Oliver Sacks: Sabbath

By OLIVER SACKS  AUG. 14, 2015

MY mother and her 17 brothers and sisters had an Orthodox upbringing — all photographs of their father show him wearing a yarmulke, and I was told that he woke up if it fell off during the night. My father, too, came from an Orthodox background. Both my parents were very conscious of the Fourth Commandment (“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”), and the Sabbath (Shabbos, as we called it in our Litvak way) was entirely different from the rest of the week. No work was allowed, no driving, no use of the telephone; it was forbidden to switch on a light or a stove. Being physicians, my parents made exceptions. They could not take the phone off the hook or completely avoid driving; they had to be available, if necessary, to see patients, or operate, or deliver babies.

We lived in a fairly Orthodox Jewish community in Cricklewood, in Northwest London — the butcher, the baker, the grocer, the greengrocer, the fishmonger, all closed their shops in good time for the Shabbos, and did not open their shutters till Sunday morning. All of them, and all our neighbors, we imagined, were celebrating Shabbos in much the same fashion as we did.

Around midday on Friday, my mother doffed her surgical identity and attire and devoted herself to making gefilte fish and other delicacies for Shabbos. Just before evening fell, she would light the ritual candles, cupping their flames with her hands, and murmuring a prayer. We would all put on clean, fresh Shabbos clothes, and
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On Saturday mornings, my three brothers and I trailed our parents to Cricklewood Synagogue on Walm Lane, a huge shul built in the 1930s to accommodate part of the exodus of Jews from the East End to Cricklewood at that time. The shul was always full during my boyhood, and we all had our assigned seats, the men downstairs, the women — my mother, various aunts and cousins — upstairs; as a little boy, I sometimes waved to them during the service. Though I could not understand the Hebrew in the prayer book, I loved its sound and especially hearing the old medieval prayers sung, led by our wonderfully musical hazan.

All of us met and mingled outside the synagogue after the service — and we would usually walk to the house of my Auntie Florrie and her three children to say a Kiddush, accompanied by sweet red wine and honey cakes, just enough to stimulate our appetites for lunch. After a cold lunch at home — gefilte fish, poached salmon, beetroot jelly — Saturday afternoons, if not interrupted by emergency medical calls for my parents, would be devoted to family visits. Uncles and aunts and cousins would visit us for tea, or we them; we all lived within walking distance of one another.

The Second World War decimated our Jewish community in Cricklewood, and the Jewish community in England as a whole was to lose thousands of people in the postwar years. Many Jews, including cousins of mine, emigrated to Israel; others went to Australia, Canada or the States; my eldest brother, Marcus, went to Australia in 1950. Many of those who stayed assimilated and adopted diluted, attenuated forms of Judaism. Our synagogue, which would be packed to capacity when I was a child, grew emptier by the year.

I chanted my bar mitzvah portion in 1946 to a relatively full synagogue, including several dozen of my relatives, but this, for me, was the end of formal Jewish practice. I did not embrace the ritual duties of a Jewish adult — praying every day, putting on tefillin before prayer each weekday morning — and I gradually became more indifferent to the beliefs and habits of my parents, though there was no particular point of rupture until I was 18. It was then that my father, inquiring into my sexual feelings, compelled me to admit that I liked boys.

"I haven’t done anything," I said, "it’s just a feeling — but don’t tell Ma, she won’t be able to take it.”
He did tell her, and the next morning she came down with a look of horror on her face, and shrieked at me: "You are an abomination. I wish you had never been born." (She was no doubt thinking of the verse in Leviticus that read, "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: They shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.")

The matter was never mentioned again, but her harsh words made me hate religion's capacity for bigotry and cruelty.

After I qualified as a doctor in 1960, I removed myself abruptly from England and what family and community I had there, and went to the New World, where I knew nobody. When I moved to Los Angeles, I found a sort of community among the weight lifters on Muscle Beach, and with my fellow neurology residents at U.C.L.A., but I craved some deeper connection — "meaning" — in my life, and it was the absence of this, I think, that drew me into near-suicidal addiction to amphetamines in the 1960s.

Recovery started, slowly, as I found meaningful work in New York, in a chronic care hospital in the Bronx (the "Mount Carmel" I wrote about in "Awakenings"). I was fascinated by my patients there, cared for them deeply, and felt something of a mission to tell their stories — stories of situations virtually unknown, almost unimaginable, to the general public and, indeed, to many of my colleagues. I had discovered my vocation, and this I pursued doggedly, single-mindedly, with little encouragement from my colleagues. Almost unconsciously, I became a storyteller at a time when medical narrative was almost extinct. This did not dissuade me, for I felt my roots lay in the great neurological case histories of the 19th century (and I was encouraged here by the great Russian neuropsychologist A. R. Luria). It was a lonely but deeply satisfying, almost monkish existence that I was to lead for many years.

During the 1990s, I came to know a cousin and contemporary of mine, Robert John Aumann, a man of remarkable appearance with his robust, athletic build and long white beard that made him, even at 60, look like an ancient sage. He is a man of great intellectual power but also of great human warmth and tenderness, and deep religious commitment — "commitment," indeed, is one of his favorite words. Although, in his work, he stands for rationality in economics and human affairs, there is no conflict for him between reason and faith.
He insisted I have a mezuzah on my door, and brought me one from Israel. “I know you don’t believe,” he said, “but you should have one anyhow.” I didn’t argue.

In a remarkable 2004 interview, Robert John spoke of his lifelong work in mathematics and game theory, but also of his family — how he would go skiing and mountaineering with some of his nearly 30 children and grandchildren (a kosher cook, carrying saucepans, would accompany them), and the importance of the Sabbath to him.

“The observance of the Sabbath is extremely beautiful,” he said, “and is impossible without being religious. It is not even a question of improving society — it is about improving one's own quality of life.”

In December of 2005, Robert John received a Nobel Prize for his 50 years of fundamental work in economics. He was not entirely an easy guest for the Nobel Committee, for he went to Stockholm with his family, including many of those children and grandchildren, and all had to have special kosher plates, utensils and food, and special formal clothes, with no biblically forbidden admixture of wool and linen.

THAT same month, I was found to have cancer in one eye, and while I was in the hospital for treatment the following month, Robert John visited. He was full of entertaining stories about the Nobel Prize and the ceremony in Stockholm, but made a point of saying that, had he been compelled to travel to Stockholm on a Saturday, he would have refused the prize. His commitment to the Sabbath, its utter peacefulness and remoteness from worldly concerns, would have trumped even a Nobel.

In 1955, as a 22-year-old, I went to Israel for several months to work on a kibbutz, and though I enjoyed it, I decided not to go again. Even though so many of my cousins had moved there, the politics of the Middle East disturbed me, and I suspected I would be out of place in a deeply religious society. But in the spring of 2014, hearing that my cousin Marjorie — a physician who had been a protégée of my mother’s and had worked in the field of medicine till the age of 98 — was nearing death, I phoned her in Jerusalem to say farewell. Her voice was unexpectedly strong and resonant, with an accent very much like my mother’s. “I don’t intend to die now,” she said, “I will be having my 100th birthday on June 18th. Will you come?”
I said, "Yes, of course!" When I hung up, I realized that in a few seconds I had reversed a decision of almost 60 years. It was purely a family visit. I celebrated Marjorie’s 100th with her and extended family. I saw two other cousins dear to me in my London days, innumerable second and removed cousins, and, of course, Robert John. I felt embraced by my family in a way I had not known since childhood.

I had felt a little fearful visiting my Orthodox family with my lover, Billy — my mother’s words still echoed in my mind — but Billy, too, was warmly received. How profoundly attitudes had changed, even among the Orthodox, was made clear by Robert John when he invited Billy and me to join him and his family at their opening Sabbath meal.

The peace of the Sabbath, of a stopped world, a time outside time, was palpable, infused everything, and I found myself drenched with a wistfulness, something akin to nostalgia, wondering what if: What if A and B and C had been different? What sort of person might I have been? What sort of a life might I have lived?

In December 2014, I completed my memoir, “On the Move,” and gave the manuscript to my publisher, not dreaming that days later I would learn I had metastatic cancer, coming from the melanoma I had in my eye nine years earlier. I am glad I was able to complete my memoir without knowing this, and that I had been able, for the first time in my life, to make a full and frank declaration of my sexuality, facing the world openly, with no more guilty secrets locked up inside me.

