



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF LAW AND SOCIETY  
BERKELEY LAW

## CSLS SPEAKER SERIES

Cosponsored with [Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice](#),  
[Institute of Governmental Studies](#), & [Center for Research on Social Change](#)

Monday, November 9, 2020

### VESLA WEAVER

Bloomberg Distinguished Associate Professor of  
Political Science and Sociology, Johns Hopkins University

## “The State from Below: Democracy and Citizenship in Policed Communities”

In *The State from Below*, we seek to understand democracy through ground-up knowledge of the state. We use a new technology and civic infrastructure, Portals, to initiate conversations about policing in communities where these forms of state action are concentrated. Portals are virtual chambers where people in disparate communities can converse as if in the same room. Based on over 850 recorded and transcribed conversations across fourteen neighborhoods in five cities– the most extensive collection of first-hand accounts of the police to date – we analyze patterns in political discourse. We reveal four currents that challenge liberal-democratic framings of political life: that an arrangement of *distorted responsiveness* characterizes the relationship between policed communities and the state; that the political desire of policed communities is not for greater engagement and responsiveness but for *political recognition* – to be known by the state; and that in contrast to prevailing wisdom about uninformed electorates, these citizens have too much knowledge of and too little power vis-à-vis state representatives. Finally, we observe among policed communities an “ethics of aversion” in their political responses, a belief that power is best achieved by receding from state institutions in the short term and forging their own collective, community autonomy in the long term. At a broader level, we observe that it is not exclusion from democratic institutions that characterizes political inequality in our time, but inclusion in what we call racial authoritarianism, and the experience of misrecognition that results.

The related papers are linked here and on our website; [paper one](#), [paper two](#).

PLACE [Please register here for Zoom link.](#)  
TIME 12:45 – 2:00pm.  
INFO <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/research/CSLS/>  
EMAIL [csls@law.berkeley.edu](mailto:csls@law.berkeley.edu)

If you require an accommodation for effective communication (ASL interpreting/CART captioning, alternative media formats, etc.) to fully participate in this event, please contact [csls@law.berkeley.edu](mailto:csls@law.berkeley.edu) with as much advance notice as possible and at least 7-10 days in advance of the event.

PAMELA ERICKSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | CATHERINE ALBISTON, FACULTY DIRECTOR