

**TURNING
THE PAGE**

The Newsletter
of the PSC
Retiree Chapter



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PRESERVING THE PSC'S HISTORY

by IRWIN YELLOWITZ

As retirees, we have lived through much of the PSC's history, but how do we ensure that history will be preserved? This requires a multi-faceted approach. It is not automatic, and if not done properly and fully, the history is lost forever. The PSC has taken important steps to preserve its history – which in essence is our history. There are two major components.

First, the documentary record must be saved and sent to an archive that has the skill and resources to store the documents and make them available. The PSC has chosen the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, which is the repository recommended by the New York City Central Labor Council for the records of its member unions. The PSC has made several major deposits of records, including a recent one. This work is handled by the union's staff in line with the PSC's Document Policy and the policies of the Wagner Labor Archives. These records cover most of the operations of the union, and they number well over 200 boxes, not including the recent transfer of records. There is a finding aid that lists what is contained in each box, so if you are interested in a particular topic, you can find the appropriate files. The PSC Collection is open to everyone without restrictions, so if you want to return to a climactic event or period in your own history, it can be done.

The PSC Archives Committee Preserving Our History

Second, the PSC has established an Archives Committee, which I have chaired for many years. Other retirees also have served on this committee. Until his recent illness, Bill Friedheim was an active member, and we look forward to his return. Steve Leberstein also has been a long-time member of the Archives Committee.

Our purpose is to supplement the documentary record saved by the union. We have done this primarily through a series of oral history interviews. These number 27 at present, and we regularly add new ones. The interviews are with a cross section of the PSC leadership who have served over the entire course of the union's history. They include lengthy interviews with the three past presidents — Belle Zeller, Irwin Polishook and Barbara Bowen – plus many other leaders, such as John Hyland, Cecelia McCall and our most recent interview with Steve London. We have also interviewed activists who represented adjuncts, college laboratory technicians, and higher education officers. Our interviews did not ignore the PSC's staff, and we have several interviews with former staff members. These interviews provide a major addition to the documentary record. The oral history interviews also are located at the Wagner Labor Archives, and they are available to everyone.

The Archives Committee is also interested in locating and preserving chapter records. These vary with the chapter and its officers, but we believe they would add significantly to the record saved by the central PSC. If the history of the PSC interests you, you may want to join the Archives Committee. Please let me know at ijellowitz@aol.com.

If you want to recall some of your life in the PSC, you also can consult the wonderful section of the PSC website that presents our history. Go to the website at psc-cuny.org, click on the “About Us” tab, and then click on the “PSC History” tab. There you will find a series of items that cover the union’s history. One of them is the summary history of the PSC from its founding to 1997 that I wrote. There are many other items including a slide show of the union’s entire history, which the Retirees Chapter did for the union’s 50th anniversary in 2022. I am sure you will find much of interest that will stir memories.



The PSC has been one of the major higher education unions throughout its history. Preserving that history ensures the story always will be there for the telling.

SOCIAL INSECURITY AHEAD

by DAVID KOTELCHUCK

By the time you read this issue of Turning the Page, the United States will have a new presidential administration. Gone for many of us is the hope that a different administration would now be in place, one that promised a continuation of the governmental policies in place when we retired. It behooves us to take another look at the policies the Trump Administration has promised and is likely to enact.

The two great programs upon which the welfare of U.S. retirees rests are the Social Security Act, enacted at the peak of New Deal power in 1936, and the Medicare program, the last major New Deal initiative (along with Medicaid) enacted in 1965.

Proposed Medicare Changes Ahead

We have a pretty accurate idea of what the Trump Administration seeks to do to Medicare, based on Mandate for Leadership 2025 released by the Heritage Foundation during the election campaign. It was edited by Russell Vought, nominated and expected to be elected Chairman of the powerful Office of

Management and Budget in the new administration. Here are some of the proposals for Medicare in Chapter 14 of Mandate 2025:

- “Make Medicare Advantage the default enrollment option” for Medicare (p.465). If passed, all Medicare registrants would, over time, be forced into Medicare Advantage. However, this change would require approval by both houses of Congress, which are now controlled by the GOP although the margin in the House is quite thin.
- “The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) created a drug price negotiation program in Medicare that replaced the existing private-sector negotiations...This ‘negotiation’ program should be repealed” (p.465). In other words, the 2025 report says that the government should NOT negotiate drug prices, such as the newly enacted lower price of insulin.