In February, I felt I had to be equally open about my cancer — and facing death. I was, in fact, in the hospital when my essay on this, “My Own Life,” was published in this newspaper. In July I wrote another piece for the paper, “My Periodic Table,” in which the physical cosmos, and the elements I loved, took on lives of their own.

And now, weak, short of breath, my once-firm muscles melted away by cancer, I find my thoughts, increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life — achieving a sense of peace within oneself. I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one’s life as well, when one can feel that one’s work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest.
Oliver Sacks is a professor of neurology at the New York University School of Medicine and the author, most recently, of the memoir “On the Move.”

A version of this op-ed appears in print on August 16, 2015, on page SR1 of the New York edition with the headline: Sabbath.
AffordableSchools.net Releases Its Ranking of Affordable Economics Bachelor's Degrees for 2015

07:38 ET from AffordableSchools.net (http://www.prnewswire.com/news/affordableschools.net)

SUNNYVALE, Calif., Aug. 18, 2015 /PRNewswire/ -- AffordableSchools.net (http://www.affordableschools.net), an independent college search and rankings site that centers on unique and affordable offerings within higher education, has released a ranking of 15 of the Most Affordable Bachelor's Degrees in Economics.

(http://affordableschools.net/15-affordable-bachelors-degrees-economics/
(http://affordableschools.net/15-affordable-bachelors-degrees-economics/))

CUNY (City University of New York) system colleges dominate the list, with CUNY Lehman College (Bronx, New York) leading and CUNY York College (Jamaica, Queens, New York) and CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice (Manhattan, New York) placing second and third, respectively. The full list of colleges and universities, in alphabetical order, is as follows:

* Brigham Young University-Idaho (Rexburg, Idaho)

* CUNY Bernard M Baruch College (Manhattan, New York)

* CUNY Brooklyn College (Brooklyn, New York)

* CUNY City College (Brooklyn, New York)

* CUNY Hunter College (Manhattan, New York)
* CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice (Manhattan, New York)

* CUNY Lehman College (Bronx, New York)

* CUNY Queens College (Queens, New York)

* CUNY York College (Jamaica, Queens, New York)

* Park University (Parkville, Missouri)

* University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (Pine Bluff, Arkansas)

* University of Texas of the Permian Basin (Odessa, Texas)

* University of Wisconsin-Parkside (Kenosha, Wisconsin)

* Utah Valley University (Orem, Utah)

* West Virginia State University (Institute, West Virginia)

According to Raj Dash, lead researcher on the piece, "Job opportunities in Economics-related careers is expected to grow 14% from 2012 to 2022 -- which is above the 11% average rate for all occupations in the USA for the same duration. This list provides a handy guide to some of the most affordable bachelor’s programs in Economics." The job growth info is based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Rankings for this list were compiled using college data from NCES (National Center for Education Statistics), a bureau of the Dept. of Education (http://nces.ed.gov/ (http://nces.ed.gov/)). Using NCES’s College Navigator online service, AffordableSchools.net queried for all institutions of higher education in the
United States that offer a bachelor’s degree in Economics or similar, sorted by NCES’ listed "yearly net average price, filtered out defunct/ soon-to-be defunct colleges, schools with no net price, schools with no actual program (bad data), and verified programs. This list is part of an ongoing series about affordable bachelor's degrees.

AffordableSchools.net (http://www.affordableschools.net) is an independent college search and rankings site with a focus on affordable colleges and programs within higher education. It publishes a number of rankings series focusing on affordable bachelor's degrees (various topics), affordable bachelor's degree colleges by state, affordable online degree programs, resource lists and much more. The site is designed to make your college search easier.

Raj Kumar Dash (Email (http://pressreleaseheadlines.com/contact?pid=288294))

Managing Editor

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When it comes to landing a good job after college, the STEM fields often get much of the attention. But let’s not forget about business majors — those with degrees in areas such as finance, accounting and business administration are often at the top of employers’ wish lists.

With so many colleges offering degrees in business, which also includes economics, management and marketing, choosing the right school can be overwhelming. So NerdWallet crunched the data to see which colleges offer the best return on your investment.

We evaluated 359 universities and colleges across the country by looking at affordability, prestige, how much graduates make and the amount of debt they have. To see the full rankings, click here.

**Key takeaways**

**Golden Bears.** The distinction for highest salary goes to graduates from the University of California, Berkeley. Business majors go on to earn a median salary of $138,300 at 10 years or more out of school.

**Go public.** When it comes to providing the best return, public schools dominate our list. Only one private school, Brigham Young University, breaks into the top 10.

**California is king.** The University of California system leads the nation, home to four of the top 10 schools: University of California, Berkeley is at No. 1, University of California, Irvine is No. 5, University of California, Santa Barbara is No. 8 and UCLA is No. 10.

**Tips for students and graduates**

**Max out federal and state loans.** Those loans often have lower interest rates and offer benefits, such as forbearance and forgiveness. Do this before turning to private loans. Get help with your FAFSA here. ([http://www.nerdwallet.com/nerdscholar/fafsa/](http://www.nerdwallet.com/nerdscholar/fafsa/))

**Shop around.** If the gap between federal aid and tuition forces you to take out private loans, shop around to get the best fees, interest rate and terms.

**Refinance.** If you’re a graduate with a job and want to reduce your monthly payments, consider refinancing your student loans ([https://www.nerdwallet.com/content/refinance-student-loans/](https://www.nerdwallet.com/content/refinance-student-loans/)).
1. University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, the University of California system's flagship campus, tops our list of universities offering the best bang for your buck. Thanks to a median salary of $358,300 for graduates who are 10 years or more out of school — the heftiest salary on our list — those who studied business will be well positioned to pay down their student loans.

2. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Part of North Carolina's famed Research Triangle, this public school's notable business administration alumni include Hugh McColl, former CEO of Bank of America, and Gary Parra, vice chair of Lazard, a financial advisory and asset management firm.

3. Brigham Young University
With the 2012-13 cost of tuition a mere $4,710, Brigham Young is one of the most affordable schools on our list, and the only private university to crack our top 10. BYU, operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is one of the country's largest religious universities. According to U.S. News and World Report, 12% of the student body majors in business, management, marketing and related support services, making this area of study the most popular on campus.

4. University of Virginia
While UVA is often referred to as a party school, don't be fooled — the university has rigorous academic standards. Its median SAT scores for incoming students, 1362, is the highest among colleges on our top 20 list. This public university located in Charlottesville, Virginia, counts business
as one of its top majors.

5. University of California, Irvine

Students, who go to this school, with over 20,000 undergraduates, will see the second-highest median salary after graduation: $121,000. Located in California’s Orange County, the university is just a short trip from Newport Beach, a perfect place for sun seekers.

6. Georgia Institute of Technology

Georgia Tech is located in Atlanta, which is also home to Fortune 500 companies, including Coca-Cola Co., Delta Air Lines and Home Depot. While many students focus on science and technology, business is the second-most common major, according to U.S. News and World Report.

7. City University of New York Bernard M. Baruch College

Students could be attracted to Baruch College for its incredibly low average student debt — $5,979, the lowest by far in the top 10 (the next lowest was $15,760 at Brigham Young).

8. University of California, Santa Barbara

If surfing and sunbathing aren’t enough, there’s also the relatively affordable education at $13,671 for in-state residents. Graduates go on to make a median salary of $102,000.

9. College of William and Mary

The second-oldest college in the country, the College of William and Mary has been cited by Travel and Leisure as one of the most beautiful campuses. The school can also boast the second-highest median SAT score on our top 10 list at 1358. This suburban campus is in Williamsburg, Virginia, and has an undergraduate population of over 6,000.

10. University of California, Los Angeles

California’s biggest university, UCLA enrolls nearly 30,000 undergraduates and over 12,000 graduate students. Notable alumni include Laurence Fink, CEO of BlackRock, the world’s largest asset management company.

