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# AND THE WALLS ARE TUMBLING DOWN: MEDICARE ADVANTAGE IN SUMMER 2024

by DAVID KOTELCHUCK

Momentous changes happened this summer to the Medicare Advantage (MA) program that was voted on by the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) and signed into law by Mayor Eric Adams in March 2023. PSC leaders spoke out against this program within the MLC, lawsuits were filed against the program by the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees, and there was grassroots opposition by tens of thousands of retirees from across the NYC Metro area. The Medicare Advantage program appears to be on its last legs.



The first major breakdown this summer in the edifice of Medicare Advantage was a decision by the NYS Appellate Court, First Judicial Department, to uphold a lower court decision by Judge Lyle Frank to block New York City from switching retired municipal workers from our traditional Medicare plan to a privatized Medicare Advantage plan. What's more, the Appellate Court decision was unanimous in our favor, making any appeal to the State's highest court, the NYS Court of Appeals, problematic. (In most state court systems, a unanimous decision on a case from the next lower court in that state often leads to a refusal by the top court even to hear the case, if appealed.) The lawsuit was originally brought by the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees, which also argued against the City's appeal to the Appellate Court. The PSC filed an amicus brief opposing the City's appeal.

The next great tremor in the edifice of NYC Medicare Advantage occurred on June 14, 2024 when the Retirees chapter of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) voted by almost 2 to 1 — 63% — to elect an insurgent slate of retiree officers opposed to the City's Medicare Advantage plan. This is the first time in the local's 40-year history that an insurgent slate of retirees has been elected. The newly-elected retirees chapter president is Bennett Fischer, who taught in NYC schools for 29 years and retired in 2018.

Then in an earthquake development one week later, on June 23, UFT President Michael Mulgrew announced that the UFT was withdrawing its support of the NYC Medicare Advantage plan, which he had so strongly advocated for within the MLC. The UFT and one other union (DC37 of AFSCME) cast 70 percent of the MLC vote for Medicare Advantage in an MLC vote that was weighted by the size of union membership.

So where does this leave the City's Medicare Advantage program now? Not quite dead. On July 5, *The Chief* newspaper reported that attorneys with the Adams administration filed an appeal in May of the unanimous Appellate Court decision to New York's highest court, the NYS Court of Appeals. If the Court

of Appeals agrees to hear the City's appeal, this would delay any final decision about the legal status of Medicare Advantage for NYC municipal retirees.

Mayor Adams now appears to be backtracking on support for the Medicare Advantage plan he himself signed into law. On July 31, *NY Daily News* reporter Chris Sommerfeldt reported that "Adams just told a municipal retiree in the room opposed to Medicare Advantage she should keep fighting the plan in court: 'You should continue to push...because we have to find a resolution.' The retiree replied by asking why Adams can't just stop pushing for the plan in court." Right on!!!

It has been quite a good summer for municipal retirees and their families who have been fighting against Medicare Advantage for years now, as well as for active employees who themselves will someday be retiring.

For a comprehensive review of the PSC's fight since 2021 to protect healthcare benefits for retirees, read "PSC has protected senior health care," in the August issue of *Clarion*: <https://psc-cuny.org/clarion/2024/august/psc-has-protected-senior-health-care/>

#### A NEW SETBACK

On August 1, Judge Lyle Frank lifted his January 11, 2023 injunction stopping the Adams Administration from charging \$15 copays for our Medicare visits because the City amended its contract with Emblem. So, it is possible that beginning on January 1, 2025, all NYC retirees currently on Medicare will be forced to pay \$15 every time they have a medical office visit.

NOTE: This results from a separate lawsuit on copays initiated by the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees. It is separate from the lawsuit (mentioned above) now being appealed by Mayor Adams to the NYS Appeals Court. To help pay for legal fees and support both lawsuits, PSC members can contribute to NYCOPSR online at <https://www.nycretirees.org/donate-subscribe>

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## THE CITY SEEKS CHANGES IN HEALTH BENEFITS – FOR ACTIVES!

by DAVID KOTELCHUCK

While City leaders have so far been rebuffed in their efforts to save money by cutting healthcare benefits for retirees, they are not done with their efforts to save money on healthcare benefits — this time for **in-service employees**. For the past year, Adams administration officials and some MLC officers (not including PSC

representatives) have been engaged in closed-door discussions on changing the Comprehensive Benefit Plan (CBP), the basic premium-free health insurance plan chosen by three-quarters of all active NYC employees. New York City also funds these benefits for retired employees who are still too young to receive federal Medicare benefits. The current CBP plan is administered by a consortium of Emblem (GHI) and Empire and covers 750,000 participants and their dependents.