If passed, these proposals would be major changes in the 60-year-old Medicare program. During the past year, NYC municipal retirees have united and beaten back the Medicare Advantage program, which Mayor Adams and his labor allies have tried to impose on us. The Biden drug-price program is very popular among Americans of all parties. If we keep our spirits up and fight back against these proposed Medicare changes, we could harness our people power and defeat them.

Saving Social Security

We do not have a semi-official roadmap for the Trump Administration’s plans for Social Security, since SS is nominally an independent agency, established by Congress but not part of the federal budget. It is not discussed specifically in Mandate 2025, although workplace pensions such as 401(k) plans are (Ch 18). GOP leaders have long been trying to reign in Social Security – remember when President Bush tried to turn the SS Trust Fund over to Wall Street in 2004? This would have allowed stockbrokers to get their hands on the SS tax money we paid into the system so that they could make handsome profits for themselves by handling and investing it.

There are plenty of long-term problems facing our current Social Security program. Without changes in the program, most knowledgeable analysts estimate that based on current economic and social conditions, the program can continue current levels of SS payments only until 2033, i.e., for only eight more years. After that, the SS trust fund will continue to pay retirees monthly paychecks, but only at 79 percent of what we are getting now – i.e., we will lose about 21 percent from our monthly checks (NYT, 12/15/24, p.B3). This would be a heavy blow, especially since SS income currently constitutes the major source of income for over 40 percent of SS recipients.

How can we increase the money coming into the SS Trust Fund? Currently, there is a cap of \$176,100 annually on tax deductions from the paychecks of active earners. So, people who earn annual incomes of

greater than \$176,100 this year, whether they be millionaires or billionaires, will pay exactly the same dollar amount of SS taxes as people earning \$176,100. We need to raise the cap! According to Dr. Alicia Munnell, founder of the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College and former Clinton economic advisor, if the cap were raised to \$300,000, the Social Security Administration could fully fund SS benefits through 2033 and after (NYT, 12/27/24, Sec B, p.1). But this action would be only a temporary fix; further changes will be needed.

Raising the age at which people become eligible for Social Security – This is a change which many Republican senators favor, noting that people live longer today and thus receive SS benefits for longer periods of time. Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) recently introduced a bill to raise the SS eligibility age to 70 years, but it was defeated (Newsweek, Dec. 2024. <https://www.newsweek.com/social-security-fairness-act-amendment-rand-paul-2004598>).

There is a deep, hidden injustice, however, built into such a change: **the rich live longer on average than the poor and the gap in life expectancy is increasing**, according to a 2021 report by the Congressional Research Service (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44846>). Specifically, the report cites a study by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), which found “among male workers born in 1930, those in the bottom lifetime-earnings quintile can expect to live to age 77, on average, while male workers in the top quintile can expect to live to 82” (Summary page). This five-year gap in life expectancy increases to 12.7 years for male workers born in 1960, according to the Report. The NAS study finds “similar patterns for women.”

Thus, the consequences of increasing the full eligibility age for SS to 70 years, which is gaining advocates currently, would mean:

1. Many lower-income Americans currently planning for SS in their old age will not live long enough to receive any SS benefits, and
2. A greater proportion of the money given into the SS Trust Fund would then go to people with higher incomes.

In short, fewer of those who need financial support in old age would be eligible for the program, and if they lived long enough to become eligible, they would receive fewer monthly benefit checks during the remainder of their lives.

Higher Social Security Taxes

There are many different, fairer ways to put more money into the Social Security Trust Fund. As Dr. Munsell has said: “People love this program and are willing to pay for it. I think if you just be straight with the American people about what needs to be done, there would be support for fixing it. This tendency to postpone solving the problem makes a lot of people nervous about a source of support that they rely on very strongly” (NYT, 12/27/24, Sec B, p.1).

TO YOUR HEALTH — PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL

by BOB NELSON

The November 11, 2024 chapter meeting discussed the future of Social Security and Medicare. We had two experts as guest speakers: **Nancy Altman, President, Social Security Works**, and **Barbara Caress, Baruch College**, health policy expert and advisor on health care to the PSC. Bonnie Nelson gave an update on the health care lawsuits.



