

SEPTEMBER 2022



Academic Year 2022-23 No. 1

psc-cuny.org/retirees

We hope you have all had a relaxing summer and are enjoying good weather and good health wherever you are.

Our opening Fall chapter meeting (still on Zoom) will be on

**VIRTUAL CHAPTER MEETING
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12
1-3PM**

**Topic: STATE OF THE UNIONS:
National and Local**

Speakers:

Ruth Milkman, Distinguished Professor of Sociology, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, has written on a variety of topics involving work and organized labor in the United States, past and present. Her most recent books are: [Immigration Matters](#) (co-edited with Deepak Bhargava and Penny Lewis, New Press, 2021), [Immigrant Labor and the New](#)

[Precariat](#) (Polity, 2020) and [On Gender, Labor and Inequality](#) (Illinois, 2016).

Prof. Milkman will present an analysis of recent unionization trends in New York and the nation, including discussion of the uptick in organizing in the past year.



Ruth Milkman

James Davis, PSC President. It has been a whirlwind year for our union and President Davis will discuss what it means to be an activist union. We'll hear about the challenges active staff are facing, such as low enrollment, course cancellations and the administration's refusal to allow faculty and staff to ask people to wear masks. James will remind us what we can do to support all union members.

Anne Friedman, chair of the Retirees Chapter, will briefly review the work of the chapter over the summer and offer thoughts on moving ahead in 2022-2023.

role models and advisors to guide and support me.

Today, most important in doing this job is working as a team with our chapter Vice Chair Diane Menna and Secretary Bonnie Nelson.

Diane Menna retired after 34 years as an adjunct faculty and staff member in the English Department at Queens College. During her tenure she also served as Director of the Tutoring Center as a Higher Education Associate. Diane's leadership in the PSC spans over 20 years in numerous capacities. She served on the PSC Executive Council, the Bargaining Team, and as Grievance Counselor, Health and Safety Co-Chair, Part-Time Organizing Project Director, PSC Constitution Review Chair and on various PSC HEO Committees at Queens College.

Bonnie Nelson worked for 37 years in the Library at John Jay College; functioning variously as Reference Librarian, Systems Librarian, Deputy Chief Librarian and Interim Chief Librarian, while moving from Assistant Professor to Professor. She served on the John Jay Chapter Executive Committee, as a delegate to the PSC Delegate Assembly, and as the Chapter's long-time Secretary. Bonnie was probably best known around the University as the University Faculty Senate's representative to the CUNY Information Technology (IT) Steering Committee, where she tried valiantly--and occasionally successfully--to uphold principles of faculty rights, academic freedom and freedom of information against the dark forces of bureaucracy.

Feel free to contact us at retirees@pscmail.org. And stay up to date by regularly checking our webpage at <https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>.

And if you've been waiting for a membership invoice it will be arriving shortly.

In solidarity,

Anne

THE SUMMER THAT WAS

Yes, it was mostly hot and hazy for all this summer, but as we know, union news trudges on.

SUMMER SURPRISE: ANTHEM ABANDONS MEDICARE ADVANTAGE+ PLAN



[As we go to press, an important development in the Retiree Healthcare Crisis is coming to light. It will be discussed at the chapter meeting Monday. In the interim, you will receive an email from PSC President James Davis.]

In a stunning development this summer, Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield/Anthem announced on July 18 that it was withdrawing from administration of the Medicare Advantage Plus contract with

New York City! Empire/Anthem requested that the City guarantee the start-up of the program by January 1, 2023, which the City said it could not do.

This is the latest, but perhaps not the final, setback for the plan signed by the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) with the City of New York on July 14, 2021. From the time of the announcement of the MLC/City agreement, which the PSC opposed, retirees from the PSC and other municipal unions strenuously opposed the plan. We objected not only because the plan was to be administered by private insurance companies, but because it requires prior approval by these profit-seeking companies when retirees seek non-routine health-care services.



