

Q0.

UW-GREEN BAY RESEARCH COUNCIL

## SUMMER RESEARCH SCHOLAR 2025 APPLICATION

Q1. First Name

Jon

Q2. Last Name

Shelton

Q3. Personal pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them - More info: <https://www.mypronouns.org/> )

- ☐ she/her
- ☒ he/him
- ☐ they/them
- ☐ she/they
- ☐ he/they
- ☐ Other

Q4. Project Title

Humphrey and Hawkins: How a Jobs Guarantee in 1978 Could Have Revolutionized Civil Rights and American Politics

Q5. This proposal is requesting funds for:

- ☐ Travel to conference for scholarly presentation
- ☐ Purchase/rental of equipment
- ☐ Copying costs
- ☐ Travel associated with research and data collection
- ☐ Human subject payments

- ☒ Data collection, analysis, fabrication, etc.

Q6. Campus Address (Office location, building, department)

MAC A324

Q7. Email Address

sheltonj@uwgb.edu

Q8. Project timeline dates (month/day/year-month/day/year)

June 2025-August 2025

Q9. Faculty Status

- ☒ Full Professor
- ☐ Associate Professor
- ☐ Assistant Professor (tenure-track)

Q10. Budgetary Unit Department Name (e.g. Business, Human Biology, Theatre and Dance, etc)

Democracy and Justice Studies

Q11. Budgetary Unit Chair & Email address

Jon Shelton, sheltonj@uwgb.edu

Q12. Budgetary Administrative Department Associate Name and Email Address

Lorri Kornowski, kornowski@uwgb.edu

Q14. Please upload your Project description (page limit: 5) in PDF format

[HH narrative.pdf](#)

185.8KB

application/pdf

Q15. Please upload an Exceeding Scholarly Expectations narrative (page limit: 1) in PDF format

[HH Scholarly expectations.pdf](#)

113.6KB

application/pdf

Q16. Please upload your Timeline document (page limit 1) in PDF format.

[HH timeline.pdf](#)

115.7KB

application/pdf

Q17. Please upload your Curriculum Vitae or Resume in PDF format

[HH vita.pdf](#)

183.7KB

application/pdf

Q18. Please upload proof of approval from unit chair in PDF format

[HH chair approval.pdf](#)

95.9KB

application/pdf

Location Data

**Location:** ([43.0026](#), [-87.9417](#))

**Source:** GeoIP Estimation



*Humphrey and Hawkins: How a Jobs Guarantee in 1978 Could Have Revolutionized Civil  
Rights and American Politics*

Jon Shelton

**Project Description**

In the 2024 presidential election, former President Donald Trump won voters with an income below \$50,000 over Kamala Harris 50-48%, the first time since the advent of reliable exit polling in which a Republican won the lowest income demographic in a presidential election. Even Ronald Reagan in 1980, which was the last time a Republican won a true landslide election, lost the lowest income bracket to Democrat Jimmy Carter.

Clearly, [as I wrote for \*The Nation\* last December](#), working Americans' votes were increasingly up for grabs in a way they hadn't been in some time. The average worker makes less now, adjusted for inflation, than they did in the 1970s, and had their wages simply kept up with the overall productivity of the workforce, the majority of Americans would not be living paycheck to paycheck. Tens of millions of Americans face serious economic insecurity, and inflation, particularly the rising cost of housing, is causing many voters to reassess their political allegiances.

Indeed, if we look at the last three Presidential elections beyond the scope of the individual candidates, a pattern has clearly emerged: in 2016, Hillary Clinton, an effective incumbent, lost to Trump; in 2020, Trump, himself an incumbent, lost to Joe Biden; and in 2024, Kamala Harris, the effective incumbent, lost to Trump again. The American voters who swing elections are saying, quite loudly, that this widespread economic insecurity is not working for them, and they are desperately voting for change.

