

CATHY O'NEIL DAZZLED AT WCC'S ANNUAL NATIONAL SPEAKER FORUM

WCC held its 31st National Speaker Forum at Memorial Hall on April 11. Our speaker was Cathy O'Neil, data scientist, journalist and award-winning author, speaking on **"WEAPONS OF MATH DESTRUCTION: BIG DATA AND YOU."**

After a warm welcome by WCC President Beth Sullebarger, Rozy Park, Board Chair of the Jeannette Rankin Foundation, talked about how the foundation changes lives by providing scholar grants nationwide to women 35+ who qualify by income for their first post-secondary degrees. Ms. Park then introduced Cathy O'Neil, recounting her unique background as a Harvard PhD, data analyst, and founder of a consultancy providing algorithmic auditing services focused on safety, fairness, and principled use of data.

Walking about the stage, Ms. O'Neil was a dramatic presence as she discussed accountability, transparency, and equity in our rapidly advancing use of data and AI. Her acclaimed book, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*, explains how opaque, black-box algorithms rely on biased historical data to do everything from sentencing defendants to hiring workers. Algorithms profoundly impact every system we interact with, including college admissions, teacher evaluation, health care outcomes, and mortgage rates.

Cheri Rekow, VP for Civic Engagement, joined Ms. O'Neil on stage for a brisk question-and-answer session, during which she discussed contrasts



NSF Committee and Cathy O'Neil

between the US and European countries that don't use algorithms as heavily, and where it is illegal for companies to sell third party data.

She said that Americans can and should hold companies accountable through courts for discriminatory algorithms to eliminate built-in bias.



Cathy O'Neil

Bureaucracies have power, so her focus is less on data-tracking, and more on algorithm auditing to assess what assumptions are used that cause societal harm—inadvertent or deliberate. Teaching our children critical thinking skills may be the best way we can prepare them for a world run by algorithmic-driven AI.

WCC is extremely grateful to our sponsors for supporting our biggest event of the year. The Rankin Foundation was Presenting Sponsor and Park National Bank, our Reception Sponsor. The Greater Cincinnati Foundation, Scott E. Knox, Attorneys-at-Law, and Union Savings Bank/Guardian Savings Bank were Corporate Partners. Once again, we were thrilled to have CET, WVXU and The Cincinnati Enquirer as our media sponsors, with additional coverage by the Cincinnati Herald. Nineteen local nonprofits served as Community Partners. A big thank you also to our generous members and friends and to all the members of the NSF committee: Janet Buening, Carole Donnelly, Sarah Gideonse, Edna Keown, Barbara Myers, Jeanne Nightingale, Susan Noonan, Cheri Rekow, Jeanette Rost, Alice Schneider, and Kay Smith-Yount!

After the presentation, about 100 patrons enjoyed the reception catered by Catered with Grace.

Harriet and Ben Kaufman kindly took photos of the evening, and The Bookshelf sold O'Neil's books along with other relevant titles. The event made a small profit but had a big impact.

~ Beth Sullebarger & Cheri Rekow