These possible changes in the CBP plan would be the first in decades. They would be administered either by the Aetna health-insurance company and/or by a new consortium of Emblem (GHI) and United Healthcare, also a health insurance company.

What is driving this possible change? The City seeks to save \$1 billion out of the \$10 billion it now pays for health benefits — **a massive 10% cut!** It is hard to believe that such savings can be achieved without a major reduction in employee health benefits or increase in employee out-of-pocket costs or both.

Negotiators insist that they will be able to achieve these cuts and still maintain high-quality, premium-free healthcare delivery both for City employees and their dependents. When a plan is finally negotiated, it will be sent to the MLC for a vote.

For some of the changes being considered and some of the pitfalls ahead, read the following articles:

“MLC Eyes New Health Insurance Provider,” Clarion, December 2023. <https://psc-cuny.org/clarion/2023/december/mlc-eyes-new-health-insurance-provider>

“The City Wants to Lower Insurance Costs. It Needs a Major Rethink,” the Center for NYC Affairs, February 2024. <https://www.centernyc.org/urban-matters-2/the-city-wants-lower-insurance-costs-it-needs-a-basic-rethink>

The article is written by Barbara Caress, a PSC member and union healthcare consultant. Caress suggests, for example, that New York City consider self-insurance for funding its healthcare benefits, as is done by other U.S. cities.

## WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THESE PROPOSED CHANGES?

1. First, right now, PSC members should **support our union’s ongoing campaign for a good contract.** Our current contract expired over a year ago. Any union’s most important source of strength is through its contract and thereby its ability to influence all sorts of issues in the workplace. So go to the PSC-CUNY website and sign up to join your campus action teams, attend contract demonstrations, make telephone calls, and write letters and emails of support. An updated calendar for all of these activities are on the PSC website — check it out regularly. (PSC website: <https://psc-cuny.org/>)

2. Also, the PSC Social Safety Net Committee now offers speakers and a slide show presentation entitled, **“The Endangered Health Benefits of NYC (including CUNY) Employees.”** This 30-minute presentation, developed by PSC members Len Rodberg and Amy Jeu, has been presented this past summer to the PSC HEO and CLT chapters. In it, speakers from the Social Safety Net Committee discuss how the current healthcare system works for CUNY members and what are some of the changes being proposed for in-service employees. **In the Fall, this presentation will be offered at PSC chapter meetings across CUNY.** If you know a chapter officer who would like to organize a presentation for their chapter, please tell them to contact Amy Jeu at [amyjeu@gmail.com](mailto:amyjeu@gmail.com). A presentation to the Retirees chapter will also be sought in the near future.

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## A SPECIAL DAY by DIANE MENNA

It was approaching noon on a beautiful spring day in June. Big fluffy clouds wharfed westward. A cool gentle breeze made walking those crosstown blocks towards John Jay College less of a chore than usual. Because of COVID, it had been four years since members of the Retirees Chapter of the PSC had met in person. Our anticipation was visible as we applied our name tags at the entrance to the Student Dining Hall on the second floor of the New Building. Many of us had not seen each other in way too long. Over 80 of us were gathered for the 2024 Retirees June Luncheon.

This day was special. What made it so? It wasn't the program or the speaker. In fact, there was no speaker. We were the speakers. The Program Committee of Marcia Newfield, Irwin Yellowitz, Marva Lilly and Bob Cermele had an innovative idea. After catching up by chatting amongst ourselves, we invited the attendees to speak to the group about their own retirement. What did you now have time to do in retirement that you always wanted to do, what surprised you or enriched your experience, what did you discover?

Peter Ranis volunteered to speak first, and he came prepared with a list of accomplishments. For example: “The hardest thing for me to do is getting in and out of Ubers. Zoom is my greatest technological breakthrough while in my pajamas. I am constantly telling my grandkids how great I was when I was their age. My best retirement achievement is 148 consecutive Wordles.”