But these developments were not inevitable...far from it. In January 1977, Democrat Jimmy Carter had just been elected president and Democrats had large majorities in Congress. One of the major initiatives Democratic reformers sought was the Humphrey-Hawkins Act. The brainchild of legendary Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey and Representative Augustus Hawkins from California, the bill would have been an important step toward true racial equality in the United States. Coretta Scott King, who led the lobbying effort in Congress, said that the initial version of the bill would be her late husband Martin's "legacy."

Though a version of the law passed, conservative Democrats like Carter and corporate interests watered it down to the point of irrelevance. In its initial iteration, however, the bill would have created a jobs guarantee, backed by the federal government. By guaranteeing every American a job, the bill would have eradicated the implicit competition working Americans felt—along race, gender, and other identities—to gain an economic livelihood. Further, by essentially eliminating unemployment, the bill would have forced private employers to raise their wages to compete. In fact, a robust version of the Humphrey-Hawkins Act could have dramatically changed the course of American history.

My new book project—*Humphrey and Hawkins: How a Jobs Guarantee Could Have Revolutionized Civil Rights and American Politics*—tells the story of this bill using the lens of the lives of Hubert Humphrey and Augustus Hawkins. Indeed, the careers of both Humphrey and Hawkins, in tandem, parallel the rise of the idea that all Americans should be guaranteed a good job, which rose to the center of American politics by the 1970s. Humphrey had been instrumental in pushing the Democratic Party toward adopting Civil Rights in the 1940s and pushing the Civil Rights Act, which outlawed racial discrimination in the labor market, through the Senate in 1964. He then made a jobs guarantee his main goal after he returned to the US

Senate in 1971 (he had been the Vice President from 1965-69, unsuccessfully running for President in 1968). Humphrey rightly understood the American promise of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as including the economic security of a job.

Hawkins, who represented the Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles, was a co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus. He had served in the California state assembly for decades before that, and he authored the employment section of the groundbreaking Civil Rights Act of 1964 Humphrey fought so hard to get through the Senate. After witnessing urban insurrections in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the 1960s brought on by urban poverty, Hawkins believed that African Americans would only be truly equal when everyone had access to a good job. By telling the entwined stories of Humphrey and Hawkins, a midwestern liberal and an urban African American civil rights activist, respectively, we can see how much broad support there was for the possibility of a jobs guarantee in the 1970s.

The recent American past could have been very different had the robust version of the bill passed. Instead, in the decades that followed, unemployment, underemployment, and low wages for workers have continued to plague all Americans, and [the racial wealth gap continues to increase](#). But this book not only will allow us to see what might have been, but how, even today, we can rekindle the promise of American democracy around the promise of a jobs guarantee. My goal is to have this book published in early 2028, which would be the fiftieth anniversary of Humphrey-Hawkins, and would facilitate promotion of the book.

Building from the work I did in my second book *The Education Myth: How Human Capital Trumped Social Democracy* (Cornell, 2023), which includes a small section on the Humphrey-Hawkins Act, *Humphrey and Hawkins* will bring to light the story of a major missed opportunity in the trajectory of American civil rights and American democracy. *The Education*

*Myth* was widely reviewed and I was interviewed about my work in a number of prominent venues: my book has been cited or reviewed in [\*The Washington Post\*](#), the [\*New Republic\*](#), [\*Inside Higher Ed\*](#), [\*the American Prospect\*](#), and many other places. Given the attention that book has garnered through an academic press, my goal with *Humphrey and Hawkins* is to break into the trade press world, and I seek this fellowship so that I can prepare a competitive book proposal next summer to *The New Press*, *Beacon Press*, *Basic Books*, and several others in addition to shopping the book to agents. I also plan to work with the Office of Grants and Research to secure external fellowships so that I can complete the actual work on the book after securing the contract.

There is a great need for this book in the historiography of the postwar United States. A few scholars have written books about Hubert Humphrey—arguably the most important American political figure never to ascend to the presidency—but these books are not principally concerned with the fight for a jobs guarantee or how Humphrey’s career culminated with that trajectory after three decades of pushing for social democracy.<sup>1</sup> There are no biographies of Hawkins at all, which is a major omission in our nation’s political history given the importance of his legislative career and place in the struggle for racial justice.