Nancy Altman



Barbara Caress

Nancy characterized Social Security as deferred compensation, or wage insurance. It is paid out as life, disability, and joint survivor insurance. Its basic structure is as it was at its inception in 1935. Current workers and employers pay equal amounts into the Social Security trust fund, which pays current retirees and their survivors, as well as the disabled. The program is secure, popular, portable from job to job, and employers pay a low cost. Actuaries at Social Security make sure benefits will be paid, projecting out 75 years. Nevertheless, US benefits are low compared to other countries, replacing only about 40% of Americans' wages.

The Future of Social Security

Nancy rejected the view that Social Security will go bankrupt. The Federal government is the guarantor, and the program is currently funded. The program does project a shortfall of 17% or so in 2034, which means that benefits would be cut by that much if Congress does not act. There are several plans before Congress with different ideas to restore the program to long-range balance. One bill, which would increase FICA tax for those earning more than \$400,000, has 180 co-sponsors, including minority leader Hakeem Jeffries. Nancy argues that we are not polarized over Social Security, since all polls show that 80% believe it is highly important and want it to expand. Even young people who may be doubtful whether the program will be there for them eventually realize that it will. Nancy believes that the bill would pass if brought to a vote.

Trump had called Social Security a Ponzi scheme, and during the campaign proposed eliminating taxes on Social Security payouts with no plan to replace the lost revenue, which otherwise would go to the program.

This would result in a 4% loss of revenue, causing an early shortfall in 2031.

Nancy sees the starving of the Social Security Administration of funding as a threat. Now it has its lowest staffing in decades resulting in long telephone queues and long lines in field offices. Frustration could lessen Americans' support of the program.

The Birth of Medicare

Barbara Caress opened her segment with a history of Medicare, beginning with a proposal by President Kennedy in the early sixties. A modified version overcame opposition from the AMA and went into effect under President Johnson. This version resulted in a substantial reduction in poverty, in hospitals becoming richer while physicians held their own, and in the strengthening of insurance companies.

Over the years Medicare's share of the Federal budget increased, and the cost per enrollee grew faster than the number of enrollees. Out-of-pocket costs to Medicare beneficiaries increased substantially. Today, one half of retirees pay 15% of their income to health care. The George W. Bush administration thought care would be better managed if it were private, so it developed Medicare Advantage and paid private insurers 4% more than traditional Medicare payments. But MA remains more expensive, and overpayments in MA threaten the solvency of Medicare overall, compounded by the Federal government's insufficient oversight of the insurance providers.

People are forced into MA if they are low income, and more than half of current Medicare beneficiaries are now in MA, driven there by traditional Medicare's large coverage gaps (e.g., traditional Medicare does not cover dentistry and vision care) and those high out-of-pocket costs.

Medicare — Public or Private

To address these imbalances, Medicare could put pressure on insurance companies by setting minimum service requirements and limits on profit. Traditional Medicare could modernize by adding vision, hearing, and dental care, and by expanding home care and putting a cap on out-of-pocket costs. Congress could also increase FICA to pay for this expansion.

Project 2025, sponsored by the Heritage Foundation as a road map for a Trump administration, would make MA the default choice, and would increase to 75% those in MA. This would cost an additional \$1.7 trillion. Large insurance companies would benefit; they find MA far more profitable than commercial insurance. Managed Medicaid is also profitable, and Project 2025 reduces Medicaid eligibility. But beyond financial incentives, privatizing Medicare is ideological. The Project 2025 proposals would increase deregulation and decrease scrutiny. Barbara says this would not lead to a happy ending. But Republicans may hesitate at these proposals, given that health care is 20% of the U.S. economy.

In many countries they have solved the health care problem. But here the donor class has made it difficult.

In New York State, we have stopped regulating health care, so no agencies exist to hold down costs.