Evie Rich, at 90 plus, guessed that she was probably the longest retired at 32 years. She spent her time, she said, making trouble. Connie Gemson took the opportunity in retirement to write three





plays which were put on by the Working Theatre. Susan O'Malley enjoyed not having to grade papers on the weekend and found herself running a successful program for the United Nations. Eileen Moran was surprised that she is now a canasta and poker player. And, Philip Leonhard, over 80, goes swing dancing with his wife.



The food, delightful summer fare, was delicious, the wine flowed, the laughter rippled. The serving staff treated us wonderfully. Old friends were made new again, and the sun continued to shine. It was a special day.

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## THE RETIREES CHAPTER'S ANTI-RACISM BOOK GROUP SERIES by GAIL GREEN-ANDERSON

*Gail Green-Anderson gives us a glimpse into her experience with the Anti-Racism Book Group Series last year when they took on the substantial task of reading Four Hundred Souls.*

During the 2023-24 academic year, I had the good fortune of being a part of the book group organized by the PSC's Retirees Chapter's Anti-Racism Committee. Under the guidance of committee members, we discussed *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619-2019*, edited by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain. Focusing on one part of the chronologically organized collection of short essays, we met once a month on Zoom. We were guided by members of the committee and talked about the selected part.

I had asked to be a member of the group when it was promoted in this publication, *Turning the Page*. It went against some of my long-held tastes as a reader. I cherish novels, long ones. I value the type of truth

available in fiction, rather than non-fiction. I like to read creative works that take me beyond my own time and place.

Still, I was drawn to the invitation to join the group — an invitation that was extended to all members of the PSC Retirees Chapter — because *Four Hundred Souls* would not be a book I would read on my own and were I to read it, I wanted to do so with others. An added draw was this: Those other readers would be fellow PSC Retirees Chapter members. As a relatively new member of the chapter, I was impressed by the intellectual energy that fueled chapter meetings.

When we had our last book group meeting this past June, I was aware of the sustained and focused attention that *Four Hundred Souls* had generated. I think the editors would have been pleased by the focused quality of our attention. In his introduction to the collection, Kendi writes: “Most of the pieces in the volume were written in 2019. We wanted the community to be writing during the four-hundredth year [since West Africans were forcibly brought to Jamestown]. We wanted *Four Hundred Souls* to write history and be history.” I felt our reading and discussion during 2023-2024 contributed to the history that Kendi and Blain wished to create.

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## **CONTRACT BARGAINING: A SNAPSHOT** by MARVA LILLY

### **CUNY STALLS AND PUTS UP WALLS FROM THE VERY BEGINNING**

The PSC and CUNY management sat down at the bargaining table on June 27, 2023, six months after the PSC started requesting negotiation dates. Many bargaining sessions took place at CUNY Central. There have been 26 sessions through August 7, 2024, with three more sessions scheduled in August. There have been 24 to 40 observers in attendance per session. PSC President James Davis explained the PSC’s bargaining proposals.

Tellingly, much of CUNY management’s bargaining agenda is devoted to undermining the PSC’s ability to represent their members effectively and prosecuting alleged employee misconduct.

### **BARGAINING SESSION 7: JUST ONE EXAMPLE**

In session 7, one set of demands concerned the multi-year appointments for adjuncts instituted as a pilot program in the 2010-2017 contract and renewed in the 2017-2023 contract. CUNY management opened this bargaining session by expressing unwillingness to engage with the PSC on this and a number of issues, an orientation that reflects management’s indifference to crucial problems faced by PSC members.



In the discussion that followed, President Davis argued that it is outrageous to refuse meaningful movement on non-economic demands. PSC Secretary Penny Lewis noted, “There is some assumption of symmetry on your side, like ‘We have 10 items on our list, and you should have 10 items on yours.’ [Lewis has since been elected Vice President for Senior Colleges.] We might accept such symmetry if you were coming to us with 30% raises like the Board gave upper management, if you shared with us your understanding of the value of your work and the acknowledgement that you need to pay yourself more to remain competitive.” But she pointed out that’s obviously not the case. There’s extreme asymmetry here, as the compensation flows to the top, while the most meaningful work that defines what a university is, not to mention most of that work, is performed by our members.

