

FEBRUARY 2019



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[psc-cuny.org/retirees](http://psc-cuny.org/retirees)

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4  
NY UNDERWATER: HOUSING AND  
DEVELOPMENT—WHO SWIMS AND  
WHO DROWNS?**

**Speaker: Tom Angotti.** Angotti, a member of the retiree chapter, is professor emeritus of urban policy and planning at Hunter College and the Graduate Center. He was the founder and director of the Hunter College Center for Community Planning and Development.

Tom will speak on the intersection between waterfront development, the climate crisis, gentrification and racial displacement.

Discussion will follow. As usual, light refreshments will be provided. **PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th Floor, 1-3 PM.** □

**MONDAY, MARCH 4  
GOOD AND WELFARE**

The focus of speakers at the meeting is the Good and Welfare of our chapter members on issues ranging from healthcare to Welfare Fund benefits to community

resources for retirees.

**Kathryn Haslanger**, chief executive officer of the Jewish Association Serving the Aging (JASA), is a prolific author on the subject of health care and aging. She will provide us a comprehensive overview of health care choices, delivery and planning for seniors in NYC.

**Ron Bruno**, who for sixteen years has been executive director of Morningside Gardens NORC (a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community), will talk about the NORC movement, resources, activities and outreach

**Donna Costa**, executive director of the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund, and Sandra Zaconeta, retirement benefits counselor, will update members on Welfare Fund benefits. □

**MONDAY, APRIL 1  
GOTHAM**



**Speaker: Mike Wallace.** Professor Wallace is an American historian at the CUNY Graduate Center and John Jay College. He specializes in the history of New York City, and "public history." In 1998 he co-authored *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, which won the **Pulitzer Prize in History**. He authored a second volume in the Gotham series in 2017, *Greater Gotham: A History of New York City from 1898 to 1919*. Mike will talk to us about the history of our beloved (and sometimes annoying) Greater Gotham. □

**SAVE THE DATE: LUNCHEON, JUNE 10<sup>th</sup>, 12:30 – 2:30 PM, CUNY Graduate**

Center. Speaker to be announced. Those of you who attended the January luncheon know that the menu was delicious and the space limited to 110, so please remember to reserve your seat in May when the announcement appears in *Turning the Page*. □

## MIDTERM POST-MORTEM: DECEMBER CHAPTER MEETING

*-Joel Berger, Retiree  
College of Staten Island*

A thought provoking panel presentation about grassroots politics, local involvement, and the changing political landscape, engaged members at the December Chapter meeting. **Susan Kang** and **Geoff Kurtz**, members of the PSC Legislation Committee, and professors of political science at John Jay and BMCC, respectively, were joined by **Ava Benezra**, the Working Families Party campaign manager for Cynthia Nixon, as they presented diverse personal and theoretical views about the electoral process.



**Geoff Kurtz** surveyed the results of the mid-term elections, observing that the Democrats made substantial gains, but because of gerrymandering and the

structure of the U.S. Senate, their number of representatives does not reflect the votes cast for the party. Twenty-five states with only 18% of the US population have 50 seats in the Senate. The other 25 states, with 82% of the population, also have 50 seats. Therefore, Kurtz believes that the Democrats must work harder to establish a majority. Drawing upon the philosophy of John Locke and the writings of James Madison, Kurtz explored concepts of majority rule. He emphasized the need for "civic dignity," and linked that concept to a new wave of local organizing groups such as Our Revolution, the Women's March, and Indivisible. By creating a coalition of these groups through face-to-face organizing, Kurtz believes that majority rule can become real. Kurtz has written an article called "Can there be dignity in a vast majority?" based on his presentation: <http://www.publicseminar.org/2018/12/can-there-be-dignity-in-a-vast-majority/>