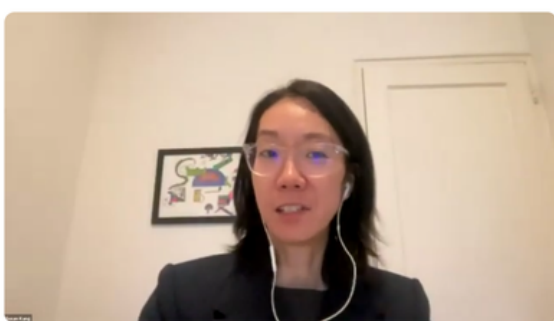
Bonnie reported that there is no change in the status of the MA lawsuits. In the co-pay case, Emblem sent all subscribers a letter announcing that co-pays would be reinstated as of 1/1/25.

The City's IRMAA payments were made in October; you should contact NYC Office of Labor Relations if you didn't get yours.

BRACING FOR MAGA

by BLANCA VAZQUEZ

The December 2, 2024 Retirees meeting began with an analysis of the MAGA election by **Susan Kang, Political Science Department Chair at John Jay College** and **Jennifer Gaboury, PSC First Vice President and Hunter PSC Chapter Chair**. Prof. Kang emphasized that while there is major concern over how the MAGA movement radically re-imagines government, including economic policies and public programs, recent history tells us that things might not go as easily as the new administration might expect. As an example, Kang pointed out that during the regressive Thatcher period in UK history, the conservative government underestimated the opposition which eventually took down that government. And, more recently, mass protests removed the authoritarian President of South Korea. Organized protests will be important, especially regarding any proposed changes to Medicaid and Social Security, both very popular social programs. Drastic changes proposed by the new administration are certainly worrisome; however, one saving grace is the less-than-efficient way the behemoth US government operates, making major change a slow process with many obstacles.



Susan Kang



Jennifer Gaboury

There are also concerns over federal funding to state and local governments and anti-higher education policies. Pell grants, which are 7% of our CUNY budget, will be in danger, and we'll have to fight to retain those funds. If you do research, you may be affected by possible changes in federal funding for collaborative work. For example, the State Department may place more emphasis on career readiness and funnel more federal monies to the states.

In New York, we'll need to demand more from the governor and mayor, including more progressive taxation. The City budget is due in June and the State by April 1st. We will need to pressure our elected representatives to support CUNY and our students.

Our second speaker was Jen Gaboury who reported that the demographic changes in this election reveal that 600,000 registered Dems voted for Biden but not for Harris, meaning Trump gained ground in NYC because people stayed home. However, two years from now, there will be a referendum on Trump during the mid-term elections. The CUNY mapping survey will tell us more by district about the local vote. Pell grants are threatened, which could generate an enrollment crisis for CUNY. Clearly, we will need to work to defend our immigrant students.

At the local level, both the Mayor and Governor are up for re-election, and Gaboury believes we may be pleasantly surprised by what Gov. Hochul puts in the budget for higher education. In the mayoral election, Adams faces opposition, including from more progressive candidates who respect our defense of Medicare. In the Q & A that followed the speakers, retirees raised the need for more grassroots organizing and the defense of vulnerable immigrants, by means such as Know your Rights clinics, which the PSC has sponsored in the past.

OPINION FORUM: MY TWO CENTS

MUNICIPAL LABOR COUNCIL: WHERE DID IT GO SO WRONG?

by MICHAEL FRANK

On November 9, 2024, the second of two Educational Forums on the Municipal Labor Committee (the negotiating body which negotiates on behalf of all municipal unions for our health care) was held — organized by an ad hoc group of union activists. Members of the UFT, DC-37 and the PSC spoke at the event. Here is an excerpt from a talk given by PSC retiree member Michael Frank.

Labor activists and scholars gathered to discuss why the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) often acts against members' interests. To understand the MLC's concessions and its secretive modus operandi, we have to go back to the fiscal crisis of 1975-76.

The New York banks demanded deep cuts before they would renew investing in bonds. There was significant resistance from labor: the MLC called for a demonstration at First National City Bank in June

1975, and ten thousand workers showed up. This was the first and only time that the MLC organized a demonstration. The turnout and the anger frightened both Felix Rohatyn, a key investment banker, and Victor Gotbaum, the head of DC-37, both sides of the class divide. Labor leaders were cowed by the power of the banks.

The crucial decision not to organize and lead a movement against austerity was made without consultation or input from union members. We cannot say what the outcome of such a movement would have been, but we can describe what happened when this road was not taken. Tens of thousands of municipal workers were laid off, pensions for future retirees were reduced, hospitals were closed, city services were cut, transit fares were increased, and tuition was imposed at CUNY. Austerity impacted not only municipal workers but the working class. Epidemiologists traced the increased rates of diabetes and homicide to the cuts in social services. The overall quality of working-class life deteriorated.