There are some books that have treated the Humphrey-Hawkins Act on the periphery of the dramatic rightward turn in American politics in the 1970s. Judith Stein’s *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in Seventies* (2010), Lane Windham’s *Knockin’ on Labor’s Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic*

---

<sup>1</sup> Arnold Offner, *Hubert Humphrey: The Conscience of the Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); James Traub, *True Believer: Hubert Humphrey’s Quest for a More Just America* (Basic Books, 2024).



*Divide* (2017), Jefferson Cowie's *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (2010), as well as my *The Education Myth* (2023) are prominent examples of these books. There are also works that deal peripherally with Humphrey-Hawkins as part of the civil rights movement or the broader question of federal policies to promote full employment. Examples of these books include Steven Attewell, *People Must Live By Work: Direct Job Creation in America, from FDR to Reagan* (2018), Margaret Weir's *Politics and Jobs: The Boundaries of Employment Policy in the United States* (1992), David L. Chappell's *Waking from the Dream: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Shadow of Martin Luther King* (2016), and Michael Honey's *Walking Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Last Campaign* (2008). But no single book has connected the trajectory of Humphrey-Hawkins, American politics, and the civil rights movement. My book will rectify that.

I have written two books, and at the risk of immodesty, I will say that both of my books have made an impact in the public conversation about politics in the US. I am a frequent guest on Wisconsin Public Radio to talk about labor and education issues, as well as a frequent commentator for news outlets across the country. I've informed stories for *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Education Week*, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, the *Chronicle of Education* and many other publications. My work on the *Education Myth* has been featured in over a dozen different podcasts. I plan to build on this reputation to take the next step as a public intellectual: a book written for a trade press that is geared for non-academic audiences.

## **Statement on Scholarly Expectations for Democracy and Justice Studies**

Democracy and Justice Studies is an interdisciplinary unit, so the scholarly expectations in our unit vary based on our respective disciplines. Nevertheless, it is not a requirement for faculty in any field in our unit to publish a solo-authored book for tenure or promotion to full professor. Though we have had faculty publish books, typically, peer-reviewed journal articles and/or book chapters have sufficed both for promotion to associate or full professor. I've published two books, however, and I am the only DJS faculty member who has published a solo authored book, and the only one with plans to publish another on the horizon. I am already a full professor, and with a range of other scholarly activities (including conference papers, book chapters, and book reviews), I already continue to contribute to scholarship in my unit. A third book, however, very much exceeds the expectations of DJS for either pre-tenure or tenured faculty in our unit.

## **Statement on Scholarly Expectations for Democracy and Justice Studies**

Democracy and Justice Studies is an interdisciplinary unit, so the scholarly expectations in our unit vary based on our respective disciplines. Nevertheless, it is not a requirement for faculty in any field in our unit to publish a solo-authored book for tenure or promotion to full professor. Though we have had faculty publish books, typically, peer-reviewed journal articles and/or book chapters have sufficed both for promotion to associate or full professor. I've published two books, however, and I am the only DJS faculty member who has published a solo authored book, and the only one with plans to publish another on the horizon. I am already a full professor, and with a range of other scholarly activities (including conference papers, book chapters, and book reviews), I already continue to contribute to scholarship in my unit. A third book, however, very much exceeds the expectations of DJS for either pre-tenure or tenured faculty in our unit.

## **Project Timeline**

Summer 2025:

I have already done some preliminary archival research at UCLA, where the Augustus Hawkins papers are located, and at the Minnesota Historical Society, where Humphrey's papers are located. I will do analysis of this research, and if necessary, travel to one or both archives for a short research trip. At the end of the summer, I anticipate having a book proposal in place to submit to major publications.

2025-26:

My plan is to secure a book contract and to seek external fellowships. At the same time, I plan to complete any additional archival research by the end of the summer 2026, and will begin drafting the MS.