100 best U.S. colleges for business majors

Scroll through the table below to see the data on the best colleges for business majors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Public or private</th>
<th>Median SAT score</th>
<th>Cost of tuition</th>
<th>Average aid package</th>
<th>Average student debt</th>
<th>Median salary after 10 years or more</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>University of California, Berkeley</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1550</td>
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<td>$12,764</td>
<td>$17,468</td>
<td>$358,500</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>1313</td>
<td>$6,693</td>
<td>$12,672</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Brigham Young University</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1277</td>
<td>$4,710</td>
<td>$6,547</td>
<td>$18,769</td>
<td>$96,700</td>
<td>71,459</td>
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<td>1352</td>
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<td>$21,812</td>
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<td>1122</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>College of William and Mary</td>
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<td>$24,400</td>
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Methodology

NerdWallet examined U.S. universities and colleges that offer business majors by looking at affordability, prestige, how much graduates make and the amount of debt they have after graduation.

Debt. How much debt students graduate with is 20% of the score. We measured the average debt of graduates in 2012-13 as reported by The Institute for College Access and Success (http://ticas.org/).

Affordability. This is 30% of the score, which gives equal weight to the cost of tuition as reported by The Institute for College Access and Success and the average amount of student aid, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education (http://chronicle.com/esection/Home/5).

Salary. How much college graduates make is 35% of the score. We examined the median amount that graduates with a bachelor’s degree in a business major earn as full-time employees 10 years or more out of college, as reported by Payscale (http://www.payscale.com/).

Prestige. A school’s prestige is 15% of the score. We used median SAT scores, as reported by The Chronicle of Higher Education, as a proxy for prestige, since many schools rely heavily on this test in admissions requirements.

Victoria Simons is a senior analyst covering loans and insurance for NerdWallet.
In an effort to rehabilitate the broken-windows theory, George Kelling recently distanced himself from the tragic deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown and others, chalking them to "poor policing." In a post titled "Don't Blame My 'Broken Windows' Theory For Poor Policing", Kelling maintains that his theory was never meant to be a high misdemeanor-arrest policy: "Broken windows was never intended to be a high-arrest program," Kelling writes (his italics).

That's hard to believe because George Kelling himself measures broken-windows policing by the number of misdemeanor arrests performed by the police. Kelling made that clear in his 2001 study, "Do Police Matter?" In that study, Kelling tried to prove the efficacy of broken-windows by comparing policing by precinct in New York City. How did Kelling measure broken-windows policing? By the number of misdemeanor arrests.

Yes, the "independent variable" used by Kelling to measure broken-windows policing was the rate of misdemeanor arrests in each NYPD precinct. Kelling explained, on page eight of his 2001 Report, that his "measure of 'broken windows' policing [is] represented by a precinct's arrests for misdemeanor offenses." This was his finding, again his emphasis:

"The average NYPD precinct during the ten-year period studied could expect to suffer one less violent crime for approximately every 28 additional misdemeanor arrests made."

"We thus find," Kelling wrote, "that 'broken-windows' policing, as reflected by arrests for misdemeanor offenses, has exerted the most significant influence on trends in violent crime."

Now, Jens Ludwig and I replicated Kelling's study back in 2006 and found that Kelling had failed to include in his analysis, as a control variable, the build-up in crime in each precinct, and thus failed to take account of the most likely explanation for the trends in New York City, namely reversion to the mean. Ludwig and I established that there was no link between the number of misdemeanor arrests and serious crime in N.Y.C. (We found the same results for marijuana arrests a year later).

But putting that aside, the point here is that Kelling himself measures the implementation of the broken-windows theory by counting the number of misdemeanor arrests in each police precinct.

And Kelling is not alone.

NYPD Commissioner Bill Bratton, a champion of broken-windows policing, also uses the number of misdemeanor arrests as the metric to
In a solo-authored report, "NYPD: Broken-Windows and Quality-of-Life Policing in New York City," issued with much fanfare in April 2015, Commissioner Bratton defended the efficacy of his broken-windows approach. Bratton's Exhibit A: the first graph, on page 2 of the report, is a large "Figure A" that relates the NYC misdemeanor arrest rate to the comparative crime trends in NYC.

Here is the visual that opens Bratton's report:

![NYC Crime Rate and Misdemeanor Arrests](image)

Let's put aside, again, the reliability of the correlation. (There are, incidentally, a number of upward trends since the 1980s that we could substitute for misdemeanor arrests in this graph, such as the price of housing in N.Y.C., and we would need to hold constant a number of competing variables if we were conducting a proper study).

The important point here is that Commissioner Bratton himself, like Kelling, uses the rate of misdemeanor arrests as the metric to prove the success of his broken-windows approach. Not surprisingly, misdemeanor arrests have always gone up with broken-windows policing.

All this raises a deeper problem at the heart of broken-windows policing: using misdemeanor arrests as a way to fight serious crime aggravates one of the worst problems in our criminal justice system today, namely racial disparities in policing.

In New York City and around the country, misdemeanor arrests have historically skewed toward African-American and Hispanic persons. This is well documented, for New York City, in a recent report from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, "Trends in Misdemeanor Arrests in New York City," which included this telling figure:
Rates of Misdemeanor Arrests by Race/Ethnicity for New York City from 1990 to 2013, Per 100,000 Population

Source: John Jay Report

The disparities are even greater in the sub-population of young men:

Rates of Misdemeanor Arrests for 25-34 year-old Males by Race/Ethnicity for New York City from 1990 to 2013, Per 100,000 Population

Source: John Jay Report
These disparities are the tragic legacy of decades of troubled race relations in this country. The figures are a stunning reflection of what Michelle Alexander calls the *New Jim Crow*.

The question we need to pose ourselves today, faced with these racial disparities in misdemeanor arrests, is what to do about them. Do we exploit them and make them worse by increasing the number of misdemeanor arrests using a broken-windows policing approach -- a policing strategy that measures its implementation by the rate of misdemeanor arrests performed? Or, do we try to find ways to reduce the racial disparities that plague our criminal justice system?

These figures alone should make us walk away from the broken-windows theory.

Follow Bernard E. Harcourt on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/BernardHarcourt](http://www.twitter.com/BernardHarcourt)

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*This Blogger's Books and Other Items from...*
Wisdom from Generation Y

Tuesday, August 18, 2015

MUCH should be expected of any band called Heights Of Wisdom. Formed just over one year ago, the quintet are determined to live up to their lofty name.

They recently launched their Generation (Y)? EP in New York where most of its members live. Jermaine Joseph, one of Heights Of Wisdom's two vocalists, said they are preparing to introduce the 10-song project to Jamaica through an unconventional method.

"We are giving it away. It's for free because we want to get it to as many people as possible," said Joseph, 21.

Four of the songs on Generation (Y)? are produced by Trinidadian DJ Future. Joseph's father, singer Donovan Joseph, co-produced four songs.

Some of the tracks feature Roots Radics drummer Style Scott who died last year. Most, like the title song and Trouble in The World, address issues affecting Heights of Wisdom's generation.

"Wi live together as brothers and not jus' discuss an' highlight the problems of our generation, but try to come up with solutions," said Joseph, a student at Baruch College in New York.

Rimel Smith (drummer), Kemani 'Fari Di Future' Powell (vocals), Desmond Braxton (keyboards) and Javed Wiggins (saxophone) are the other members of Heights Of Wisdom. Like Joseph, they are in their 20s.

The group take their cue from Rhythm and Blues acts like Arrested Development and creative reggae unit The Nomaddz who take a communal approach to music.
Behind China's slowdown, signs of labor unrest

For China, a nation that prizes predictability, it's been a summer of improvisation. First came Beijing's manic efforts to cool the country's overheated stock market. Then came a shock currency devaluation aimed at keeping Chinese exports humming.

In different ways, both moves represent an effort by the government's central planners to execute a controlled descent for the world's second-largest economy, which has seen the double-digit annual growth that fueled China's remarkable rise in recent decades shrink to 7 percent or less.

For investors and businesses, getting an exact fix on that glide path is made much harder by the liberties Chinese officials are known to take with economic data. For instance, how do we know what the unemployment rate is in China?

In a recent study, economists Robert Moffitt and Yingyao Hu of Johns Hopkins University, along with Shuaizhang Feng of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, found that until 1995 -- when the economy remained under direct state control -- China's jobless rate averaged a remarkably low 3.9 percent.

But unemployment appears to have soared in the ensuing years after the government slashed the public sector and laid off tens of millions of workers. By 2009, the jobless rate averaged 10.9 percent, the researchers found. That was twice the official rate published by state officials at the time.