The Fatalistic Consequences

As important as the material effects of austerity were, there were also long-term impacts on the consciousness of union members. The absence of a general movement against austerity led to an end to disruptive actions. The demoralization of the activists gave rise to a fatalistic belief that cuts were inevitable. The false lesson drawn from this experience was that strikes and protests simply don't work. Apathy in unions has muted opposition to the sub-par contracts that labor leaders have negotiated for municipal workers to this day. And there was no Left to serve as the collective memory of the conflict surrounding the fiscal crisis and draw the actual lessons of that experience for a new generation of workers.

The bankers were able to implement austerity not by destroying the unions or by voiding their contracts, which under the Emergency Financial Control Board they had the legal right to do, but by working through unions, more precisely, by working through the interests of labor officials. By agreeing to austerity measures and investing union pension funds in city bonds, labor leaders were able to preserve the form of collective bargaining but at the price of weakening its substance, that is labor's power and independent voice. This enabled collective bargaining to function as a vehicle for the implementation of neoliberal measures. For example, the MLC's 2018 agreement with the City, which was appended to our contracts, requires 600 million dollars in healthcare "savings" every year, continuing indefinitely. This in exchange for salary increases that barely reached the rate of inflation.

Unlike workers who are dependent on employers for their livelihood and can live without unions, labor officials are dependent on unions as organizations, as institutions. The preservation of their role as mediators, as negotiators, as buffers between management and labor, is a priority. Agreeing to concessions is one way that leaders attempt to convince management of their usefulness and of the necessity of unions. And unlike union members, leaders set their own salaries and benefits and are not negatively affected by what they negotiate for their members.

Labor's power to shape collective bargaining was significantly reduced when its leaders made their fateful, strategic decision to cooperate with finance capital. Maintaining this cooperative relationship helps to explain why in 1977 leaders refused Governor Carey's offer to grant unions the right to strike. Having the legal right to strike might give members the idea that they should use it. And actually striking would rupture labor's relations with the powers that be. The friendly relations between bankers and union leaders that have been reported on over the decades is a reflection of the collaboration between organized labor and capital. Victor Gotbaum and Felix Rohatyn, for example, held joint birthday celebrations in Southampton.

Tectonic Shift Births the Neoliberal Era

The successful imposition of austerity and the defeat of labor in what was known as a "union town" was a momentous shift in the balance of class power that had national repercussions. New York served as a test laboratory for class conflict and what was done here was later imposed elsewhere. This tectonic shift helped to inaugurate the neoliberal era.

Democracy should not be limited to the right of members to elect the union's officers, as important as that is. Rather, members should have the right to have their say, to weigh in on all major questions of policy and strategy. At the very least, there should have been discussions on the fiscal crisis in all delegate assemblies which are, on paper, the highest authority in many unions. However, in practice the DAs are often bypassed. The political decisions made by leaders are often not presented as such but are described as the only possible response to unchangeable realities. This results in a membership that is disenfranchised and depoliticized. Apathy and lack of interest in union affairs become the norm for most union members. This, in turn, helps to insulate leaders from scrutiny and criticism.

We need to re-politicize our unions, to rebuild the kind of militant minority that existed decades ago. And we can begin by challenging the MLC with demands that are understandable and will resonate: demands for transparency and democracy. What are you negotiating? We want the right to vote on it! These demands strike at the very heart of class collaboration. You can't keep the bedroom door open if you're sleeping with the enemy.

Sources utilized: Joshua Freeman's [Working Class New York](#) and Marc Kagan's "More Austerity Coming? Lessons from New York City's 1970 Fiscal Crisis," New Labor Forum 2020.

To view the video from the forum:

contact Mike Frank at mfrank345@aol.com

CULTURE CORNER

OPENING WEEKS AT THE MET

by NORMAN LEWIS

Grounded, which opened the season on September 23, is part of General Manager Peter Gelb's move to get younger audiences into the opera house. Good luck with that! Wrapped in the politically correct themes of gender parity, anti-militarism, and the perils of technology, and incorporating the sounds and words of modern life, *Grounded* does not add much to the operatic canon. Aside from the superb singing of the two leads, Emily d'Angelo and Ben Bliss, there was very little to recommend this work.



