

For Immediate Release
Working to Remember when Janitors Took to the Streets and
Transformed L.A. History

Event Location:

SEIU-USWW
828 W. Washington Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90015
May 7, 2011 (10: AM to 3:00 PM)

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On May 7, the janitors of Los Angeles will gather again. This time, as part of an effort to preserve the memory of one of the most important events in the city's recent history.

Educators at UCLA are working together with an L.A. union to remember three memorable weeks of struggle on the streets of L.A. when the city's labor history changed forever. In 1990 members of the Service Employees International Union launched the "Justice for Janitors" campaign. Their red t-shirts came to symbolize the rising of some of the city's lowest-paid employees, workers who were considered "unorganizable" by many labor leaders. Their strike and public protest capped a campaign begun five years earlier, and transformed the California labor movement, helping to bring livable wages, health benefits and basic labor protections to members of the workforce dominated by poor immigrants. Now a group of researchers and archivists at UCLA's Department of History and the university's Labor Center are calling on the public to help in an effort to preserve the memory of this seminal event for future generations.

"We don't often hear the stories of ordinary people at the grass roots of major political and economic changes," said UCLA history professor Tobias Higbie. "The janitors made history with their union campaign, and we're thrilled to help preserve their story for future generations."

The union organizers and UCLA professors have invited the janitors who were veterans of that organizing campaign to a May 7 "history gathering" event. Student volunteers armed with video cameras and computer scanners will collect oral histories from the workers, who have also been invited to donate personal documents, photographs and other ephemera related to the campaign to what will become a permanent university archive collection dedicated to the movement.