According to the China Labour Bulletin, a pro-labor nongovernmental organization based in Hong Kong, China's National Bureau of Statistics reported the mainland's official jobless rate this year at 4.09 percent, up from 4.05 in 2013. The China Labour Bulletin says this number excludes hundreds of millions of migrant workers because "the official rate only refers to the proportion of registered urban job seekers to the total number of employed urban workers."

"Trying to compare how the U.S. and China track unemployment is totally like comparing apples to oranges," said Peter Kwong, a Hunter College professor who specializes in Asian-American and immigration studies. Kwong said hundreds of millions of migrant workers are off the statisticians' radar.

"When there are no jobs, they go back home and farm. They don't go to the unemployment office," he said.

Both Kwong and the China Labour Bulletin confirm that signs of a broad-based
economic slowdown have been evident for quite a while as Chinese workers faced with pay cuts and plant shutdowns staged several hundred protests last year alone. A survey of construction workers in five Chinese cities indicated that, in 2013, only 20 percent got paid on a regular basis, according to the China Labour Bulletin.

In one incident that highlighted employees' increasingly aggressive stance, Chinese factory workers held hostage American executive Chip Starnes, co-owner of Specialty Medical Supplies, who had plans to move the plant to Mumbai, India. A settlement was reached with the workers, who were looking for back pay and severance, and Starnes was released.

Experts say such restiveness among Chinese workers has been rewarded with significant increases in their average annual compensation, which for urban workers now averages $9,000 a year.

"The American press has only been looking at how China has been growing and how much money they are making," Kwong said. "But the media has missed the major labor unrest that produced these wage gains."

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Introducing CIR’s new director of strategic research

By Reveal staff (https://www.revealnews.org/author/reveal-staff) / August 18, 2015

The Center for Investigative Reporting has appointed Lindsay Green-Barber, Ph.D., in the newly created role of director of strategic research, effective immediately. Green-Barber will develop and lead a research agenda that aligns with and furthers the organization’s strategic and impact objectives.

Green-Barber has worked as a media impact analyst at CIR since 2013, a fellowship position funded by the American Council of Learned Societies. In her new role, she will continue to identify, assess and rigorously test future areas of programmatic work where CIR can have catalytic impact through its content distribution and engagement. She will lead research and analysis and will serve as an expert both internally and for external partnerships.

Historically, research departments at newspapers have focused on readership and audience satisfaction for the purpose of increased circulation and ad sales to
generate revenue. New media companies are increasingly focusing their research departments on audience Web traffic and behavior – BuzzFeed has a team of over 100 data scientists, engineers, product owners and designers focusing on this. But the goal is still to generate revenue. In looking toward the future and by appointing Green-Barber in this new role, CIR is setting a precedent with the creation of a Department of Strategic Research that will extend research focused on increasing earned revenue to include offline impact analysis about real-world impact, an angle for which CIR has become known in the media world.

In her new role, Green-Barber will continue to provide consulting services to other organizations in order to help them set strategic and impact goals, develop strategies for measurement, and assist in analysis. She will report directly to CIR’s CEO, Joaquin Alvarado.

Previously, Green-Barber was an American Council for Learned Societies public fellow and served as media impact analyst at CIR. She earned a Ph.D. in political science from the City University of New York Graduate Center. Her doctoral research, conducted from 2011 through 2013 in Ecuador, focused on indigenous organizations’ use of new information and communications technologies for social mobilization. She also taught political science courses at Hunter College.

Contact her at lgreenbarber@cironline.org (mailto:lgreenbarber@cironline.org).
Author and former college president offers advice to parents on the first year of college

Submitted by Jacqueline Thomsen on August 18, 2015 - 3:00am

As the start of the academic year approaches, parents of incoming freshmen wonder what they should be doing to prepare their children. Roger H. Martin, former president of Moravian College in Pennsylvania and Randolph-Macon College in Virginia, and a parent of two daughters who both attended college, spent a year examining the programming and resources offered to first-year students at five different four-year institutions -- Tufts University, Vassar College, Morningside College in Iowa, Washington College in Maryland and Queens College of the City University of New York. From orientation sessions to campus safety to first-generation students, Martin examines the freshman year of college from multiple lenses, dispensing advice to parents along the way. Martin answered questions about his new book from the University of Chicago Press, Off to College: A Guide for Parents, via email.

Q: Helicoptering, overinvolvement and underinvolvement of parents with their first-year students all come up as scenarios in the book. As both a parent and a former college administrator, how involved do you believe a parent should be?

A: Parents should love and support their children and be there for them in the event of a crisis but otherwise let their children take care of their own business. What I mean by this is that when their child has a roommate problem, or is not getting proper advising, or is not getting field time on the baseball team, the child -- not the parent -- should talk to the appropriate dean or coach. Part of a college education, beginning first year, is learning how to be independent, and this will not happen if parents are constantly intervening for their children.

Q: As you examined programming and other resources for first-year students, what stood out the most to you as a parent? What advice would you give to parents who are concerned about leaving their children at college for the first time, and do you think the children would agree?

A: What stood out to me most is that good colleges will not abandon their students when things go wrong, that when a child is struggling with a learning disability (as I did), or is having writing issues, or is depressed, there are people on campus who will help out. So the advice I would give parents who are concerned about leaving their children at college is that they need to calm down (or chill, in the common parlance), that at most good colleges and universities their children will be well taken care of.

Most first-year students will agree, saying that they want their parents to be supportive but otherwise not to interfere. Unfortunately, I'm increasingly meeting college students who still want their parents to run interference for them, and this is not good.
Q: You also take on the difficulties of financing a college education. What would you say to parents who are afraid of paying a great deal for college only to find that their child isn’t succeeding? How would you suggest they minimize financial pressures during freshmen year?

A: In both of my colleges, I saw first-year students who clearly didn’t know why they were there, cut classes and ended up doing poorly or flunking out. If Thanksgiving rolls around and things are not going well academically, this would be a good time for parents to have a frank conversation with their child. If the interest is still there but the grades aren’t, parents should urge their student to sit down with his or her adviser and work out a plan to succeed. Perhaps a lighter course load might help. Perhaps their student needs to spend more time with studies, less time partying. But if their child just isn’t interested in college, there is nothing wrong (indeed, everything right) with temporarily leaving college and serving one’s country in the armed services or with AmeriCorps or by learning a trade and getting a job. If the interest resurfaces later on, college can resume.

There are many ways to help minimize financial pressures first year. For example, before they leave for college, parents should insist that their child manage and stick to a budget and responsibly use a credit card (sometimes a debit card works better). Their child should also consider taking on a campus job to help pay for college. Some parents think that working will detract from academics, but studies show that college students who work 20 hours per week or less actually do better academically than students who don’t work at all. Students who work are also less likely to drop out of college and, of course, having a campus job is something they can put on their résumé. I suggest other strategies for minimizing financial pressures in the book.

Q: Throughout the book, you look at programs at all different kinds of four-year institutions. Despite all of the unique features in each first-year experience, did you find a theme or focus that was present in each of those programs? Do you think all other institutions should adapt to make sure that their programs also have this theme or focus?

A: First-year programs at the institutions I studied in Off to College all had similarities, even though the institutions themselves are in many ways very different. They did not overuse adjuncts or graduate students to teach first-year students, as is often the case in larger universities. They considered good advising to be a critical ingredient to college success. Classes -- even for first-year students -- tended to be much smaller than the large lectures we often hear about. And what we call “active learning” -- learning in which students are not passive listeners but are actively engaged in the learning process -- defined the curriculum. All of these institutions also took great care to monitor their first-year students from the day they arrived at orientation and to quickly intervene if problems (like missing classes or not engaging in out-of-classroom activities) became apparent. Colleges that do not do these things risk severe attrition problems.

Q: You dedicated to the book to your daughters, and say you hope they “will benefit from this book when my grandchildren head off to college.” You also mention multiple times how orientations and first-year programs have features you didn’t have access to as a freshman. How do you think the first-year experience will change in the future?

A: I think higher education is changing, and with this change so will the first-year experience. When I went to college in the 1960s, for example, very few campuses had disability support services, and I suffered as a result. Today, most colleges offer support for students with physical and learning disabilities. In the past, higher education, especially at the more elite colleges and universities, was available mostly to white upper- and middle-class students. Today, colleges and universities are much more racially and economically diverse, and, as a result, much stronger.