<https://www.metopera.org/season/2024-25-season/grounded>



<https://www.metopera.org/season/2024-25-season/les-contes-dhoffmann>

One night later, *The Tales of Hoffmann* renewed my faith in opera. Bartlett Sher's tacky and dated production was redeemed by Benjamin Bernheim's lyrical, winsome Hoffmann and Erin Morley's impeccable Olympia. Her aria at the end of the first act had so many impressive feats of coloratura technique, precisely produced roulades and trills, and gorgeous sustained high notes that I was transported. After that, Pretty Yende's wan Antonia was disappointing. However, in the final act, Clémentine Margaine sparkled as Giulietta. The villains were played by Christian van Horn, who was competent but not very exciting.

On September 30, *Rigoletto* was presented in its strange Weimar Germany setting. Whutt?? The cast was a solid one with Nadine Sierra in excellent voice as Gilda and Stephen Costello as the Duke. Costello, in better voice than he was several years ago, still lacks the ardor that can make this character truly memorable. Quinn Kelsey gave his usual outstanding if not very exciting performance in the title role.



<https://www.metopera.org/season/2024-25-season/rigoletto>



<https://www.metopera.org/season/2024-25-season/ainadamar>

On October 15, another opera new to the Met debuted. This was *Ainadamar* by the Argentine composer Osvaldo Golijov, with a libretto by David Henry Hwang. The opera had its premiere at Tanglewood in 2003 and has taken a long and circuitous route to finally arrive at the Met. Although the critical reaction to this work about the life and death of Garcia-Lorca was mixed, I found it engrossing and musically inventive. All sorts of music form part of its rich texture: rumba, flamenco, Mayan chants and a gut-wrenching “*cante jondo*” sung by Alfredo Tejado. The three women in the principal roles (Angel Blue, Daniela Mack and Elena Villalón) all sang beautifully, and Miguel Harth-Bedoya conducted the complex score with facility and elegance. A performance recorded in October will be presented on April 5, 2025 as a Met Saturday afternoon broadcast, and I strongly recommend giving it a listen.

To stream the Met online go to: <https://www.metopera.org/season/radio/free-live-audio-streams>

MUSEUM EXHIBITS WINTER/SPRING 2025

by MARCIA NEWFIELD

Maybe you’ve been lying around all month or maybe you’ve been dashing down the ski slopes. Whichever mode you’ve gravitated towards, it’s now time to move your museum muscles. Roam around town, go someplace you’ve never been, and take your time to absorb the artist’s materials and intentions.

THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL

Pets and the City (through April 20)

There are roughly 1.1 million pets in the city — 600,000 dogs and 500,000 cats. Using a variety of materials — paintings/documents/film clips — this exhibit surveys the visual history of New Yorkers and their animal companions over the last two and a half centuries, tracing the ever-evolving relationship between Gotham’s people and its animals as the city grew increasingly urbanized and industrialized. Animal presence among the Lenape and

Haudenosaunee and the hunting culture of settlers transformed into companions of the urban household and attained a different status — pampered pets? service animals? The pet population soared after 9/11 and the COVID crisis. How have our new neighbors transformed human consciousness?



<https://www.nyhistory.org/exhibitions/pets-and-the-city>

The Year of Falco, the Eurasian Eagle-Owl (through July 6)

From the time he escaped from Central Park to his death in 2024, Falco was a symbol of freedom . . . he navigated the skies, learned to hunt, and became famous for peering into apartment windows. In addition to photographs and video, this exhibition features letters, drawings, and objects left at a memorial beneath Falco's favorite oak tree. It also examines the dangers faced by birds in the urban environment, the legislation inspired by Falco's death, and what we can do to be better neighbors to the animals in our midst. A special related installation in the [Audubon's Birds of America Focus Gallery](#) showcases owls, primarily those found in New York.