### **PSC FORGES AHEAD UNDETERRED**

The PSC bargaining team remains committed to making as much progress as possible during the summer. As of this writing, they requested and received agreement from management on several bargaining dates: August 13, 21 and 27. At the PSC’s insistence, bargaining sessions continue to be open to members. If you would like to join a bargaining session go to our website at [www.PSC-CUNY.org](https://www.PSC-CUNY.org).

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## **WILL SOCIAL SECURITY SURVIVE FOR OUR GRANDCHILDREN?**

by **BONNIE NELSON**

As a child in the 1950’s, I can recall my father assembling the paperwork so that my grandparents would be able to retire and collect Social Security after giving up the income from their modest grocery store. Without Social Security they would have lived in poverty or (heaven forbid!) come to live with us in our very small house in the Bronx. I recount this story to remind us that, although it feels like Social Security has always been with us, the first Social Security taxes were not collected until January 1937 and monthly benefits did not begin until 1942. Social Security was a very new program when most of us were children, yet we grew up confident that it would be there for us in our old age. Can today’s children grow up with the same confidence?

The answer probably depends on which political party is in power when Congress and the president finally address the issue of the current imbalance between the amount being paid into Social Security and the amount being distributed in benefits.

Social Security is largely a “pay as you go” program. Since its inception, the money collected in Social



Security taxes (FICA) has been paid into the Social Security Trust Funds. When more money was paid into these funds than was paid out in benefits, the surplus was invested in interest-bearing Treasury securities, ultimately reaching a total of \$2.9 trillion.

Since 2021, Social Security has been drawing on these reserves to pay current benefits [1]. The Social Security Board of Trustees announced in its May 6, 2024 report that “The combined asset reserves of the... Trust Funds are projected to have enough dedicated revenue to pay all scheduled benefits...until 2035, one year later than projected last year, with 83% of benefits payable at that time.” [2] So if nothing is done, after 2035, Social Security will only be able to pay out 83% of the benefits that retirees and SSI beneficiaries expect and depend on.

This is not the first time that it has been recognized that Social Security would be in crisis unless Congress acted on a solution, but the last time there was a serious effort to ensure Social Security’s viability was the enactment of the Social Security Amendments of 1983 — over 50 years ago! That law brought more workers into the Social Security system — including federal government employees, increased the Social Security tax rates, began taxing Social Security benefits for higher income individuals and couples, and gradually raised the “full retirement age” to 67 (from 65) by 2027 (among numerous other provisions). As you can guess from the added burden on workers (increased FICA taxes, higher retirement age), Ronald Reagan was president at the time.

So what are the current proposals to “fix” Social Security?

The Democratic Party’s approach is probably best exemplified by Congressman John Larson’s (CT) Social Security 2100 Act [3], supported by nearly 200 House Democrats. This bill would actually increase benefits for Social Security beneficiaries: 2% across the board increase, additional increase for lower income seniors and the most elderly, improvements in the cost-of-living adjustment to more closely reflect the inflation actually experienced by seniors, and improvements in disability benefits, among other provisions. It would pay for these enhancements and keep the program solvent by applying FICA to earnings above \$400,000 and by adding a “net investment income tax” for individuals making over \$400,000 (President Biden has promised not to increase taxes on individuals making less than \$400,000).

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[1] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Policy Basics: Understanding the Social Security Trust Funds.

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/understanding-the-social-security-trust-funds-0>

[2] Social Security Administration. “Strong Economy, Low Unemployment, and Higher Job and Wage Growth Extend Social Security Trust Funds to 2035” May 6, 2024

<https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/releases/2024/#5-2024-1>

[3] Social Security 2100 Act. <https://larson.house.gov/issues/social-security-2100-act>

The Republican Party, in its platform, claims “President Trump has made absolutely clear that he will not cut one penny from Medicare or Social Security.... These programs are promises to our Seniors, ensuring they can live their golden years with dignity. Republicans will protect these vital programs and ensure Economic Stability.” [4] But the Republican Study Committee (nearly 80% of House Republicans) rejects any kind of tax increases, and favors “program Savings” that would reduce cost-of-living increases, “make modest changes” to the benefit formula (e.g., reduce future monthly income) for those not near retirement age and “make modest adjustments [e.g., increases] to the retirement age for future retirees to account for increases in life expectancy.” [5]

So will Social Security be the bedrock of retirement income for our grandchildren as it was for our grandparents? That depends on who we elect. How are you voting in November?