Technology is playing a larger role in higher education, and I think that as this happens, the first year will also change -- hopefully for the better. I do not think, however (as some do), that technology can completely replace real professors teaching students in a campus setting. Education is a very human activity, and the thought of eighteen-year-olds receiving their college education over the Internet in the comfort of their parents’ living room is, frankly, scary. As I point out in my book, college is not just about academics; it’s also about living in a residence hall with someone who is very different, playing
a sport and writing for the college newspaper. So my hope is that while college (including the first-year experience) will inevitably change, many important things will remain pretty much as they have always been.

Q: You've also recently spent time as a first-year student for your book *Racing Odysseus: A College President Becomes a Freshman Again*. From your experience with that, and in researching this book, what do you think is the number-one issue for first-year students that both parents and institutions should be aware of?

A: Most people who work with first-year students will agree that the number-one issue for most first-year students is time management. Before college, they lived at home. Mom or Dad woke them up, made them breakfast and then sent them off to school, where the schedule from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. was invariable. After school and various activities, they ate dinner at a set time, did their homework and then went to bed.

At college they have no one to wake them up in the morning and tell them when to eat breakfast. Classes vary over the week: Some days there are no classes. And then in the evening no one tells them when to eat dinner, when to study and when to go to bed. Most students must learn to do these things by themselves, which, again, is part of the growing-up process and -- to come full circle -- why parents need to chill and stay on the sidelines.

**New Books About Higher Education**

Mayor de Blasio's bad summer

Job performance numbers at all-time low amid media attacks and public disputes

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, The Associated Press

August 17, 2015

Mayor Bill de Blasio is having a really bad summer, unable to shake a media-driven perception that the Big Apple's crime- and vagrant-filled days are returning.

Homicide and homelessness numbers are up only modestly but that hasn't stopped almost daily tabloid pictures of bedraggled men urinating in the streets or bathing in public fountains. One tabloid has adopted the standing headline "Rotting Apple" and launched a website — deblasioFAIL — that counts down the hours until his term ends at the end of 2017.

All of that comes amid a series of political setbacks, including a dispute with Uber that made him the target of millions of dollars in attack ads and an about-face on hiring new police officers that seemed like a cave to his police commissioner and City Council. And most notably, there was de Blasio's diatribe against the governor, which only heightened the tension between the two men that has now spilled into a turf war amid a deadly Legionnaires' outbreak in the Bronx.

While the mayor's allies have steadfastly defended his record, de Blasio's sudden losing streak has taken a toll, sending his poll numbers plunging.

"He should be very worried," said Kenneth Sherrill, professor emeritus of political science at Hunter College. "He's in some trouble and you can't just say, 'In two years I'll be fine.'"

A Quinnipiac University poll released last week found the percentage of New Yorkers who disapprove of de Blasio's job performance has increased to the highest point since he took office in January 2014. And only about one-third of those surveyed say their quality of life is "good" or "very good," a record low for the poll, which has been asking that question since 1997.

De Blasio's own aides believe his ill-fated dispute with Uber inflicted the biggest wound.

A City Hall proposal to cap Uber's growth over concerns about traffic congestion led the ride-hailing service to blanket the city with ads that accused de Blasio of turning his back on the minority residents of outer borough neighborhoods who struggle to find traditional yellow taxis.

The administration appeared caught off-guard by the onslaught and
eventually punting, extracting a few concessions from Uber in exchange for tabling talk of a cap. That crisis may have passed, but the mayor is locked in near-daily feud with Gov. Andrew Cuomo that shows little sign of relenting.

Cuomo has frequently thwarted de Blasio's agenda and provided little vocal support for the mayor's plans during this year's state legislative session. De Blasio, who had largely bit his tongue over the governor's perceived slights, eventually broke his silence and blamed the governor for not acting "with New York City's interests at heart."

"(He) keeps playing out in ways that I think sometimes are about deal-making, sometimes about revenge," de Blasio said. "I have been disappointed at every turn."

Though many of the mayor's allies defend de Blasio's outburst, saying he needed to send a signal that he wouldn't be bullied, it is clear that his decision to fight back hasn't reduced any tension. The two administrations have even bickered this week during a public health crisis, holding competing news conferences during the Legionnaires' outbreak that has killed 12 people.

Discussions were held before the outbreak to plan an event where the two men would make a joint appearance as a public display of reconciliation, but those talks have been postponed, according to a city official familiar with the plan who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

"De Blasio's report card right now for 2015 isn't looking great and who thinks he'll have more luck in Albany next year considering the enemies he's made there?" asked Jeanne Zaino, political science professor at Iona College.

The strain apparently has taken a toll on de Blasio, who has appeared snippy at recent news conferences and has taken pains to put seemingly disturbing statistics in context.

Homicides have gone up 10.1 percent, but from historic lows — from 178 to 196 — from this point a year ago. Meanwhile, the number of homeless in shelters has also risen to 56,000 from approximately 52,000 when de Blasio took office.

The mayor's aides have pushed back against the perception that de Blasio is faltering, noting that his 2015 accomplishments — like ramping up his affordable housing plan — produce fewer immediate tangible results than last year's centerpiece, the launch of universal prekindergarten.

"People said the mayor would never be elected, and he was," press secretary Karen Hinton said. "The mayor is a straight ahead, get-the-job-done practitioner. He will keep doing what he's been doing, and New Yorkers will see the results."

There are myriad signs that de Blasio can rally. His support among his base — namely blacks and Latinos — has slipped some but remains high. The city is overwhelmingly liberal and it usually takes a calamity for an incumbent Democrat to lose. And his poll numbers have previously rebounded after clashes with charter schools and the police unions.

"This is not the death knell by any stretch of the imagination," Zaino said. "But it should be a wake-up call."
Why New York City doesn't have a teacher shortage

Even as enrollment in the state's teacher prep programs drop, just one in three graduates is able to land a job in New York.

By Geoff Decker  
gdecker@chalkbeat.org

PUBLISHED: August 18, 2015 - 5:00 am EDT

Kaylan Buendia teaches her 10th-grade science class at Brooklyn Generation School. (Photo by Stephanie Snyder)

When Principal Michael Shandrick posts a job opening at Williamsburg Preparatory School, he doesn't worry about finding teachers to apply.

Shandrick and the small high school's hiring committee received more than 100 applications for just three positions this spring. When Shandrick posted a different opening for a teacher certified in English as a second language, he sorted through
another 30 applications before choosing two finalists.

That scenario might have played out differently in Nashville, Oklahoma City, or a number of other urban school districts struggling to fill positions before this school year begins, as the New York Times reported this month. California alone had more than 21,000 new teaching slots to fill this year but issued credentials to just 15,000.

The demand to work at Williamsburg Prep is emblematic of a different reality in the Empire State, which has many more aspiring teachers than classrooms for them to fill. While recruiters elsewhere are increasingly relying on people without teaching credentials to fill positions, New York’s excess supply gives principals the chance to be selective when reviewing résumés.

“I always try to get people with a little more experience and who know what it’s like to be a teacher,” Shandrick said.

In fact, New York remains one of the country’s most competitive job markets for teachers, according to Carrie Murthy, who analyzes higher education data for Westat, a research organization that works with the federal education department. Just one in three graduates from a teacher preparation program is able to land a job in New York, according to the State Education Department.

The state’s teacher surplus is large enough to have persisted even as enrollment in teacher preparation programs has fallen by 40 percent in recent years, Murthy said. That decrease outpaces the national average of 30 percent over that period.

“People have been saying for a while now that once all the baby boomers retire we’re really going to be in trouble,” Murthy said. “But at least in New York, we have yet to see that happen.”

Recruiting and hiring new teachers are not uniformly without difficulty across both the state and the city. Attracting well-qualified teachers tends to be more challenging for the city’s lowest-performing schools and in economically depressed parts of the state, said Arthur Levine, former president of Teachers College and the current president of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation.

But a number of factors have converged to make hiring easier than it is in other parts of the country.

The state’s teacher preparation programs are still churning out excess graduates certified
to teach elementary school and popular subjects where demand for new teachers is low, Levine said. New York state’s public school enrollment has stayed almost flat over the last decade, while populations are booming in states like Arizona and North Carolina.

And New York City, where the population has increased in recent decades, is a desirable place to live and work with relatively competitive teacher salaries.

"It’s a go-to location," Levine said.

