer and critical urban scholar. Her research program addresses how Wall Street and Silicon Valley are jointly transforming property relations, urbanization, and economic subjectivity.

I hope to see all of you who are coming to AAA New Orleans join us for her lecture!



The CUAA Reception - After Professor Fields' Lecture

When: Saturday, November 21, @9 PM - @11 PM,

Where: A café and bar in the French Quarter (see below)

Best of all... Food and drink for CUAA members is free!

The CUAA Reception is held in honor of our members, our 2025 distinguished speaker, and our CUAA Awards winners. **The venue for the Reception will be revealed at the time of the CUAA Annual Business meeting, which will be held from 12:15 PM-2:15 PM on Friday, November 21, at the Marriott Studio 1.** We will also post the venue simultaneously on the CUAA Website: <https://cuaa.americananthro.org/>



Let's show the world that CUAA members and our guests know how to let the good times roll on in downtown New Orleans!

2025 CUAA Awards

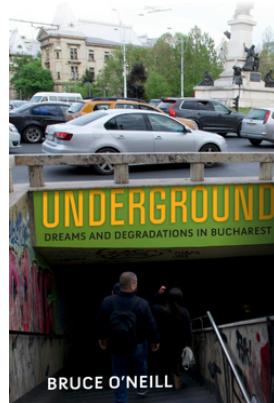
The high point of the CUAA Program every year is the awarding of our prizes for distinguished scholarship, which are presented to their authors in person at the Annual CUAA Business meeting on [Friday, November 21, from 12:45 PM-2:15 PM in the Marriott Studio 1 Room](#). Be there and join us for this joyous occasion! The authors have personally assured me that they will do their utmost to be there in person.

In addition, CUAA will use its social media accounts on Instagram, BlueSky, and Facebook to announce and publicize the prizewinners!

Leeds Prize for Best Book in Urban Anthropology Published in 2024

For the best book in urban anthropology published in the previous year, the 2025 CUAA Leeds Book Prize committee awards the Leeds prize to **Bruce O'Neill (Anthropology, St. Louis University), for his book entitled, *Underground: Dreams and Degradations in Bucharest*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024.**

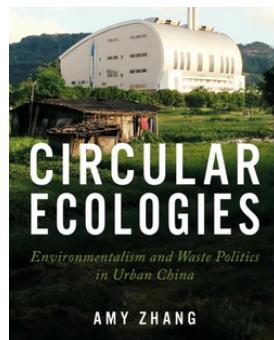
The Leeds Prize comes with a \$500 award.



2025 Leeds Prize Honorable Mention: Amy Zhang

(Anthropology, New York University)

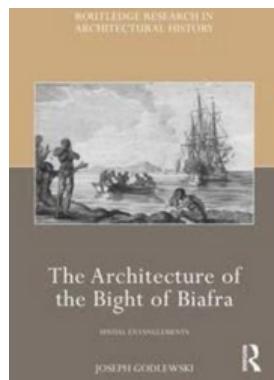
Book: *Circular Ecologies: Environmentalism and Waste Politics in Urban China* (Stanford University Press, 2024)



2025 Leeds Prize Honorable Mention: Joseph Godlewski

(Architecture, Syracuse University).

Book: *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra: Spatial Entanglements*.



For the full statements describing what makes each of them truly exceptional, see the CUAA website "Awards" [here](#) – or better yet, plan to attend the CUAA Business Meeting and hear from the Award Committee in person!

Other CUAA Prizes

Best Graduate Student Paper Prize for 2025

CUAA is delighted to announce that **Junnan Mu** (Harvard University) is the winner of the 2025 Best Graduate Student Paper Award for her outstanding essay, *“Story za Jaba: Ecologies of Hype Around Kenya’s Smart Cities.”* The prize comes with a \$300 cash award.