Dave Sanders

Demonstrations and petitions by City municipal retirees followed. Tens of thousands of retirees and their families declined to join the plan, opting instead for Traditional Medicare (TM), even though this would require them to pay \$191 per month per family member for remaining in TM. Eventually a newly organized group, the Cross Union Retiree Organizing Committee, filed a lawsuit in City Courts to block approval of the MLC-City plan.

On March 3, 2022 Judge Lyle Frank ruled that the MA+ plan was illegal since

the City Charter says that the City cannot decrease benefits for City workers once they have retired – and the added retiree payments to stay in TM represents, he ruled, just such a decrease. Despite objections and public protests, the City is appealing this decision.

Meanwhile, since the Empire/Anthem announcement this summer, the MLC has announced that it will continue to seek to provide a “substitute Medicare Advantage program.” (MLC letter, 7/18/22). As PSC President James Davis said in his July 25 letter to PSC members: “...many MLC unions remain committed to an MA+ plan in some form, even if it is not with Anthem/Empire. It is likely that MA+ is still on the table...”

SO WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE RETIREES NOW?

All current PSC retirees, as well as other NYC municipal retirees, are in the same place we were at the beginning of this summer: We continue to have all our Traditional Medicare benefits at no additional cost to us and our full PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund benefits. (NOTE: The \$15 copays for office visits, which went into effect earlier this year, will continue for retirees enrolled in GHI Senior Care under Emblem Health. For details see

http://www.pscunywf.org/media/246600/2022_seniorcare_flyer.pdf)

Our current Medicare benefits will continue until and unless the NYS Court of Appeals overturns Judge Frank’s decision. The Court will hear this appeal during its Fall session, beginning in September.

Meanwhile retired NYC municipal employees and our supporters will continue to press Mayor Adams to

abandon the City's appeal of Judge Frank's decision.



AFT 187th CONVENTION: BOSTON, MA July 7-13, 2022

Marcia Newfield attended the AFT Convention this summer as one of our delegates. (The PSC is part of both NYSUT and the AFT).

My first thought upon entering the Boston Convention Center, where the 187th AFT Convention was held, was "vast." The Center is on the scale of an airport, with endless walks from halls to meeting rooms. Vast also describes the scale of the Covid testing operation for 3,000 delegates representing 389 locals. Along with everyone else, the PSC delegation of thirteen* had to get their noses swabbed, stand on endless lines, and wait patiently for the results, then learn how to manage an app to record their everyday health status and self-testing. Unfortunately, two of us came down with COVID, one at the conference, one afterwards. All are okay.



Some big news and resolutions of the convention were the formal signing of the affiliation of AFT and AAUP (the AAUP will retain its independent structure); the endorsement of student

debt forgiveness, which will affect many adjuncts and students; A New Deal for Higher Education, which promotes affordable and accessible standards, calls for a Department of Labor study of the inequity between adjunct and full-time wages, touts labor education, anti-racism, and representation of underserved communities: Asian, Native American, trans athletes, paraprofessionals and healthcare workers. There was strong agreement to fight the criminalization of anti-reproductive healthcare, to support the Ukraine, to condemn excessive military spending, and to oppose voucher programs. AFT President Randi Weingarten maintained an upbeat note, stressing organizing possibilities and successes (70 new unions have joined since the last convention in 2020). Current membership was reported as 1.7 million. Resolutions that were voted on, as well as those recommended to the AFT Executive Committee for consideration, and the convention video playlist are available at aft.org/about/resolutions.

RESOLUTION STRUGGLES

The Executive Committee of the Progressive Caucus ran an uncontested winning slate of AFT officers and delegates in the election held at the convention (James Davis is a VP).