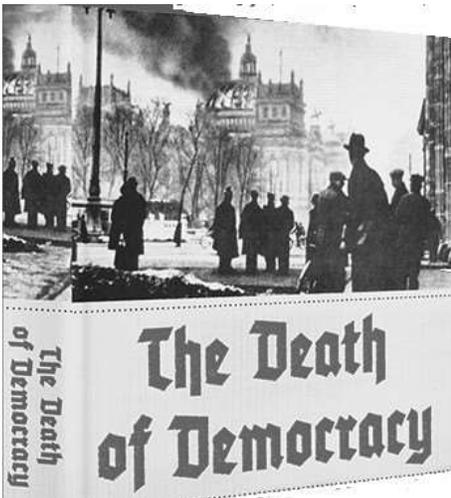
**Ava Benezra**, organizing director of the Working Families Party, outlined how the Party has influenced policy, not only in New York, but in many other states as well. Issues such as raising the minimum wage, revising drug laws, and paid family leave are now on the agenda for legislative action because of the Party's grassroots, coalition-building approach. Focusing on New York State, Benezra described the Party's relationship with Governor Cuomo, and explained why the Party endorsed him in the recent election. As campaign manager for Cynthia Nixon, Benezra believed that Nixon focused attention on issues that Democrats will now pursue. She emphasized how the defeat of State Senate members of the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) paves the way for progressive legislation. The Working Families Party's goals for the 2019 legislative session include passing redistricting reform and public campaign

financing legislation.

**Susan Kang** teaches at John Jay and lives in Jackson Heights. Senator Peralta, who represented her district, joined the IDC shortly after being elected. Kang responded by engaging him personally, setting up a town hall meeting, and by creating a YouTube video that "reverberated in Albany." Kang is a co-founder of NO IDC New York, and an activist for the Democratic Socialists of America. In addition to defeating Senator Peralta, Kang stressed that grassroots and coalition efforts elected Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to Congress. The upset victory over Representative Joseph Crowley indicates the strength of individuals when they band together in common purpose. □

### **WHITHER DEMOCRACY: JANUARY LUNCHEON**

Santiago Villafaña, Retiree, Bronx EOC



[Editor's Note: Monday, January 7<sup>th</sup> dawned sunny and not too cold. Over 100 pre-registered retirees gathered on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of the Graduate Center to hear Benjamin Hett talk about his book, *The Death of Democracy*, which was acclaimed by many, including E.J. Dionne, of the *Washington Post*, who said that "Hett's brisk and lucid study offers compelling new perspectives inspired by current threats to free societies around the world. . ."

Meanwhile, in less earth-shaking news, Restaurant Associates, the catering company, found themselves locked out of their kitchen that day (floors were being polished) and miraculously supplied most of the full menu, cooked in another kitchen and trucked to us on time. Salmon, as usual, was the most popular item and we promise next time to make the portions larger and serving time faster. See you on June 10<sup>th</sup>.]

Benjamin Carter Hett, professor of History at Hunter and the CUNY Graduate Center, made a timely presentation about the subject of his book *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic* (Holt, 2018).

Dr. Hett identified three causes that moved post-World War I Germany to the extreme right and gave rise to Adolph Hitler. First, a strong sense of German nationalism that caused an anti-globalization reaction to the consequences of world markets impacting the German economy after defeat in World War I. Secondly, the conservative values and traditions of a society ruled by a Kaiser, a Prussian aristocracy, and a military caste with authoritarian practices. The third cause was dishonesty in the practice of electoral politics across the fragmented political spectrum of Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Adolph Hitler and the Nazis exploited the divisions among politicians as well as the on-going fears of revolution or civil war among leaders and the populace as the Weimar Republic collapsed.

The anti-globalization sentiment in Germany was in part due to the use of the Gold Standard to serve as a monetary reserve to the Reich Mark, which imposed limits on the printing of paper money in a country with rising inflation.

Restrictions on military expenditures as part of the Treaty of Versailles also made the German military establishment resentful of economic globalization. Additionally, the conservative Prussian aristocracy that dominated the military leadership, and the rural farmer class, which made up the majority of soldiers in ranks, had conservative values inconsistent with the liberal beliefs of the Weimar Republic. These tensions set the stage for a possible Civil War in the 1920s.

The dishonest electoral and political practices engaged in by parties from the left (Communists and Social Democrats), the center and the right (National Socialists) yielded partisan division and discord which threatened revolution in the country. Hett points out that a shrewd, ruthless and ambitious Hitler exploited the fears of national leaders including Paul von Hindenburg, President of the Weimar Republic and Franz von Papen. Both thought that they could control Adolph Hitler if he were named Chancellor.