Other areas are also still recovering from deep cuts made to their teacher workforces during the recession. State and local budgets now look healthier, and districts are trying to quickly fill gaps in their workforce they’ve had for years. In other words, demand has suddenly outstripped supply.

New York City, though, doesn’t have to make up as much ground. The city managed to avoid layoffs between 2009 and 2013, though it slowed new teacher hiring by about half. (The rest of the state did see cuts, with schools losing about 8 percent of their active teaching workforce in those years, according to New York State School Boards Association spokesman David Albert.)

This year, districts are receiving an average state funding increase of 6 percent. Cosimo Tangorra, superintendent of Niskayuna, a 4,000-student district of north of Albany, said the extra aid allowed him to hire 44 new teachers for the coming fall.

"No one can remember ever having hired this many teachers in one year," said Tangorra, a former deputy state education commissioner. He noted that the hiring spree was likely easier because the schools in Niskayuna, where just 10 percent of students are considered poor, are highly sought-after by parents.

The city has had trouble finding teachers before, most notably in 2000, when hundreds of vacancies were unfilled as the school year started and about one in seven teachers lacked certification. Since then, teacher pay has risen significantly, and programs like NYC Teaching Fellows were created to offer alternatives to the traditional teacher education process.

Some educators are concerned that teacher "A lot of people are
shortages may still be on New York’s horizon, thanks partially to the public’s focus on teacher evaluations and standardized testing. The state is also introducing a new set of certification exams designed to make it more difficult to enter the profession.

Craig Michaels, the dean of Queens College’s education division, has seen undergraduate enrollment fall nearly 20 percent and graduate enrollment drop about 10 percent in the last three years. The higher costs associated with the new certification exams were keeping some students away, Michaels said, while others have flocked to alternative certification programs. Others may avoid the profession if they feel educators are always “under attack” by the media and politicians.

“A lot of people are questioning the profession in a big way,” he said.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, agreed, saying there are signs that New York “isn’t far behind” other states that are losing teachers. New York’s testing and accountability policies have demoralized educators, she said in a statement.

Levine disputed that argument, saying much of the discussion about how education policy was shaping the national and local teacher job market is not rooted in evidence.

The unions “make a good case, but there’s no evidence that’s the case,” he said. “The research needs to be done and anything anyone tells you at this point is conjecture.”

For Dylan Scott, an aspiring teacher with an in-demand science background, the difficulty of his job search has been surprising.

Scott, who has a master’s degree in biology, hoped that credential would propel him into a teaching position at a school close to where he lived and whose administration was well-liked by its staff. Seven interviews later, he’s realized the market for those positions is more competitive than he realized.

“Now I’m wondering if I’m shooting too high,” he said.

Sabrina Rodriguez contributed reporting.
Families of Chinese firefighters seek answers in port blasts

By Christopher Bodeen Associated Press
Published: Tuesday, Aug. 18 2015 7:58 a.m. MDT

TIANJIN, China — The rapid chain of explosions that destroyed a warehouse district in the Chinese port of Tianjin could become one of the world’s deadliest disasters for fire crews, with at least 21 firefighters confirmed dead and scores of others still missing.

Now questions are being raised about whether the crews were properly trained and equipped to deal with the emergency at a warehouse that stored a volatile mix of chemicals, including compounds that become combustible on contact with water.

For a third day Monday, angry relatives of the 64 missing firefighters flocked to a hotel to demand information about their loved ones from government officials.

"I’ve gotten no information from the authorities whatsoever," said Liu Runwen, whose 18-year-old son, Liu Zhiqiang, has been missing since he responded to the fire Wednesday night.

Liu said his son joined the force two years ago on the recommendation of a friend and embraced the danger despite safety concerns.

"He was proud to be a firefighter who could serve the people," Liu said.

The father had questions about whether his son was sufficiently prepared, and he complained that TV reports failed to mention contract firefighters like his son alongside full-fledged firefighters "as if they never took part at all."

As of Monday, 114 people had been confirmed dead in the blasts, which destroyed several warehouses, crumpled shipping containers and shattered windows several kilometers (miles) away. Police have cordoned off the area of still-smoldering fires in a mixed industrial and residential zone, and more than 6,000 people have been forced into temporary shelters or are staying with friends and family.

Also angry with authorities was Yang Jie, whose firefighter son, Yang Weiguang, is among the missing. The 23-year-old had joined just 10 months earlier after a two-year stint in the army.
much higher if many of the 70 missing are confirmed dead.

Local officials have yet to comment on the possible cause of the explosion and the fire that preceded it. However, the Global Times newspaper, citing chemical industry experts speaking on condition of anonymity, said the blast was probably triggered by a flammable substance such as industrial alcohol stored on the site. Other reports suggested that high summer temperatures may have been a factor, along with the possibility of a chemical reaction sparked by water being sprayed by the firefighters.

Zhong Shengjun, a social scientist who studies industrial safety at Northeastern University in Shenyang, said "we can't rule it out that when firefighters tried to cool down the area, they sprayed some water on some alkali metals that should not be in contact with water. It's partly because the firefighters couldn't contact the executives of the warehouse in time so as to know exactly where different chemicals were placed."

"This disaster has exposed several problems, such as the poor management of dangerous chemicals. In theory, they should be stored by category and have clear signs placed on their containers indicating their basic features," he said.

China should have a system whereby dangerous chemicals are tracked on their containers by bar code, but that system has not yet been adopted at Chinese ports, Zhong said.

In the United States, firefighters regularly visit industrial sites to become familiar with hazardous materials and how they are used and stored.

"You need to know ahead of time what you're dealing with," said Glenn Corbett, associate professor of fire science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City.

However, Zhong said that because
the Tianjin accident took place at transit warehouse in a loading area of the port, the material was there only temporarily, making it especially difficult to identify.

Corbett said that beginning in the late 1960s, American fire crews also established specialized hazardous-materials teams that are "trained to a much higher level" than regular firefighters.

Many of the Tianjin firefighters, including many of the dead, were not part of a full-time department, but rather had been hired on one-year contracts to act as a sort of auxiliary firefighting force. They did not enjoy the official perks and job security of the national firefighting team, which is itself an adjunct of the paramilitary People's Armed Police.

One of contract firefighters, 18-year-old Zhou Ti, survived only because he was buried so deeply under his colleagues' corpses.

About 40 minutes after the first reports of a fire, a sudden set of explosions — one equivalent to 21 tons of TNT — all but obliterated Zhou's squad. Rescuers pulled him out about 32 hours later.

"I was wondering what could be wrong with me. Why would people need to be saving me? And then it occurred to me that maybe I was in an incident," Zhou told state broadcaster CCTV in an interview from his bed at Teda Hospital, where he was in stable condition. Doctors refused requests by other media to interview him, citing the fear of infection to his damaged lungs.

A firefighter for just over a year, Zhou said he understood the risks of the job.

"Yes, I have a bit of fear, but it does not stop me from firefighting. I won't let my fear show. You do what you need to do," said Zhou, breathing with the help of a respirator, his face burned black by the explosion.

Knocked to the ground by the initial blast, Zhou said he tried to cover his head before blacking out. "I recall nothing after that," he said.

Just 24 of the accident's 114 confirmed victims have been identified. The force of the blast and heat of the fire make it unlikely that the bodies of the dead would remain intact.

The fate of the firefighters has captured the public imagination, with tributes streaming in from Premier Li Keqiang and other top officials.

One set of SMS messages reportedly sent...
between an unnamed firefighter and a friend has been circulated widely online. In it, the firefighter says one of his colleagues has just been killed. He also asks his friend to look after his father if he fails to return alive.

"If I don't come back," the unnamed firefighter wrote, "my dad is your dad."

State television said the man survived.

*Associated Press writers Didi Tang and Ian Mader and researcher Henry Hou in Beijing, video journalist Paul Traynor in Tianjin and Deepti Hajela in New York contributed to this report.*

In this Friday, Aug. 14, 2015, file photo, Chinese firefighter Zhou Ji is treated in Taide Hospital in northeastern China's Tianjin municipality. (Chinatopix Via AP)
SIDEBAR: Outgoing Bay Ridge Lawyers Association President Lisa Becker

By Rob Abruzzese
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Lisa M. Becker is a Brooklyn-born attorney who currently resides in Staten Island with her husband Ralph Mercante and their two sons James and Mark Mercante. She went to Nazareth Regional High School before earning her bachelor’s degree at St. John’s University and her law degree at St. John’s Law School.