Best Graduate Student and Recent PhD panel presented at the CUAA Program New Orleans

The panel, “Politics of Spatial Absence: Ghosts and ‘Places Out of Joint’” has been selected as winner of the Best PhD student/recent PhD Panel of the Critical Urban Anthropology Program at the 2025 American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting. The prize comes with a \$1,000 award to be shared equally among the panel’s presenters: **Idil Onen** (Anthropology, CUNY Grad Ctr), **Irina Shirobokova** (Anthropology, CUNY Grad Ctr), **Nehal Amer** (Anthropology, CUNY Grad Ctr), **and Jesse McLaughlin** (Anthropology, CUNY Grad Ctr).

For full statements describing the accomplishments represented through these two unique CUAA prizes, see the CUAA website [“Awards”](#) page. Or, again, come congratulate them in person at our November 21 Business Meeting!

If You Aren’t Joining Us in New Orleans – And Even If You Are: A Special Message

As we are all increasingly aware, the discipline of anthropology is facing hard times

Neoliberal austerity programs at our universities, decreased funding for travel for faculty (and none for graduate students), and the ordeals faced by our increasingly precaritized faculty, are creating stress among anthropologists. Recent PhD’s struggling in a shrinking job market face extraordinary hardships. Increasingly university administrators and boards of trustees consisting of wealthy donors to which they answer are becoming increasingly intolerant of the academic freedom to which anthropologists, like all faculty in academia, are committed. Anthropologists are increasingly being targeted and attacked by extreme rightwing forces including the Trump regime that seek to intimidate and at times commit violence against anthropologists for our research, teaching, and political stance... (cont.)

In 2025, Resulting from These Challenges To Our Discipline, CUAA Now Faces Two Problems

First, the CUAA Board is deeply concerned about the AAA's and, closer to home, CUAA's membership decline. Formally, CUAA is required by the AAA Executive Board to **increase its numbers to at least a minimum of 225 members within the next two years or face dissolution as a section**. Since November of last year, the CUAA Board has worked hard to stanch the decrease in CUAA members, and we are proud to say for the first time in years that our number of members are modestly increasing, even if they are still below 225 members. Thanks to all of you who have joined or rejoined us recently!

I'm confident that if we keep on doing what we're doing so far – with your help – we can not only raise our memberships beyond 225 members, but do so in ways that can address the current crisis faced by the AAA and by anthropology as a discipline, and become more functional for and responsive to our members. Indeed, the CUAA Board realizes that in order to increase and retain our members, **CUAA as an organization must become increasingly more functional by adapting to the difficult situation that we collectively face** while providing more services needed by our members, particularly those who are disadvantaged by their lack of experience or status in the discipline.

Second, *City & Society*, CUAA's journal which has published as our association's journal for 37 years, faces its own crisis. For all of that time, *C & S* has been part of the AAA publishing portfolio. However, as part of a restructuring exercise brought on by the ending of the AAA's contract with Wiley publishers in 2027, **the AAA is terminating *City and Society's* presence in the AAA portfolio with Wiley, as well as its royalties. That means that within the next year or two, our journal needs to find an independent publisher**, and that has to happen with workable finances on the part of both CUAA as the journal's sponsor and a new publishing partner. The *C & S* editors and the CUAA board are hopeful, but making the finances work in the new arrangement will be challenging. The CUAA Board has already set aside modest funding over a 5-year to assist the journal in its transition, but the amount of bridging funds needed to meet expenses is still unclear.



Continued....

These two crises are now confronting the CUAA Board at a time when the Board is under-resourced in terms of CUAA revenues and even more importantly, in terms of Board members' labor time. CUAA is ethically committed to always sharing governance on its Board widely to include not only relatively secure tenured faculty, but also those who are still tenure-track, those in precarious contingent faculty positions, and Ph.D. students. As a result, colleagues who have precarious economic positions, and are forced to devote their spare time to writing yet another article for peer review, search out another postdoc, apply for another (scarce) tenure-track position, or look for alternative temporary employment to pay the bills, are on the CUAA Board, and quite rightly they feel pressed for time. Currently, more than 50% of the CUAA Board occupy precarious positions in so far as they do not have tenure. While tenured members of the Board do take on major Board responsibilities (e.g., as editors of *City & Society*), they are often overworked within their own departments.