The Progressive Caucus supported all but two of the thirty-seven resolutions that were submitted. The two resolutions that did not have the Progressive Caucus support were introduced by the, PSC on behalf of our DA: to reverse sanctions on Cuba and to oppose the privatization of Medicare. The rationale against our anti-privatization was that it should be up to locals to decide on their

insurance coverage. President James Davis rose at the Caucus meeting to explain and defend the PSC’s anti-privatization position, as did PSC Secretary Penny Lewis, but it was voted down at the Higher Education Committee. A striking irony is that one of the guest speakers at the convention was Dr. Claudia M. Fegan, national coordinator of Physicians for a National Health Plan, which champions public health care for all. The argument against our resolution in support of removing Cuba sanctions was that it was too politically controversial, especially in the Florida locals.

A third PSC resolution submitted by our Retiree Chapter on climate justice was folded into the AFT #34 resolution to divest pension plans from fossil fuels and reinvest in workers and communities. It was enthusiastically endorsed. The AFT Climate Task Force initiated a special follow-up meeting which twenty-six people, including most of our delegation, attended. Plans have been initiated to build a labor network to support climate justice.

Celebrity guests, who appeared on giant video screens, included Amazon and Starbucks organizers, Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Jill Biden, MA Representative Ayanna Presley and Liz Shuler, the first female president of the AFL-CIO. In keeping with the convention’s theme “Reclaim Our Future,” all speakers stressed the transformative power of teachers and their own working-class backgrounds. Elizabeth Warren’s father was a janitor; her mother, a Sears worker. Jill Biden has been a union member for thirty-eight years. Some videos of the convention are available

[here](#). I particularly recommend listening to Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III of Trinity Church in Chicago, who told the moving story of one of the lesser-known founders of compulsory public education: Robert Smalls of Charleston, South Carolina. Moss’s message that it’s midnight in America was counterposed by “morning is coming.” If you need a keep-going vitamin, this is it. Check YouTube for the film about his ancestor “Otis’ Dream”.

The AFT’s formal report of its implementation of these exemplary resolutions doesn’t occur until the next convention in 2024 in Texas. Meanwhile, check the AFT website for action projects.

*Lynne Turner, Pamela Stemberg, Susan Di Raimo, Rulisa Galloway-Perry, Joyce Moorman, Howard Meltzer, Marcia Newfield, Nivedita Majumdar, Sharon Persinger, James Davis, Andrea Vasquez, Felicia Wharton, Penny Lewis, and Ida Cheng (PSC staff)



PSC TURNS FIFTY



Those of you who were at the big June Chapter meeting were treated to slide shows of PSC history along with photos

of 'the way we were'. The PSC was founded fifty years ago in April 1972 with the merger of the Legislative Conference and the United Federation of College Teachers.

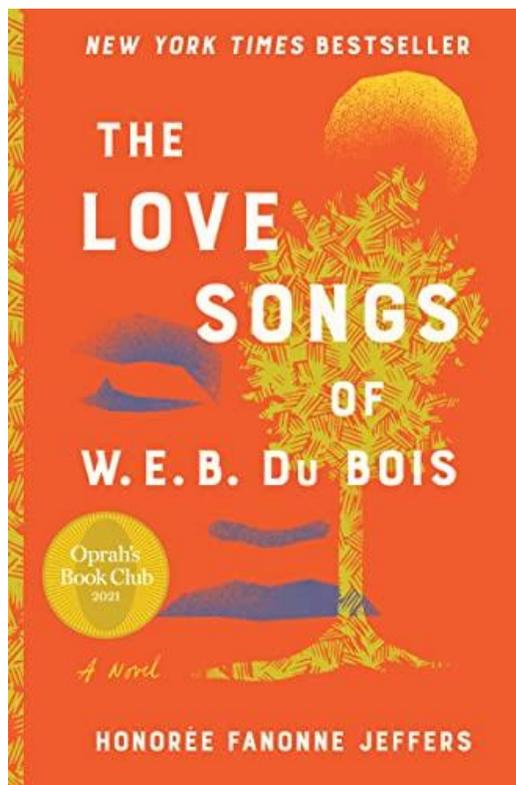
The video of that meeting can be found at psc-cuny.org/retirees/ It includes some memorable historical photos of 1972-97, presented by Irwin Yellowitz. More recent scenes from this century were showcased by Bill Friedheim, and included rousing talks by Lilia Melani and Barbara Bowen, among others.