[4] Republican Party Platform, p. 16. <https://prod-static.gop.com/media/RNC2024-Platform.pdf>

[5] Republican Study Committee Detail Budget proposal

[https://hern.house.gov/uploadedfiles/final\\_budget\\_including\\_letter\\_word\\_doc-final\\_as\\_of\\_march\\_25.pdf](https://hern.house.gov/uploadedfiles/final_budget_including_letter_word_doc-final_as_of_march_25.pdf)

## SHIRLEY CHISHOLM’S LEGACY

### by BARBARA WINSLOW

Kamala Harris will not be the first woman of color to have had her name placed in nomination for the Democratic Party candidacy for the US president. That “first” belongs to Shirley Anita St. Hill Chisholm, a graduate of Brooklyn College in 1946. Writing in 1972, she wrote, “I ran because somebody had to do it first...I ran because most people think this country is not ready for a Black candidate, not ready for a woman candidate...someday.” That “someday” is here. Kamala Harris is poised to be the first woman of color to be the US president.

Harris will be facing many obstacles and challenges as a presidential nominee — mainly race and gender prejudice. Her path was somewhat cleared by the courage of Chisholm. Born into a family of working-class Caribbean immigrants, Chisholm experienced both gender and racial hostility as she first navigated Brooklyn’s racially



Image: Shirley Chisholm Campaign Poster

segregated public school system. Her political activism began at Brooklyn College. Chisholm and Harris both credit their alma maters with fostering their political and activist ambitions.

Chisholm followed the path of early childhood education, because the study and practice of law was then too large a hurdle for most Black working-class women. But the lure of politics was too great. She found she had to constantly and effectively fight the entrenched white and male domination of Brooklyn and New York State politics.

She became the first African American woman from Brooklyn elected to the NY State legislature. In 1968, after a grueling campaign marked by gendered attack after attack, mainly by the Black and male Brooklyn establishment, she became the first African American woman elected to Congress. Then in 1972, defying all “conventional wisdom,” she ran for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. Her campaign excited millions, like that of both Obama and now Harris. However, Chisholm faced outright racial and gendered hostility and contempt even from members of her own party.

In the almost fifty years since Chisholm ran for the presidency, only one African American male and one white woman won the nomination of a major party. Obama never acknowledged Chisholm. Hillary Clinton, who did recognize Chisholm’s legacy, was subjected to relentless misogynist attacks by her political opponent, the press, as well as members of her own party.

This year, we witness a sea change. Harris has the support of her party; there have been no public statements — “of course we want a woman, just not this one” — that were said about Chisholm and Clinton.



Image: Wikimedia Commons  
([tinyurl.com/WikimediaHarris](https://tinyurl.com/WikimediaHarris))

After 2005 a new generation of social justice activists — Black Lives Matter, Me Too, Climate Change, Gun Safety, Reproductive Justice and Peace — rediscovered Chisholm. Her portrait hangs in the Capitol Building, thanks to Nancy Pelosi. The 2018 congressional election in which 107 women were elected, many of whom were women of color, brought Chisholm’s legacy front and center. Harris who shares Chisholm’s love of partying, music and signature clothing, recognizes what is owed to those, who she says “fought and sacrificed so much for equality and liberty and justice for all, including the Black women, who are often — too often — overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy ... I stand on their shoulders.” [For more information on Shirley Chisholm, check out the exhibit reviewed in Culture Corner below.]

## CULTURE CORNER

# LIVE OPERA GOES STREAMING

by NORMAN LEWIS

One good thing that came out of the pandemic was the streaming of live operas online. I have been going to operas since the age of seven, when my grandmother took me to see Lohengrin at the Metropolitan Opera. That launched my love of opera, and for seventy-plus years, I attended live opera and listened to it on the radio faithfully every Saturday afternoon. Because of mobility issues, I have not been to a live opera in years but thanks to the internet, I have been able to see and hear live opera online.

Europe in the summer is notable for its many opera festivals. So far this summer I have been fortunate to be able to travel online to three major venues: Aix-en-Provence, Bayreuth and Munich.