<https://www.nyhistory.org/exhibitions/the-year-of-falco>

Fred W. McDarrah: Pride and Protest (through July 13)

<https://www.nyhistory.org/press/presents-fred-mcdarrah-pride-and-protest>

Fred W. McDarrah: *Pride and Protest* depicts moments in the history of LGBTQ+ civil rights captured by famed *Village Voice* photographer Fred McDarrah in the latter half of the 20th century. Featuring more than 60 black-and-white photographs, the images offer unique insights into the triumphs and struggles of LGBTQ+ history, including the Mattachine Society "Sip-In" at Julius' Bar on 10th Street in 1966, the Stonewall Uprising in 1969, and the annual Pride marches that followed.

THE NICHOLAS ROERICH MUSEUM**150 paintings on view (permanent exhibit)**

The mission of the Nicholas Roerich Museum is essentially a narrow one: to make available to the public the full range of Roerich's accomplishments. These, however, are not narrow; they cover the realms of art, science, spirituality, peacemaking, and more. Because Roerich's activities ranged widely, so do the Museum's exhibits. Nicholas Roerich is known first and foremost as a Russian-born artist. His paintings, of which there are thousands around the world, explore the mythic origins, the natural beauty, and the spiritual strivings of humanity and of the world. The Museum houses approximately two hundred of these works



<https://www.roerich.org>

and keeps most of them permanently on display for visitors who come from around the world. Indeed, for many of these visitors, the Museum is a destination of great importance; the paintings speak to them of their own inner yearnings for spiritual development, about culture and its role in human life, and about opportunities for the achievement of peace in a fractious world.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Always a cornucopia of familiar and unfamiliar works, providing insight, history, and pleasure.

Flight into Egypt: Black Artists and Ancient Egypt 1876 to the Present (through February 17)

Closing soon so rush to see this exhibit that examines the symbolic importance of ancient Egypt to Black artists and other cultural figures, from the 19th century through the Harlem Renaissance to the present day. The exhibit and the book that inspired it ranges from scholars to artists, from familiar images to remote connections. Performance art is included; if you miss it, check out the Met website for a taste.



<https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/flight-into-egypt-black-artists-and-ancient-egypt-1876-now/art-in-transit>

Year of the Snake (through Feb 16, 2026)



<https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/celebrating-the-year-of-the-snake>

The Snake occupies the sixth position in the Chinese zodiac. 2025 is the year of the Wood Snake. The exhibit contains objects that feature the snake's presence in Chinese culture, including a 3,000-year-old bronze ritual vessel with a spout formed by joined snakes' heads, a 13th-century pottery figure of a mischievously smiling snake, and an 18th-century exquisitely painted porcelain cup portraying a scene from the "Legend of the White Snake," a popular folktale of love and romance between humans and fantastic creatures.

FILM REVIEW:

THE SEED OF THE SACRED FIG

by Peter Ranis

The seeds of the sacred fig tree, found mostly in Southeast Asia, germinate and sprout around neighboring trees, often strangling them by way of its massive trunk and giant foliage, shutting off their nutrients. This metaphorical title of Mohammad Rasoulof's new film, *The Seed of the Sacred Fig*, symbolizes the growth of smaller dissensions into increasing civil confrontations, in this case, directed at the theocratic Ayatollah and the Islamic Iranian state. It is a remarkable, powerful film, devastating in its implications.

Rasoulof had a pending trial scheduled for previous protests before the Islamic Revolutionary Court that would have meant eight years in prison. In the few weeks that remained for him, he was able to complete the movie and flee to Germany. The film was widely acclaimed there and at the Cannes Film Festival and

opened recently in New York to supportive audiences.

The film depicts Iman, a court investigator in Tehran, who has just been appointed to work with the court prosecutor with the authority to implement the death sentence often without reviewing the evidence. The story coincides with the death of Mahsa Amini, who died in September 2022 at the hands of the security police while in custody for not wearing a hijab. Women across Tehran were courageously demonstrating, chanting “Life, Liberty and Freedom,” a serious threat to the government resulting in over 500 deaths and thousands imprisoned.



<https://www.filmfare.com>

What then transpires in the main character’s home is a searing drama with his two daughters drawn to the street demonstrations while challenging both their father and mother. The street conflicts intrude on their hitherto domestic tranquility and the daughters confront their father about his fanatical allegiance to both the state and religion. The values portrayed within the household are riveting and feel totally authentic. In the breathtaking days that follow, the family’s clashes break out and the ideological divide deepens. This comfortable upper middle-class family no doubt may represent many urbanized Iranians who seek a more secular state without the dangers of daily mortality if they protest against the regime. Yet religious and state power are almost irresistible, and the father closely adheres to its demands, even though his conscience is put to the test. Iman, a devout Muslim and an obedient civil servant, must accede to giving out daily death sentences.