What inspired you to study law?

Ever since I was approximately 8 years old, I knew I wanted to be an attorney; specifically, I knew I wanted to be an assistant district attorney. Years ago, there were so many shows that I referred to as “police shows,” and I was always drawn to the attorneys who worked “Downtown in the DA’s office.”

I was thrilled when I worked in the Brooklyn District Attorney’s office for almost 15 years, first as a paralegal in the Early Case Assessment Bureau and Homicide Bureau and then as an Assistant District Attorney in numerous bureaus such as Grand Jury, Investigations and Domestic Violence. I was able to indict over 100 cases and was able to work closely with crime victims, which was always my passion. I knew if I worked as a Prosecutor (and paralegal) in the District Attorney’s office, I would be able to “help people,” and throughout my career, I have done just that — helped people and made sure that justice was served.

What was your most memorable case and why?

I once handled a case where the husband (defendant) refused to pay child support to his ex-wife. He literally thought he was above the law as he was an attorney himself and smirked when the judge told him he better pay his ex-wife or when he returned to court the following month, he should bring his toothbrush.

In court, the following month, I did the entire hearing. I did my closing argument. The judge paused and then sentenced the husband to 6 months in jail for non-payment of child support (he owed her thousands of dollars). There are so many other memorable cases I worked on while at the Brooklyn District Attorney’s office and at the NYC Department of Education.

What has been your proudest moment as an attorney?

My proudest moment as an attorney was when — actually there are two proudest moments — I was sworn in as president of the Bay Ridge Lawyers Association by one of my favorite judges, Hon. Matthew D’Emic. My other proudest moment was on June 24, 2015, at my Dinner Dance, where I was honored as outgoing President of the Bay Ridge Lawyers Association and received my BRLA medal. When my son, James, placed the medal around my neck, this was such a proud moment!
What is one fact about you that people would find surprising?

Many people know that I am a lymphoma survivor and know my story. I have been told how strong I am and how strong I was while I was going through the treatments for this dreadful disease. I have been told I am a true inspiration. I have always tried to live my life to the fullest and have never ever let anything regarding my medical issue stand in the way of achieving all of my goals and working hard. However, one thing people may not know about me and may find surprising as it relates to my medical issue, is that deep down, I am truly frightened at times. I may not show it, but I am very scared.

If you weren't a lawyer what career would you pursue?

Event, party planning and photography. I am seriously thinking about doing photography on the side — another one of my passions.

August 17, 2015 - 1:04pm
Elia's first month: New plans for struggling schools, and for Buffalo

ALBANY—In just over a month since she took over as state education commissioner, MaryEllen Elia already has rolled out the receivership plan for consistently low-performing schools and appointed a team to monitor Rockland County's troubled East Ramapo school district.

On Tuesday, she could add finding a new Buffalo schools superintendent to that list: The Buffalo school board is expected to vote on the hiring of former Memphis schools superintendent Kriner Cash at a noon meeting Tuesday—a vote that could cap a problem-plagued recruitment effort that has dragged on for more than a year.

Elia stepped in last month to recommend Cash to lead the district, which has 20 schools identified by the state as "struggling" and another five that have been designated "persistently struggling." Those schools must demonstrate academic improvement or risk being taken over by a state-approved receiver.

Elia knew Cash from her time as superintendent of schools in Hillsborough County, Florida, where Tampa is located. She knew he was available, so she made the recommendation, said Buffalo school board president James Sampson.

"She didn't exert any kind of pressure or influence beyond that," Sampson told POLITICO New York. "She made it clear that she was very concerned about Buffalo schools."
If Cash is appointed, the board also will have to vote to ask the state Education Department to review his credentials and issue the proper state superintendent certification, Sampson said.

School board member Carl Paladino told The Buffalo News that Cash will make $275,000 a year and have a 12-month buyout clause.

The superintendent recommendation is just one of a number of thorny issues Elia has taken on since she replaced John King as education commissioner in July, after he resigned to become a senior adviser to U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

As one of her first duties, Elia gave districts statewide an ultimatum: Fix their struggling schools, or the state will.

“I am going to be intimately involved in saying. I believe schools and districts are legitimately working on making these necessary changes,” she said last month. “But in the converse, if I don’t see that, I will be intimately involved in your school districts. Because we can’t allow students to move forward without the support they need for success.”

Last week, Elia intervened in East Ramapo schools, which have seen deep program and staffing cuts in recent years at the hands of a growing Orthodox Jewish population that gained control of the school board even though their children attend private yeshivas.

Elia appointed a team headed by Dennis Walcott, who was New York City schools chancellor under former mayor Michael Bloomberg, to monitor fiscal and operational management as well as educational programming and to regularly report back to her.

“I’m extremely delighted that our new commissioner is taking action right away and hitting the ground running,” State Sen. David Carlucci, an independent Democratic Conference member who represents the East Ramapo district, told POLITICO New York.

Both Carlucci and Assemblyman Kenneth Zebrowski, a Democrat who represents part of the district, said they spoke with Elia a few days after she was appointed and she said she would take action on East Ramapo.

“I think she’s proven, to me, that she’s willing to take these issues head on and not willing to let them languish any further,” Zebrowski said.

David Bloomfield, a professor of education leadership at Brooklyn College and at the City University of New York Graduate Center, said in an interview that Elia seems to be taking the middle ground.

“Unlike the previous two commissioners, she is an experienced superintendent, fully aware of the landscape and the land mines,” Bloomfield said. “In her first month, she has stepped carefully forward and so far has survived.”

In Buffalo, for instance, she recommended a new superintendent, but didn’t take control
of the failing schools, he said. And in East Ramapo, she opted for further study. But that might not be enough, Bloomfield added.

"I think she has to do a lot more," he said. "It's a good strategy for the first month. It is not a constructive strategy for the future. She has to wrestle more forcefully about accountability issues including opt out, the Common Core . . ."

Buffalo's Sampson, meanwhile, called her a "breath of fresh air."

"It's been an interesting month," Sampson said. "She has a real interest in making sure the New York State Department of Education provides all the support it can for districts to function, and function well. ... I can hardly wait for next month."

MORE: ALBANY EDUCATION BUFFALO BUFFALO CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT CARL PALADINO DAVID BLOOMFIELD DAVID CARLUCCI EAST RAMAPO EDUCATION JAMES SAMPSON KENNETH ZEBROWSKI KRINNER CASH MARYellen ELIA NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT SCHOOL BOARD
CUNY Professor Says Judge Upholding Test Leaves Teacher Gulf

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, August 17, 2015 4:30 pm

A leading educator said last week that although a Federal Judge upheld one of the tests used to certify the city’s Teachers, the instructional cadre needs greater diversity.

Earlier this month, U.S. District Judge Kimba Wood said the Academic Literacy Skills Test avoided the pitfalls that led her to strike down its two predecessors as discriminatory and unrelated to the job. But David C. Bloomfield, a Professor of Education Leadership at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center, said the state-administered exam wasn’t helping to increase black and Hispanic instructors.

David Bloomfield

DAVID BLOOMFIELD: A ‘negative impact on classroom.’

‘Woefully Disproportionate’

“The state had lots of time to get this one right, but the effect, still, is a woefully disproportionately low pass rate for minority students that I believe—and many educators believe—will have a negative impact on the classroom,” he said. “I respect her decision as law; that’s her job, but it doesn’t bode well for the future of diversity in the teaching force.”

In 2012, and again in June, Judge Wood tossed out the Liberal Arts and Science Tests—referred to as LAST-1 and LAST-2—on the grounds they were “unfairly discriminatory” toward minority candidates. Annually, only about 54 to 75 minority candidates passed the LAST-2 exam for every 100 white candidates. She also found that questions weren’t necessarily related to Teachers’ job demands.

“Unlike the LAST, the ALST qualifies as a job-related exam under Title VII,” Judge Wood wrote in her Aug. 5 ruling. She noted that when the state applied for nearly $700 million in Federal Race to the Top grants in 2010, it redesigned the test accordingly as it adopted tougher Teacher-preparation and Common Core curriculum standards.

‘ Appropriately Designed’

“The ALST was derived from those standards, and thus was appropriately designed to ensure that only those applicants who possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to teach successfully may be hired to do so in New York’s public schools,” she wrote.
The ALST, which measures reading and writing skills, is used along with the Educating All Students exam and edTPA. Some specialized educators must also pass the Content Specialty Test.