You may also be interested to see the memories from about 50 of your former colleagues about their union days. □

BOOK CORNER

THE LOVE SONGS OF W.E.B DU BOIS

Ann Davidson



There are many, many characters in Honoree Fanzine Jeffers' rich and expansive novel, *The Love Songs of W.E.B Du Bois*. Men are certainly present and significant, but the novel belongs to women: Ailey Pearl Garfield; her sisters Lydia and Coco; their mother Belle; and their grandmothers and great-grandmothers up the matriarchal line, all the way back to 1733 when an escaped Black slave married a Creek woman in a place that wasn't yet called Georgia.

The novel is partly set in "the City," but the Garfield women spend every summer in Chicasetta, the close-knit community down south whose values and traditions provide support and continuity. The land itself is an archive of the past, as are the foods, the language, the church rituals, and the "home training" that remain touchstones for Ailey as she works out who she wants to be—and be with—in a racialized world.

Du Bois emphasized how Black people's ideas of who they were and what they were worth—the formation of the Black individual and group identity—were shaped, in America, by white racist projections—to disastrous effect. That Ailey develops into a self-assured Black woman is a triumph, and Jeffers shows us the myriad influences that her journey is built on.

Ailey pushes back against the "double consciousness" that Du Bois described—the ingrained awareness of derogatory white assumptions that undermine the self's validation. She attends both Black and white high schools; an HBCU where colorism is rampant, sororities rule, and code switching can be disarming or strategic;

and, finally, a predominantly white graduate program. She is mindful of the color line and is incensed when she realizes that a white aunt doesn't "see color." That is a privilege that Black folks don't ever have.

The Garfields epitomize what Du Bois termed "the talented tenth of the Negro race," an aristocracy less of wealth than of "knowledge and character." Higher education and professional attainment are as valued as correct grammar and dignified behavior.

Ailey is expected to become a doctor, like her father and sister; but Ailey's mentors are academics. The first is Uncle Root, so light-skinned he could pass for white if he chose to, who blazed a trail as an historian and civil rights activist. Then there is Prof. Oludara, who insists on the importance of her students knowing the past and acknowledging their communal ancestors, their suffering and their perseverance.

These stories of indigenous, African, and immigrant forebears are interspersed with Ailey's, and they are essential because their humanity enables young people to imagine positive ways of knowing and seeing themselves, countering centuries of white disdain.

Jeffers has said that she began by writing short stories set in Chicassetta, then developed Ailey's coming of age story as "a beach read." At times, this core narrative does feel lighter and reads faster than the historical passages.

But it is those stories—of integration and displacement, dignity and abasement, kindness and abuse, death and survival—voiced by an omniscient, sometimes playful, sometimes mournful communal chorus—that set this novel apart.

Late in the novel, as Ailey researches the historical record, the two strains merge. The races have been mixing as well, and Jeffers has said that the result is "a book about how America came to be."

That story necessarily includes some ugly truths. Yet Jeffers explains, "I want white folks who don't know Black people to see a version of blackness that I have created not out of fear of insulting white people, but for them to be a fly on the wall and to hear these conversations that Black people have when no white people are in the room." She is giving us access, in particular, to the lived experience of generations of Black women. They struggle in the world as men do, but in Du Bois' words, women have to "improvise to keep their children safe, to keep themselves safe, and sometimes to keep their men safe." It's a daunting burden, one carried by Jeffers' women with dignity, determination, grit, sass, and generous helpings of sweet potato pie.

Ailey's role models, long before she becomes Dr. Odulara's protege, are her mother, her sisters, and the other women in her family, especially down home. Whatever white readers make of these characters, it is arguably empowering for a young generation of Black girls and women to see—and internalize—a celebration of their beauty, sexuality, culture, and history□

CULTURE CORNER

THE OTHER PSC: THE PEOPLES' SYMPHONY CONCERTS

Marcia Newfield



Classical music of the highest caliber should be available to all the people at affordable prices. That was the mission that inspired the founding of the Peoples' Symphony Concerts 100 years ago, and it's still operative. Imagine a series of six concerts for \$90 and single tickets for as low as \$10 for essential workers and students with IDs. And all with renown artists.