Paul von Hindenburg

In addition, Hitler had acolytes whose talents and skills solidified his power. Among them was Gregor Strasser, a

pharmacist who could read Greek and Latin, with the ability to recruit and organize large numbers of followers for the Nazi Party. Professor Hett emphasized that Hitler understood the need to present his message to the majority of Germans in simple language. In the arena of communication, another able supporter of the Nazi cause was Joseph Goebbels. University-educated and a holder of a Ph.D., Goebbels could not find employment in post-World War I Germany. Goebbels was a student of advertising and psychology whose knowledge advanced National Socialist propaganda that recruited of Brown Shirts and won over moderate but loyal Germans to the Nazi cause. Goebbels and Hitler developed the strategy of using “The Big Lie” to present myth and irrational ideas as part of the plan to save the nation from the rational solutions that had failed to restore Germany to its former imperial status. Hett quoted Peter Drucker who, as a young journalist, noted a comment made by a Nazi official about bread prices: “We don’t want higher bread prices, we don’t want unchanged bread prices, we want National Socialist bread prices.” The attack on reason and facts that the Nazis promoted and practiced by relentlessly lying culminated in the master race myth, a Second World War, and the destruction of German cities, including Berlin.

A brief question-and-answer session allowed Professor Hett to amplify his presentation. One of the inquiries was about the differences between Nazi Germany and the United States today. He responded that the checks and balances of the federal government, including states’ rights, the federal court system, the Supreme Court, and the division of Congress into the Senate and the House, limit the power of the presidency. A second question about the societal conditions that allowed the rise of National Socialism in 1930s Germany prompted Hett to note the

diversity of people in the United States when compared to the German population of the early Twentieth Century, who were unified by culture, language and custom. Nevertheless, reading *The Death of Democracy* is recommended so as to gain an in-depth understanding of the political, social and cultural forces at work today in the U.S. as the our republic faces a potential constitutional crisis.

- Yes - 117
- No - 72
- Not Sure - 34

If no to a \$105 increase, would you consider \$85?

- Yes - 123
- No - 18
- Not Sure - 11

**SPECIAL ELECTION FOR ALTERNATE DELEGATE.** In a tightly contested December election by mail ballot, Bob Cermele won by 24 votes.

Robert Cermele - received 466 (winner)  
 Glenn Kissack - received 442  
 Voided/ not counted – 7

It's a testament to the engagement of chapter members that 915 people voted in this off-year election.

Do you think that there should be a lower dues amount for retired part timers? \*

- Yes - 168
- No - 35
- Not Sure - 40

If yes, which amount would you consider most appropriate?

- \$25 - 28
- \$35 - 66
- \$50 – 72

**SURVEY ON RAISING RETIREE DUES**



This is not a scientific survey, but nonetheless a rough snapshot of member views on these questions. The Retiree Executive Committee will discuss this survey and a possible dues increase for next year at its February 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, 10:30 AM at the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 15<sup>th</sup> floor. Chapter members are welcome.

As of mid-January, these are the results:

Would you consider paying an increase in annual dues?

- Yes - 201
- No - 23
- Not Sure - 19

If yes, would you consider an increase that keeps pace with inflation -- \$105?

**MEMBERS ATTEND TRUSTEE MEETINGS**

**TRS UPDATE**

About a dozen retirees attended a Board of Trustees public hearing on Monday, December 3. Four testified and a fifth, who could not attend, submitted written testimony. Each presented a compelling personal story of their years of service to CUNY, only to have their full TRS pensions put on hold.

As reported in the December TTP, scores of CUNY retirees in the NYC Teachers Retirement System (TRS) cannot collect their full pension because the CUNY Payroll Office has not provided the accurate final salary history that TRS needs to calculate each individual's monthly payments.

TRS is a defined-benefit plan. Benefits are based on salary history, age, years of employment, and other factors. Before TRS can calculate monthly pension payments, the CUNY Payroll Office, if applicable, must provide that final salary history so that the calculation includes any back pay from the 2010-17 contract owed through the 4/20/17 salary increase.