Of several performances that I saw or heard from Aix, the one that stood out was a double-bill of Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauride* (July 11). Directed by the brilliant Dmitri Tcherniakov and conducted by Emanuelle Haïm, this was an outstanding production. Corinne Winters was superb in the title role in both operas and Véronique Gens was in powerful voice as Clytemnestra. Tcherniakov updates both operas to our time and draws many parallels with the current wars we are experiencing. Gluck's music is glorious and unfortunately not as well-known as it deserves to be. *Tauride* was last presented at the Met in 2011, after a hundred-year absence, and *Aulis* has never been performed there.

You can view the complete Aix production here: <https://lascenenumerique.festival-aix.com/en/videos/iphigenie-en-aulide-iphigenie-en-tauride-gluck>

The new production at Bayreuth this year was *Tristan and Isolde* (July 25). I watched this online and was not taken with the production, which was very gimmicky and distracting. However, Andreas Schager and Camilla Nylund in the title roles and Semyon Bychkov's conducting were all excellent and after a while I just turned off the video and bathed in the glorious music. I always feel a little sorry for the Festspielhaus patrons, who have paid thousands of dollars for their uncomfortable seats and who must suffer in their unairconditioned Wagnerian hell.

You can view the Bayreuth production here: <https://www.operaonvideo.com/tristan-und-isolde-bayreuth-2024-andreas-schager-camilla-nylund-gunther-groissbock-christa-mayer/>

Finally, I watched a new production of *Tosca* (July 27) from the Munich Festival, presented by the Bavarian

State Opera. This one had some really odd conceits: the action had been moved to 1970s Rome, with the Red Guard, paparazzi with polaroid cameras, gratuitous nudity, body painting and lots of other weirdness. At one point, videos of Anna Magnani in *Rome: Open City* played on screens behind the singers.

Act I was a hyperkinetic ADHD mess; there was never a still moment. Jonas Kaufmann as Cavaradossi rose above the clutter. His "Recondite armonia" was breathtaking. Eleanora Buratto, who was a fine Butterfly at the Met this past season, was making her debut as Floria Tosca. Hers was a competent assumption, although her characterization lacked a certain depth. Hopefully, she will acquire this with more performances. Unlike Callas' wild, out-of-control diva (my favorite), hers was a rather demure and even-tempered Tosca. Ludovic Tézier was an effective and menacing Scarpia.

Acts II and III were far better, played without the usual intermission and building to an effective climax. Kaufmann's "E lucevan le stell" was heartbreaking and beautiful, as was the duet that follows, "O dolce mani," where the two plan their escape. Despite the bizarre first act, this was an impressive production and one well worth watching.



Screenshot from Munich Production of TOSCA, 2024

You can view the Munich production here: <https://www.operaonvideo.com/tosca-munich-2024-jonas-kaufmann-ludovic-tezier-eleonora-buratto/>

I hope to continue my online summer tour in August at the Rossini festival in Pesaro and the Puccini festival in Torre del Lago, which will honor the centenary of the composer's death.

# Ex Libris

Time stamped.

We all are.

You know,

like the old inside fly-leaf of library books, checked in and checked out.

Black ink stamps

leave traces under our eyes,

and lines, like those on a printed page

stretch around our mouths.

Maybe some of us are like an open book?

Smeared softly with thumb prints

of people who loved us.

I rather like the bookish life.

Read many times.

Underlined for emphasis,

enjoyed, outraged, surprised,

wooned, laughed at,

And trying not,

trying terribly hard not,

to turn the page

to find out how it all ends.

Joan Greenbaum, October 2016



# MUSEUM EXHIBITS: FALL 2024

## by MARCIA NEWFIELD

The museum season is about to sail...where it goes depends on each viewer.

### METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

#### “Mexican Prints at the Vanguard” (September 12 to January 5)



Over 130 works are on display, including woodcuts, lithographs, and screen prints, by artists such as Posada, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and Leopoldo Méndez. The exhibit explores how prints were central to the artistic identity and practice in Mexico and highlights their effectiveness in addressing social and political issues, a role of the graphic arts that continues today. The bulk of The Met’s expansive collection came through the French-born artist Jean Charlot, whose association with the museum began in the late 1920s. Charlot donated many of his own prints and works by other artists to The Met, and in the mid-1940s, acted on behalf of the museum to acquire prints in Mexico. The collection demonstrates The Met’s early interest in Mexican art and culture, at a time when there was growing international interest in the subject.

