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DUKE UNIVERSITY HISTORY PROFESSOR APPOINTED NEW RESEARCH CHAIR IN DIVERSITY AND LAW

CHICAGO, Sept. 26, 2016 — The [American Bar Foundation](http://AmericanBarFoundation.org) has [appointed Laura F. Edwards](#), the Peabody Family Professor of History at [Duke University](http://DukeUniversity.edu), as the 2016-17 [William H. Neukom Fellows Research Chair in Diversity and Law](#). An award-winning historian, Edwards is an expert on race, gender and the law. Her research focuses on how disadvantaged and dependent groups such as slaves, women and children used the law in the nineteenth century to empower themselves and shape their communities.

The Neukom Fellows Research Chair was established in 2014 to lead the ABF's empirical research on law and legal processes, relating to issues of diversity and inequality that women, people of color, people with disabilities and persons from the LGBTQ community face in the justice system. It was created to build upon the work of the ABF's [Research Group on Legal Diversity](#), a network of scholars who conduct empirical research on [diversity in the legal profession](#) and institutions of justice, as well as the impact of diversity on legal processes and institutions.



Photo courtesy of Duke University

During her year as the Neukom Fellows Research Chair, Edwards will work on a research project entitled “Only the Clothes on Her Back: Women, Textiles and State Formation in the Nineteenth-Century United States.” The project explores the relationship between U.S. textile trade in the nineteenth century and institutions of law and governance. It will reveal the ways in which subordinated groups engaged in trade, used the legal system and ultimately shaped the nation’s governing institutions. The research will provide a new framework for understanding the

development of inequality in the United States, demonstrating that problems of inequality today are more entrenched, and therefore more difficult to resolve, than we have thought.

Edwards said she is honored and excited to further her research in this new role. “This is an incredible opportunity to explore the historical relationship between social inequality and the justice system in the United States,” she said. “That history needs to be unpacked and understood in order to address the critical challenges that the United States faces today.”

“We are honored and delighted to welcome Laura Edwards to our intellectual and institutional community,” said [Ajay K. Mehrotra](#), director of the ABF. “Professor Edwards is not only a world-class scholar and leading historian of race and gender; she is also an influential voice in our historical understanding of law and inequality in the United States.”

Edwards joined the faculty at Duke University in 2001. Prior to this, she taught at the [University of California, Los Angeles](#), [University of South Florida](#) and the [University of Chicago](#). She has been awarded several fellowships, including from the [John Simon Guggenheim Foundation](#), [National Humanities Center](#), [Newberry Library](#), [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) and the [Smithsonian](#).

Edwards is the author of four books: “[A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Nation of Rights](#)” (2015); “[The People and Their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South](#)” (2009), “[Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era](#)” (2000); and “[Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction](#)” (1997). “*The People and Their Peace*” won the [Southern Historical Association’s Charles Sydnor Prize](#) for the best book in southern history and the [American Historical Association’s Littleton-Griswold Prize](#) for the best book in American law and society. Her most recent articles include “[Textiles: Popular Culture and the Law](#)” in the [Buffalo Law Review](#) and “[The History in ‘Critical Legal Histories’](#)” in [Law & Social Inquiry](#), the ABF’s academic journal.

Edwards received her doctorate and master’s degrees in history from the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), and her bachelor’s degree in American Culture from [Northwestern University](#).

About the American Bar Foundation

The [American Bar Foundation](#) (ABF) is the nation’s leading research institute for the empirical and interdisciplinary study of law. An independent, nonprofit organization for more than 60 years, the ABF’s mission is to serve the legal profession, the public, and the academy through empirical research, publications, and programs that advance justice and the understanding of law and its impact on society. The ABF’s primary funding is provided by the [American Bar Endowment](#) and [The Fellows of The American Bar Foundation](#).

About the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation

The [Fellows of the American Bar Foundation](#) is an honorary organization of lawyers, judges and legal scholars whose public and private careers have demonstrated outstanding dedication to the welfare of their communities and to the highest principles of the legal profession.

About the William H. Neukom Fellows Research Chair in Diversity and Law

The [William H. Neukom Fellows Research Chair in Diversity and Law](#), established in 2014, is dedicated to the values of diversity in the legal profession, the creation of communities of equity and opportunity and the provision of equal justice through law. The Neukom Fellows Research Chair was made possible through generous gifts from [William H. Neukom](#), [Walmart](#), the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), [Sidley Austin Foundation](#), [Northrop Grumman Corporation](#), [Kirkland & Ellis LLP](#), and [The Fellows of the American Bar Foundation](#).

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