Contract ratification happened over two years ago. As of late December, CUNY Payroll has NOT provided usable and accurate salary history data to TRS. PSC leadership has pushed CUNY management, but has not been informed that a data file acceptable to TRS has been submitted. This is unacceptable!

But now there may be some movement as a result of retiree testimony and meeting with trustee representatives.

The trustees and CUNY management responded to the testimony, setting up a meeting within minutes in another room with Interim Vice Chancellor Margaret Egan.

Egan understood that the retirees' chapter would push – and then push some more – on this issue. She opened an ongoing line of communication and promised timely updates on a timeline to resolve the issue.

On January 14<sup>th</sup>, Egan sent chapter chair, Bill Friedheim, the following update:

We sent [TRS] new files for both the senior and community colleges on January 9th. TRS acknowledged receiving and is now analyzing. We have not gotten feedback yet but

hope to shortly. We have set weekly calls with them and hope to know....

This is an important step in the right direction, assuming TRS confirms that the CUNY data meets their requirements. Stay tuned.

## **MULTIPLE MEETINGS ON CUNY'S BUDGET**



By the time this issue of *Turning the Page* meets your inbox you will know more about how the Board of Trustees' budget request to NY State did nothing to cure the austerity CUNY faculty, staff and students have faced. It also did not address a contract for the PSC that would include 7K for adjunct teaching.

Here are two examples of specific issues raised by members of the Retirees chapter about the needs for enhanced CUNY funding, based on their own professional experience. If you haven't had a chance to express your views or tell your stories, the fight for adequate funding goes to Albany and local officials offices. See the [psc-cuny.org](http://psc-cuny.org) website for lobbying information.

## **TESTIMONY AT OCTOBER 22 CUNY BOARD OF TRUSTEES HEARING**

*-Dave Kotelchuck, Retiree, Hunter College*

I was a faculty member in the Hunter College School of Health Sciences for 22 years and directed the graduate program in Environmental and Occupational Health for 15 of those years.

For several years now, Governor Cuomo has refused to increase funding for CUNY to cover contractual increases in salary, including negotiated reductions in teaching load, even going so far as to veto the Maintenance of Effort bill passed by the Legislature last year. The result: further cuts in existing CUNY programs to fund these contractual obligations. I ask you as a Board to include funding for these obligations in your upcoming budget proposal, as well as additional funding to increase base salaries for courses taught by adjuncts to \$7,000 per course.

I would particularly like to focus my remarks today on increasing the base salaries for adjuncts and graduate assistants who teach as adjuncts: When I directed the graduate Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences program, I had to offer salaries of about \$3,500 per course to adjuncts and this basic salary schedule has not increased for decades. This was an insulting amount to offer to these often highly paid professionals – it was as if we were asking them to donate their time *gratis*. As a result I had to recruit younger, less experienced professionals, often to teach highly specialized courses such as ventilation, air and water quality, exposure assessment. We need to show greater respect for these specialists who help us maintain advanced technical curricula throughout CUNY. Many nearby colleges and universities pay \$7,000 per adjunct course; CUNY should pay this as well.

Also in any field of scholarship where adjuncts are needed, the offer of a paltry \$3,500 is simply exploitive. With faculty positions in short supply in many academic fields, persons with advanced graduate education are often forced to string together adjunct courses at CUNY and private institutions to make tenuously livable incomes. Concomitant with this exploitation these employees are denied retirement pensions and, despite recent advances,

many are still deprived of the medical, drug, dental, optical and hearing benefits already won by fulltime faculty and staff.