Three series are offered for the 2022-23 season. They all provide a mix of soloists and chamber groups, including the Juilliard Quartet, Septura Brass, Jonathan Bliss, and Shai Wosner. Performances take place in two venues: Washington Irving High School and Town Hall.

The PSC Family Pass offers parents and grandparents who subscribe to the Arens, Mann, and/or Salomon Series complimentary tickets for up to two fully vaccinated children up to the age of 18. This is a chance to pass on a legacy of music.

Programs for The Peoples' Symphony Concerts can be found at <https://www.pscny.org/> (not to be confused with our website!)

An added benefit since Covid is the availability of virtual access the day after each concert with conversations before and after the performance with the artists.

ART YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

At the Morgan Library (2 blocks from the Grad center), 100 Years of "Ulysses" will be on view until October 2; it contains portraits of Joyce, Nora Barnacle, Sylvia Beech, Berenice Abbott and other memorabilia of comments and historical records of his journey to create this groundbreaking work and overcome the obstacles to its publication (www.themorgan.org).

Jean-Michel Basquiat produced significant art in the 80s during his short life, incorporating his original graffiti into the mainstream. His family has made 200 works never seen before available at the Starrett-Lehigh building on 27th Street and 11th Avenue. There are discounted tickets for students, active-duty and veteran U.S. military personnel and senior citizens (kingpleasure.basquiat.com).



AMONG OURSELVES

Connie Gemson, a former adjunct at LaGuardia and an active retired union member has a chapter called "Adjunct Blues and Class Notes" in a new anthology *The Children of the People: Writing by and about CUNY students on Race and Social Justice*, Rose M. Kim,

(Editor), Grace M. Cho (Editor) and Robin McGinty (Editor). □

WHEN I HAVE FEARS I MAY DEMENTED BE

By Diane Menna

Apologies to John Keats

When I have fears I may demented be
That I have such a slow and leaky brain
And won't now qualify for Jeopardy
And can't remember what's that actor's
name;
When I behold upon the cashier's face,
A look of bother while I search my pants.
Where is my wallet, gone without a trace.
Can I find my car keys, not a chance.
When standing in a room for half an hour,
I can't remember what I came in for,
I fear losing all my mental power.
I left those tickets here, I was so sure.
Trying to remember, I think and think
Till memories to nothingness do sink. □



DUES NOTES are going out in the mail. This is a once-a-year mailing. Please look for an envelope from the PSC and/or use the link on the website to pay your dues. Dues are \$85/year for full-time members and \$40 for part-timers.

Round up friends and colleagues who recently retired and ask them to join us

for monthly meetings, films, events and this newsletter. Also, Retiree Chapter members have access to NYSUT benefits such as term life insurance up to the age of 84, discounted car rentals, travel discounts and legal services.

SPEAKING OF TURNING THE PAGE

Would you like to submit something to us? We welcome news about what you are doing:

About the upcoming election (maybe about groups you are working with)? Art work or writing that you are doing? Books of interest? Cultural events you participate in or recommend? You name it, we want to hear about it. Our editorial collective of **Michael Frank, Bill Friedheim, Joan Greenbaum and Dave Kotelchuck and Diane Menna** is waiting to hear from you.

Write to us at retirees@pscmail.org, with 'Newsletter' in the subject line.

USEFUL UNION LINKS:

Retiree Chapter:

<https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>

Welfare Fund

<http://pscunywf.org/>

Reminder! The Welfare Fund benefits provided by the PSC, including pharmacy, dental, vision and hearing services, remain unchanged.

TURNING THE PAGE is a publication of the Retirees chapter of PSC-CUNY, Local 2334 of NYSUT and the AFT.