#### “Don’t Forget To Call Your Mother” (Showing until September 15)

At a time when photographs are primarily shared and saved digitally, many artists are returning to the physicality of snapshots in an album or pictures in an archive as a source of inspiration.

Drawing its title, *Don’t Forget to Call Your Mother*, from a photograph by Italian provocateur Maurizio Cattelan, the exhibition consists of works in The Met collection from the 1970s to today that reflect upon the complicated feelings of nostalgia and sentimentality that these objects conjure, while underlining the power of the found object. Among the featured artists is Sadie Barnette, for whom photographs provide a portal to illuminate the forgotten history of the first Black-owned gay bar in San Francisco and her own father’s life as her 2022 work *Photo Bar* powerfully illustrates.

Like Barnette, many of the artists in the exhibition seek to fortify the legacy of family histories, to

emphasize the importance of intergenerational relationships, and to consider the ways in which knowledge and respect for the past can inform our current moment. Some artists such as Sophie Calle and Larry Sultan explore their own narratives to reveal the construction of desire, while others, including Taryn Simon and Hank Willis Thomas, examine histories that have shaped cultural and political dialogue.

For some, including Darrel Ellis who utilized family pictures to negotiate the trauma of police violence, the personal is political. Deploying various strategies, these artists consider how a collection of images — like a talisman or an altarpiece — build relationships across time and can transform our understanding of the present.



Human nature is examined through a group of Netherlandish prints illustrating proverbs, while notions of family and artistic kinship frame a selection of works by seventeenth-century French printmaker Claudine Bouzonnet Stella. The complex relationship between animal and human qualities is explored via Eugène Delacroix's depictions of lions.

Other works on view reveal humans acting on their environments, as in representations of building activities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy. Natural history drawings of shells, flowers, and insects, as well as cut-paper collages of plant life, show how artists both carefully studied nature and attempted to control or possess it. Finally, the assertion of nature and its impact on humanity is registered by groupings of seascapes and prints depicting flooding in the United States over the past two hundred years.

## THE WHITNEY MUSEUM

### **“Survival Piece #5: Portable Orchard,” (Showing until January 5)**

Portable Orchard marks the first standalone museum presentation of the fully realized indoor citrus grove conceived and designed in 1972 by artists Helen Mayer Harrison (1927–2018) and Newton Harrison (1932–2022). This project explores the need for a productive and sustainable food system in an imagined future where natural farming practices are obsolete and cannot be taken for granted.

Stretching across the Museum's eighth-floor gallery, this installation of eighteen live citrus trees rooted in self-contained planters with individual lighting systems reflects a survivalist alternative in the face of environmental decline. The Harrisons began their decades-long collaboration in the early 1970s, inspired by emerging environmentalist movements and a growing social awareness of the planet's vulnerable ecosystems.

They brought distinct backgrounds in education and sculpture to their shared creative practice and



developed an approach to art-making that was grounded in cross-disciplinary research and yielded projects that served simultaneously as works of art and calls to action.

“To survive as a species,” Helen Harrison reflected, “we are going to have to learn how to grow our own food and take care of ourselves at one point or another. So we started looking at what that means.”

Portable Orchard is one of seven Survival Pieces developed by the Harrisons in the early 1970s, each of which proposes an alternative to an existing food production system — from a hog pasture to a shrimp farm. The Harrisons planned for future implementation of these projects by making detailed instruction drawings; the Museum’s recent acquisition of one such drawing was the impetus for this presentation and is on view in the galleries, along with additional archival materials.

Portable Orchard reveals the prescient quality of the Harrisons’ research into food sustainability as well as the successes and failures of artificial systems built to sustain life — issues that are even more relevant today than they were fifty years ago when the project was first conceived.

### “Wanda Gág’s World” (Showing until December)

This exhibition presents a selection of prints by the artist, illustrator, and children’s book author Wanda Gág (1893–1946). These works record the world as Gág experienced it: a place where landscapes move rhythmically and inanimate objects hum with life. Although she also painted, the graphic arts offered her the most effective method for expressing this unique vision.



Born in Minnesota to immigrants from German Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic), Gág arrived in New York in 1917 to study at the Art Students League, where she became a fixture of the city’s modernist art scene. Adhering neither to abstraction nor social realism — the dominant artistic movements at the time — Gág forged her own approach to figuration.

