



DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS WORKERS UNION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 29, 2021

SUBJECT: Staff of Duke University Press Organizes to Form a Union

DURHAM, NC – On Monday, employees at Duke University Press, a leading nonprofit academic publisher based at Duke University, announced that they are organizing to form a union. By uniting together, they want to ensure that they gain an equitable working environment that mirrors the themes of equity, justice, and inclusion that are central to the books and journals the press publishes.

Staff urges Duke University Press to voluntarily recognize the Duke University Press Workers Union (DUP Workers Union), a unit of The NewsGuild, TNG-CWA Local 32035, so that they can partner with management to continue to produce over 140 books and 50 journals a year while simultaneously managing subscriptions, fulfillment, hosting, marketing, and sales for five other university presses and scholarly societies.

For years, the press has struggled with constant turnover, extended vacancies, low compensation, inconsistent policy enforcement, and patterns of discrimination. The expansion of different initiatives, including those related to acquisitions, platform development, product creation, and distribution, has come at the price of employee well-being. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the precarity experienced by staff members.

“We need a union at Duke University Press because we deserve a workplace that recognizes us as whole people, with many different demands and commitments in our lives outside of work,” said Kelsea Smith, an Assistant Managing Editor at the press. “I was offered only three weeks of paid leave when I had my first baby during a pandemic. I’ve seen others endure some harsh treatment at the Press, especially people of color and queer people. I think we need a union because our working conditions affect our whole lives, so we deserve a say over them. The only way to secure that power definitively is by coming together as a union and meeting DUP at the bargaining table.”

Alejandra Mejía, an Assistant Editor at the press, agreed. “As a formerly undocumented immigrant from a working-class background, I grew up in a context where I witnessed constant precarity, manipulation, wage theft, and fear in my community. Through those experiences, I’ve learned that workers are the experts of our own condition, and we must have a say in the working conditions that affect our lives. I believe that a union would be the most powerful mechanism to ensure equity at DUP. I care about my colleagues and I want to see us all thrive.”

“After 14 years at DUP, I have come to believe that, while it’s great to work at a major university press in the USA, it would be better if Duke recognized the stature and value-add that all of us, together, contribute to the business that is DUP,” said Roy Pattishall, an Assistant Managing Editor at the press. “My contribution and all our contributions deserve better recognition, better and more transparent treatment, and better compensation, along with other deserved improvements, like improved family leave and retirement and hiring policies and more.”

Employees urge Duke University Press and Duke University to recognize the union and to collaborate together to build a strong, transparent, equitable, and diverse future. The press publishes content at the forefront of fields traditionally marginalized within the academy, including Black studies and queer studies, that work toward a more just world. Now is the chance for Duke University Press to prove that it really does stand for those ideals.

The NewsGuild-CWA represents over 20,000 journalists, media and nonprofit workers throughout the US, Puerto Rico, and Canada, including *The Associated Press*, *The New York Times*, and *The Chicago Tribune*.