Ponder, persons of my generation, some of whom sit on this Board, what our lives would have been had we graduated as young professionals in the modern era of austerity and economic uncertainty rather than in the post-WWII era. Are these young professionals graduating today any less bright, hardworking and ambitious, any less deserving than we were then? No, they are not—and their current states of exploitation must weigh on our collective consciences. We cannot ignore their needs and aspirations; we must stand with them today as they seek a fair wage and social justice. In this spirit, I request this Board to ask for, nay demand, that they be paid \$7K per course on the path to full academic citizenship. □



### TESTIMONY AT THE JANUARY 9<sup>TH</sup> MEETING

-Stephen Leberstein, Retiree, City College

The draft Proposed CUNY Operating Budget Request for 2019-2020 is seriously deficient in several critically important areas:

- The most critical deficiency is that it continues the damaging regime of austerity for the University, neglecting to request adequate funding for basic operating needs, compounded by the Governor's refusal to fund the costs of union contracts agreed to.
- It does not address the union's demand for 7K for adjuncts, thus maintaining the

shameful practice of a two-tier labor system in which adjuncts, who teach half of all courses at CUNY, are paid paltry, less-than-subsistence wages.

- It does not demand funding for settling the collective bargaining agreement for faculty and professional staff, which expired more than one year ago. The preceding contract had expired over 6 years before the University agreed to a successor agreement. Another delay would be intolerable.

- Shifting responsibility for funding the operating budget onto student tuition, relieving the State of its historic responsibility, is unacceptable from every perspective. CUNY serves working-class families in the city who can ill afford an increase in tuition.

Over a career of 42 years at CUNY, most of them at City College, I witnessed the damage caused by the policy of austerity ushered in by the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s. Retirements and resignations of faculty and staff were often not replaced for years, building maintenance was neglected (at City, a section of the façade on the Marshak Science Building’s 11<sup>th</sup> floor actually collapsed in 2004, crashing to the ground), escalators in the North Academic Center were often out of commission, and maintenance everywhere was insufficient. I know that other colleges, especially Brooklyn, suffered similar or worse neglect.

But I especially want to speak to the proposal for a “CUNY Comeback Campaign.” Most of my 26 or so years at City were at the college’s Center for Worker Education, which opened in 1982 offering interdisciplinary bachelor degree programs to the City’s workers. I chaired the planning committee for the Center, served as its executive director for over 20 years, and retired as professor of history there. Over the years, with the support of the city’s labor movement, notably IBT Local 237, DC 37,

SEIU 1199, and the federal Office of Personnel Management, the student population grew from a few hundred to 1,000 when I left in 2005. Not a few students told us that the greatest gift of this program, aside from their own joy at discovering new worlds, was the effect their example had on their school-age children. Children who saw their parent studying at the kitchen table sought to follow their example instead of hanging out.

But what was most troubling about your [budget] proposal was the section on a “Partnership With Industry.” The proposal names Amazon, Google, Con Ed, and JPMorgan as corporations that will “develop curriculum...preparing students for meaningful internships and high growth jobs.” It goes on to propose new degree programs “based on industry feedback, course creation or revision.”

I want to remind you that CUNY is not a job training school for big corporations. That is the job of the faculty, who should enjoy their own right to “high growth jobs” with protection of their professional prerogatives. Remember, CUNY is not an industry training school. It is a university. □

## REFLECTIONS ON RETIREMENT

*-Beth Spencer Rosenthal, Professor Emerita, York College & Graduate Center*



In fall 2016, I taught Social Work 101 in a NYS men’s medium security correctional facility. The course was offered through John Jay’s Prison-to-College Pipeline

Program. Teaching in this kind of setting had been on my retirement bucket list!

Upon learning that I was going to teach in a prison, one of my grandchildren said, “But aren’t those bad people?” This response was similar to that made by several acquaintances who also expressed concern when I told them I was going to teach in a prison. I tried to reassure all by saying that incarcerated people may have done bad things but that they are human beings who often want to better themselves. In retrospect, I realize that I, too, shared some of our culture’s negative stereotypes about incarcerated people. My experience was a shocker!

Certainly my physical entry into the prison was unlike my entry into any other college building. Prior to teaching, I came for a day’s orientation, which included being fingerprinted and being told not to wear the “inmate color” (green) so I would stand out if there was a lockdown. Once approved and prior to each class, I had to go through a metal detector, exchange my driver’s license for a prison ID and be taken by prison bus to the classroom.

I had thought the men would be tough and hardened, not particularly polite, and more than a little rough around the edges. Reality, however, was very different! As the students entered the classroom, they were generally quiet and polite – greeting me, asking questions about or commenting on assigned readings

These men were felons, and some had likely been involved in violent crimes. Yet in the classroom, they often exhibited gentleness, helpfulness and caring. For example, the men often offered to help one another with assignments; and frequently someone in his second or third semester of study took a less academically experienced student under his wing.