Over the course of her career, she found modest success selling her prints and produced several popular children’s books, examples of which are presented in the show. Gág was also a prolific writer about her life and work, and excerpts from her letters and diaries accompany the prints on view. Drawn entirely from the Whitney’s collection, the works in this exhibition span roughly two decades, ranging from the mid-1920s to the year before Gág’s death. Together, these still lifes, landscapes, and interiors illuminate what the artist called “Wanda Gág world,” demonstrating her fervent quest to capture the feeling and movement of life as she saw it.

## THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

### “Changing the Face of Democracy: Shirley Chisholm at 100” (Showing until July 20)

To commemorate the centennial of the birth of Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005), the Museum of the City of New York and the **Shirley Chisholm Project at Brooklyn College** will present the first major museum exhibition on the life and legacy of this path-breaking politician and New Yorker.

The first Black woman elected to Congress and the first woman to run for president on a major party ticket, Chisholm emerged from a unique constellation of New York networks. Set against the broader landscape of New York politics, Caribbean communities, and Black women’s activism, this exhibition explores Shirley Chisholm’s life, from her early years in Brooklyn and Barbados to her lasting impact on U.S. politics.

Follow Chisholm’s political career from her 1964 election to the New York State legislature, her 1968 election to Congress, and 1972 run for President. Explore the still-relevant issues she worked on, including education and childcare, rights for migrants and workers, abortion access, and racial and gender equality.

With the 2024 election cycle in mind, learn about Chisholm in her own words and through an array of historical artifacts, art, photographs, and video; glimpse into her life through hands-on interactives; and reflect on Chisholm as both an inspirational figure to subsequent generations, and a change-maker whose work remains unfinished



Installation view of "Changing the Face of Democracy: Shirley Chisholm at 100," Museum of the City of New York, New York, N.Y. (June 24, 2024-July 20, 2025). | Courtesy MCNY



# COMMUNITY BOARD

## HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR UNION MEMBERSHIP YET?

How can you contribute to the wonderful work being done by our Retirees Chapter and the Professional Staff Congress? The ground-breaking work being done to save Medicare (as opposed to Medicare Advantage)? The contract fight? The deep reading on African American history documented in this newsletter? Simple!! Renew your membership. Unlike other chapters, we retirees need to “renew” our membership every year, usually in the Fall. Why? Remember, we don’t have dues automatically taken out of our paychecks. Instead, we pay \$85 a year for full-timers; \$40 a year for part-timers.

The 2024-2025 billing cycle invoices were mailed in the last week of August. Payments should not be sent until you receive an invoice.

Now, reach out to your colleagues who have recently retired and invite them to join us. We are more powerful together as members.

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## WRITING GROUP

We are pleased to announce the launch of the Retirees Writing Group. There will be virtual meetings every other week over Zoom. The four founding members would like to invite both beginning and accomplished writers to join us in creating and reading aloud your memoirs, fiction and nonfiction, journals, poetry, travelogs, haikus, etc. If you are interested, please email [marvin.weinbaum@gmail.com](mailto:marvin.weinbaum@gmail.com).

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## A CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

The editors of *Turning The Page* are soliciting story proposals and article submissions. Please let us know what you are interested in reading and writing about in your newsletter. Do you have an idea for a book or movie review you think would be of interest to others? Is there a topic you think we should discuss, a labor subject we should present, a question we should explore? Perhaps share something personal like an event, person, or experience that impacted your life. As retirees, we all have a trove of great stories that are worth remembering and sharing with others.

Send your proposals to [retirees@pscmail.org](mailto:retirees@pscmail.org) with “Proposal for TTP” in the subject line.

# FALL SEMESTER MEETING DATES: PSC RETIREES CHAPTER

## PSC Retirees Meetings, on Zoom

Monday, September 9, 1:00 PM | Topic: Getting Out the Vote: Election 2024

Monday, Monday, October 7, 1:00 PM | Topic: State of the Unions 2024

Monday, November 11, 2024, 1:00 PM

Monday, December 2, 2024, 1:00 PM

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The *Turning The Page* editorial committee for this September/October 2024 issue is made up of Diane Menna, Marianne Pita, David Kotelchuck, Joan Greenbaum and Michael Frank.

*Turning The Page* is a publication of the Retirees Chapter of PSC-CUNY, Local 2334 of NYSUT and the AFT.