2026-27:

Ideally, I'll have external funding in place to get time for research, either through external funding (as I did with my second book in calendar year 2020) or sabbatical and will finish the book this year. If not, I anticipate another year to complete the book if I am unable to secure any leave

2027-28 (if necessary):

Without research leave of some kind, it will likely take another year for me to cobble together the time to write this book. However, my goal is to have the book come out by 2028, which would be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Humphrey Hawkins Act.

As the current chair of Democracy and Justice Studies, I affirm my approval for this project! I am certain that I will have the capacity to do this work, as I have with my first two books, in addition to my teaching and service obligations.

**Jon Shelton**  
Professor  
Democracy and Justice  
Studies

**ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS**

Professor, Democracy and Justice Studies, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, 2023-

Associate Professor, Democracy and Justice Studies, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay,  
2018-23

**PUBLICATIONS**

**Books:**

*The Education Myth: How Human Capital Trumped Social Democracy* (Cornell University Press), 2023

*Teacher Strike! Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order* (University of Illinois Press/Working Class in American History series), 2017

- Winner, 2018 First Book Award, International Standing Conference for the History of Education

**Recent Peer-reviewed Book Chapters:**

“The Meaning of Teachers’ Labor in America’s Public Schools” in Frederick Gooding and Eric Yellin (eds), *Public Workers in Service of America: A Reader* (University of Illinois Press, 2023)

“Walker’s Wisconsin and the Future of the United States,” Jasmine Kerrissey, et. al. (eds.) *Labor in the Time of Trump: Challenges and Responses* (Cornell University Press, 2020)

[“Teacher Unions and Associations,”](#) in Tanya Fitzgerald et. al. (eds). *International Handbook of Historical Studies in Education: Debates, Tension, and Direction* (Springer, 2019)

**Recent Peer-reviewed Publications:**

[“The Teacher Uprising, 2010-21,”](#) Oxford Encyclopedia of American History (2021)

“Civil Rights and Tiletown: Green Bay and the Open Housing Ordinance of 1968,” with Greg Lutz and Joseph Taylor, *Voyageur: Northeast Wisconsin’s Historical Review* (Winter

2019)

### **Recent Research Honors/Fellowships**

National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow, 2019-20 (\$70,000)

International Standing Conference for the History of Education First Book Award, 2018

National Endowment for the Humanities, Summer Stipend, 2015 (\$6,000)

### **Recent Media Interviews/Expert Commentary (Selected)**

Expert commentary, Beatrice Lawrence, “[Act 10 Faces Another Legal Challenge: This Time, It Might Stick,](#)” *Wisconsin Public Radio*, Jul. 10, 2024

Expert commentary, Joe Schulz, “[2023 Was a Big Year for Unions. Wisconsin Labor Leaders Want to Keep the Momentum Going.](#)” *Wisconsin Public Radio*, Feb. 1, 2024

Guest, “[Jon Shelton and Neil Kraus on Labor, Education, Inequality, Human Capital, and the Creative Class,](#)” *Cultural Studies Podcast*, Jan. 31, 2024

Expert commentary, Liam Knox, “[No End to Wisconsin’s Higher Ed Budget Standoff,](#)” *Inside Higher Ed*, Dec. 8, 2023

Guest, “[Why Some Universities Are Cutting Curriculum,](#)” *All Sides with Anna Staver*, Nov. 16, 2023

Expert commentary, Madeline Will, “[Teacher Strikes, Explained: Recent Strikes, Where They’re Illegal, and More](#)” *Education Week*, Oct. 30, 2023

Guest, “[The Education Myth w/ Professor Jon Shelton,](#)” *KC Morning Show*, Sep. 26, 2023

Guest, “[Jon Shelton, The Education Myth,](#)” *The FreshEd Podcast*, July 24, 2023

Guest, “[If We Want to Save Public Education, We’ve Got to Talk about It Differently](#)” *Have You Heard?*, June 1, 2023

Guest, “[Confronting the Education Myth with Dr. Jon Shelton,](#)” *Trending in Education*, May 1, 2023