Mr. Bloomfield said the Department of Education was in an awkward position because as the prospective employer, it had to defend and enforce the state-developed test. To recruit more candidates, the DOE could work more with teaching colleges to attract more minority candidates, he suggested.

The DOE hosts a Diversity Unit that specializes in recruiting diverse applicants. Still, only 20 percent of city Teachers were black and 14 percent were Hispanic, according to a study conducted last year by the Independent Budget Office.

The LAST-1 was first introduced in 1993 and replaced by the LAST-2 in 2004. In the year that ended Aug. 31, 2014, 68 percent of the 11,371 prospective educators who took the ALST passed, according to the state Education Department.

A Long Court Fight

The legal challenge, Gulino v. Board of Education, sprawled across multiple courts for nearly 20 years. Joshua Sohn, an attorney for the plaintiffs, declined to comment on the ruling. A spokesperson for the United Federation of Teachers didn’t specifically address the decision, but said it supported “high standards and fair, non-discriminatory tests for Teachers and students.” The UFT initially joined the case, but didn’t pursue it, an official added.

Citing a decades-old case against the NYPD, Judge Wood asked whether the exam was properly validated for prospective DOE employees by determining: if the test-developers performed a “suitable analysis” and were competent enough to build the exam, whether the test was related to the job, if questions were representative of the content of the job, and if test-takers were effectively scored.

Not Without Fault

Though Judge Wood found that the ALST met those expectations, she still faulted the SED, Pearson and the Human Resources Research Organization, all of whom developed the exam, on some issues. For example, some focus groups and surveys consisted of few, if any, minorities. And she said that while the standards were linked to Common Core objectives, their job requirements were too broad: “Describing an exam as testing ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ says about as much about the content of the exam as saying the exam tests ‘thinking,’” she wrote.

Pearson, which recently lost its contract to develop state tests for students, still designs Teacher tests.

“We are pleased the court found DOE should not be held liable for using a Teacher-licensing test required by the state,” said Eric Eichenholtz, Chief of the Law Department’s Labor and Employment Law Division.
‘The Two-State Delusion,’ by Padraig O’Malley

By PETER BEINART AUG. 18, 2015

Padraig O’Malley’s “The Two-State Delusion” is an impressive and frustrating book. It’s impressive because O’Malley, a professor at the University of Massachusetts at Boston who has written extensively on South Africa and Northern Ireland, has done a tremendous amount of research about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He’s not only delved deeply into its literature; he’s also interviewed dozens of participants on both sides. The result is a book so packed with information that it will reward even the reader so dedicated that she consumes the Israel-Palestine stories buried on Page A17 of The Times.

O’Malley, for instance, considers at length the potential economic viability of a Palestinian state, something often overlooked by American commentators. He notes that not only does public sector employment constitute more than 50 percent of the Palestinian Authority’s budget but also that “the tax base is small” and tax “collection practices are lax.” He observes as well that a Palestinian state would most likely be unable to desalinate water and thus “would almost necessarily have to import water from Israel, which has the necessary resources and expertise in the field, but water dependency devalues sovereignty.”

O’Malley is not only knowledgeable; he’s also honest. He vividly captures the brutality of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank. According to pro-Palestinian activists, Israel has cut down more than 800,000 Palestinian olive trees since 1967, which, O’Malley observes, is “the equivalent of razing all of the 24,000 trees in New York City’s Central Park 33 times.” And according to the Israeli human rights group
Yesh Din, he tells us, 90 percent of Palestinian complaints against Israelis in the West Bank never result in an indictment, and in the rare circumstances “when convictions are made, Israeli citizens involved in such violent acts are handed light sentences.”

But if O’Malley apportions more blame to Israel, as the far stronger side, for the fact that millions of Palestinians lack basic rights, he is hardly romantic about Palestinian politics. While acknowledging that Hamas is not the only major party to the conflict that rejects the two-state solution (the most recent Likud platform does too), O’Malley endorses Israeli Jews’ fears about the group’s long-term agenda. After interviewing Hamas leaders, he writes: “Israeli Jews have a right to question whether a free-standing Palestinian state with an ‘end of claims’ agreement is not the end of the conflict but the beginning of Palestinian preparation for the next phase of ‘liberating’ all of Palestine. If the Israelis take seriously — and they do — the unequivocal declaration by Hamas’s leaders that Hamas’s goal is to reclaim all of Palestine, they are perfectly justified in hesitating before embracing a two-state solution.”

O’Malley doesn’t think much of the two-state solution either. As its title suggests, his entire book is devoted to proving that it constitutes a “delusion.” He dismisses polls showing that majorities or near majorities of Israelis and Palestinians support the idea by noting that the two sides mean something very different by it. The Palestinians he interviewed generally “envisage a state along the lines of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital . . . enjoying full sovereignty.” By contrast, the Israeli Jews he spoke to support a Palestinian state only if it has Israeli troops on its soil (at least initially); cedes some control over its borders, airspace and telecommunications spectrum to Israel; and accepts “an Israeli settler city, Ariel, at its heart.”

O’Malley denies that the two parties have ever been close to a deal. At Taba in January 2001, he notes, six months after the failure of the Camp David summit between Ehud Barak and Yasir Arafat, “both sides fielded their most dovish teams, which worked in an environment that allowed the players more give-and-take latitude, free of the many constraints imposed by formal negotiations,” and yet “the Taba negotiators still could not come up with” a final status agreement (F.S.A.). Similarly, although some commentators have lauded Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud
Abbas for the concessions they made at the Annapolis conference in November 2007, O’Malley insists that “many barriers to a final status agreement had not been dismantled and no F.S.A. was in the offing.”

Although O’Malley makes his case well, he discounts some contrary evidence. Olmert has said “we were very close” at Annapolis, and according to Abbas, the two leaders were “two months” away from a deal. (Negotiations ended following a corruption investigation that forced Olmert from office.) What’s more, former Israeli and Palestinian negotiations reached a model agreement at Geneva in 2003, although as O’Malley says, the accord “found no takers.” He is right that the kind of agreement both sides could support would require each to make compromises — Palestinians on refugee return and Israel on Jerusalem, in particular — that would foment furious domestic opposition. But such is always the case in conflicts this bitter and longstanding.

What makes O’Malley’s book frustrating, however, is not his critique of the so-called two-state delusion. It’s his refusal to offer an alternative. Page after page, chapter after chapter, I kept waiting for him to proffer a solution of his own. I’m not the only one. Near the book’s end, O’Malley admits that “friends who read the manuscript” objected that “you can’t just end the book and leave the reader with no alternative to a two-state solution if you are so sure one is delusional.” O’Malley’s reply: “Why should I be so presumptuous as to dare to provide a vision for people who refuse to provide one for themselves?”

This is weak. If O’Malley feels entitled to declare the two-state solution a delusion, why isn’t he entitled to provide an alternative? Presumptuousness isn’t the issue. O’Malley’s real problem is that offering a credible alternative to the two-state solution is extremely difficult because the same factors that make it so hard to agree on how to divide Israel/Palestine into two countries make it even harder to agree on how Israelis and Palestinians should live together in one. Binationalism, the most commonly suggested alternative to the two-state solution, barely works in Belgium. The Czechs and Slovaks opted for divorce. To imagine that Israelis and Palestinians can live together peaceably and freely in one country (let’s call it “Israstine”), you have to believe that the “Israstine” army, composed of joint Jewish-Palestinian brigades, would hold together under enormous stress because its members are more
loyal to “Israstine” than they are to being Jewish or Palestinian. That’s even more delusional than the two-state solution. More likely, “Israstine” would be civil war under a common flag.

In 2013, Marwan Barghouti, who according to polls is the most popular Palestinian politician alive, told Al-Monitor that “if the two-state solution fails, the substitute will not be a binational one-state solution, but a persistent conflict that extends based on an existential crisis — one that does not know any middle ground.” Calling the two-state solution unachievable is easy. Answering Barghouti’s fears about the alternative is hard. Given all the effort O’Malley has poured into his subject, it’s disappointing that he doesn’t even try.

THE TWO-STATE DELUSION

Israel and Palestine — A Tale of Two Narratives

By Padraig O’Malley


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