The family denouement cascades to almost subterranean levels that exaggerate only slightly what a committed officer of the Islamic Revolutionary Court would do to salvage his reputation before the regime. It has to do with a gun given to him to protect himself from potential dissidents who may recognize him as having sent people to their deaths. As in a Chekhov play, if a gun appears early in a drama, it is bound to show up at the end with profound consequences. Though the ending may come as a surprise, it is understandable given the tyranny of a regime that punishes dissent large and small.

The national conflict brings the challenges into the heart of one family with riveting urgency. I believe it will reverberate strongly with the viewers as it touches upon the realities of a family in the throes of societal change and illustrates the consequences for the resisters both outside the home and in the very life of the family.

What makes the film so stirring is that underneath an ostensibly powerful ruling theocracy, there are the seeds that increasingly challenge the regime’s values and, perhaps, predict a change in public consciousness represented by the women bravely confronting an all-powerful religious and state order. It promotes the deep undercurrent of feminism that the two daughters represent in the clash of generations. It reminds the audience that hearts and minds are never totally at rest and can germinate into major society upheavals.

COMMUNITY BOARD

ATTENTION JAMES BALDWIN FANS

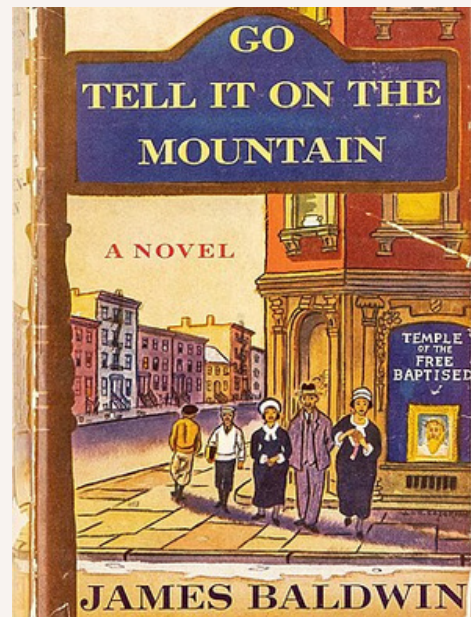
In Commemoration of the 100th Birthday of James Baldwin,
the Retirees Chapter is holding some special events.

Retirees Chapter Meeting February 3 at 1 PM: Professor Brenda Greene of Medgar Evers College, Executive Director of the Center for Black Literature and Director of the National Black Writers Conference, will be speaking on **James Baldwin: Writer as Activist**.

Book Discussion Series on

Go Tell It on The Mountain:

On Thursday, February 13 from 3-5 pm and on every second Thursday of the month through May 8, the Retirees Chapter Anti-Racism Committee will host a book discussion series on James Baldwin's first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Book discussion group participation will be **limited to 25 persons** so register early with Doris Hart at gloxii@yahoo.com by including the words "**Baldwin registration**" on the subject line. For further questions, please contact Doris.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go_Tell_It_on_the_Mountain

MOVIES FOLLOWED BY SCHMOOZIES

NYC is probably the best and last stomping ground for diehard cinephiles. To view movies where they should be seen for their artistic merit and enjoyment, followed by a lively discussion over coffee and . . . get in touch with **Lisa Flanzraich** at cinephile49@gmail.com, if you would like to join my movie meetup. I am a peripatetic movie lover, traveling uptown, midtown, downtown and even way out east to the hinterlands of Queens, where I live, to gaze in awe of the silver screen. I will announce future screenings and locations upon compilation of the list.

SPRING SEMESTER MEETING DATES: PSC RETIREES CHAPTER

PSC Retirees Meetings, on Zoom

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2025, 1:00 PM

MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2025, 1:00 PM

The *Turning The Page* editorial committee for this FEBRUARY/MARCH 2025 issue is made up of Diane Menna, Marianne Pita, David Kotelchuck, and Joan Greenbaum.

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