Occasionally, an individual would reveal his vulnerability, e.g., one student asked to speak with me privately and stated that he got nervous during exams. I thought to myself: here’s this “hardened criminal” acknowledging a vulnerability to a relative stranger.

To my surprise, the men were generally very good students! Their classroom attitudes and behaviors were excellent: they were prepared, engaged, interested, thoughtful, desirous of doing well, introspective and appreciative of the opportunity offered them by the Program. And, nary a complaint about homework!

The students were well prepared for each class, and tended to think deeply about issues. In a mock debate between “liberals” and “conservatives” one “liberal” said, “We (most people in this class) don’t start out equal, that is, we are born into poverty, given poor housing and education . . . it’s not surprising, therefore, that we end up poor. I want to ask *you* (facing the conservative debaters) a question: ‘Given our beginnings, why *don’t* you want to help poor people?’”

Students’ appreciation of the educational opportunity afforded them was loudly demonstrated at the end of each class session by the students’ standing, applauding and saying “thank you.” Wow!

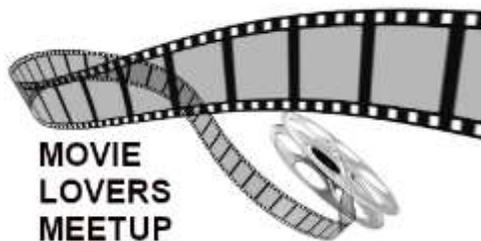
I often marveled at the fact that these students were *so like* other college students insofar as they were enrolled in a college course, doing assignments, getting grades, etc., yet *so unlike* other college students in terms of their setting; and so unlike the stereotype of incarcerated people in a medium-security institution.

The students spoke frequently about the very positive influence going to college was

having on them, stating that they had never thought of themselves as college students and that being in college was giving them a chance to change their lives in a profound way, e.g., one man said he went from thinking of himself as a “prison man” to a “man in prison.” Concurrently, I realized that I, too, was being transformed, that my implicit “knowledge” of and attitudes toward incarcerated men were being challenged.

I came out of retirement to teach this course to this student body and I couldn’t have made a better decision. In the approximately 300 classes I taught during my academic career, this class was among the most rewarding in terms of the students, the challenges to me as the instructor and the opportunity to potentially make a positive change in others and in myself. □

## NEWS AND NOTES



*-Lisa Flanzraich, Film Librarian  
Queens College*

As a hopeless cine-maniac, I invite my fellow retirees and friends to join me at the **FILM FORUM** for a **WEEKDAY MATINEE**. All shows are only \$9.00 before 5 PM! (That’s the senior rate.)

**Where:** **FILM FORUM**, 209 West Houston St. west of 6th Ave.

**When:** Tuesdays or Thursdays: early or late afternoon show.

**What:** We decide what to see.

**Schmooze:** (Optional) Great, reasonable eats/cafes abound.

**How:** Contact Me:  
[CINEPHILE49@GMAIL.COM](mailto:CINEPHILE49@GMAIL.COM) □

**FLORIDA LUNCHEON:** A number of Florida retirees (and snowbirds) have inquired about our annual Florida luncheon and pension and health benefits seminar, usually held the second Monday in February in Boca Raton. There is no luncheon this year.

Planning and facilitating these luncheons is labor intensive, with the bulk of the work of necessity done on the ground in Florida. After many years of orchestrating successful luncheons, Paul Levitz and the Florida Branch Board of Peter Hoberman, Laraine Ferguson, Joan Fleishman, Abe Korn, Etta Kutner, Herb Ringel and Norma Van Felix, have stepped down. They deserve our gratitude for a job well done.

Others now need to step up if we are to revive the luncheon in 2020.

In the interim, we are exploring the possibility of a online face-to-face pension and benefits seminar for Florida members in March or April. For more details—and to express your interest in participating in a virtual seminar and/or volunteering to help organize a 2020 luncheon, go to:

<https://www.psc-cuny.org/form/florida-options>