As a result, the CUAA Board is facing its own labor crisis, and this is why the Board needs your help especially as it seeks to increase CUAA membership, bring its journal to a safe new publishing partner, and provide more services and functionality to all members.

Some Proposals Your CUAA Board Is Considering...

With all this in mind, here are some **tentative proposals** that the CUAA Board will be considering in the next three weeks. I invite you to send me your reactions to them to at my email dnonini@email.unc.edu so that I can share them with the CUAA Board. Please especially note where YOU could come in, where I refer below to a "regular CUAA member"!

1). Hold monthly or bimonthly scholarly sessions on Zoom to which all CUAA members would be invited. Scholarly sessions would alternate with more "political" sessions. Scholarly sessions would be one in which CUAA Board members (first) and then regular CUAA members would present their own original research for no more than 15 to 20 minutes after having pre-circulated a short manuscript to participants. There would then be a 10 minute discussion comment, followed by broader conversation by the author and discussant with those attending. A political session e.g., info sessions, talks, etc. would be about political issues on topics where we have expertise (e.g. Trump's invasion of cities), or which are of special disciplinary concern (e.g. AAA governance, labor activism in academia).

2). Hold monthly/bimonthly mentoring sessions convened by senior CUAA Board or regular CUAA members for ABD PhD students and recent PhD's (a.k.a. precarious scholars), which would start after the NOLA meetings, covering how to publish, write job letters, etc.

3). Reactivate CUAA's now mothballed URB-ANTH-L listserv. Why? It would a daily resource for all CUAA members to keep in touch with one another to announce the recent publications, grants, and CFP's. Initially, the listserv would be exclusively for CUAA members, but perhaps after a year or two, non-CUAA AAA members who wished could be invited to join if endorsed by a CUAA member.

4). Continue posting and boosting CUAA members' achievements (publications, awards and prizes, grants received...) through the CUAA website, and on CUAA Social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Bluesky.

5). Convene a CUAA Virtual Spring Conference which would be an online one-day Zoom webinar. This could start in the spring of 2027.

6). Convene recent PhD/precarious scholar members of CUAA to meet annually either face-to-face or virtually (probably the latter). Provide a CUAA monetary prize for the best paper not already in publication) written by a recent PhD without tenure-track employment, as well as consideration for publication in *City & Society*.

7). Attract more graduate students as regular members by helping them come together to locate other graduate students or professionals who could join them in forming a panel, act as discussants, etc.

8). CUAA targeted mentoring of PhD students and recent PhD members who show interest as potential CUAA Board election candidates to be led by current and former Board members.

9). Recruit an informal group of regular CUAA "super members" who could assist the CUAA Board in carrying out these above tasks along with CUAA Board members. Typically, such super members would have experience and perhaps more time, e.g. as tenured or retired members. CUAA would ensure such super members are recognized annually for their contributions. [Are you interested?]

10). Adjust CUAA membership fees more appropriately, e.g. low if not zero membership fees for PhD and undergraduate students, specifically lower fees for precarious scholars.

These are some of the proposals that the CUAA Board have come up with so far to increase our membership and to develop our functionality and value to members. What do you think of them? Again, I invite you to write to me at dnonini@email.unc.edu with your suggestions comments and (to be blunt) your offers to help us undertake one or more of these tasks.

For those of you not going to Orleans, please get in touch, and hopefully we'll be meeting one another over Zoom if not in person soon! For those of you going to New Orleans, I look forward to seeing you at the CUAA Annual Business Meeting, our Distinguished Speaker's lecture and our Reception!

All the best,

Don

Don Nonini, President
Critical Urban Anthropology Association



CUAA NEEDS YOUR HELP!
Join or renew your membership:
<https://americananthro.org/membership/>



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