New York's First Disability Pride Parade

City officials say it will become an annual event

Christina Eisenberg, Joe Slaninka and Jessica Lopez—all from the Viscardi Center—participate in Sunday's parade.

PHOTO: PETER J. SMITH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By CORINNE RAMEY
July 12, 2015 9:06 p.m. ET
New York’s First Disability Pride Parade

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Cheering and chanting with signs held high, New Yorkers rolled, motored and marched down Broadway on Sunday in the city’s first Disability Pride parade.

It has been a busy month for city parades. Two weeks ago, the annual Gay Pride parade came on the heels of the Supreme Court’s gay-marriage decision, and on Friday a ticker-tape parade honored the U.S. women’s soccer team.

While Sunday’s parade, which attracted about 3,000 people, was relatively small, disabled people and their advocates said the event was a public celebration for a community that often remains hidden and invisible.
Disability pride parades have been held in cities including Philadelphia and Chicago, and city officials said that the New York parade will be an annual event. About 800,000 New Yorkers are disabled, according to advocacy group Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York.

On Sunday morning, the hip-hop duo 4 Wheel City, both of whom use wheelchairs due to gun-violence injuries, warmed up the crowd.

"We say four, you say wheels," they rapped from a stage in Manhattan's Madison Square Park.

"Four!" one yelled.

"Wheels!" responded the crowd.

Emmanuel Ford, in red, walking with his mother Drew, on the right, and friend Jacob Brandt. PHOTO: PETER J. SMITH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

After remarks from Mayor Bill de Blasio and other public officials, the parade traveled down Broadway, with former U.S. Senator Tom Harkin, who sponsored the Americans with Disabilities Act, serving as grand marshal.

Sophie Wallace and her mother, Jane Wallace, of Washington Heights, watched from the sidelines. "She is so proud to have a group to identify with," said Jane Wallace. "It never occurred to her there would be a parade in her honor."

Sophie, 22, has developmental disabilities and is bipolar, her mother said, but she has a life: She rides the subway, has friends and works at an animal shelter.
Seeing people with various disabilities gathered together was unusual, said Alex Elegudin, president of advocacy group Wheeling Forward. “The is probably the only place you ever see every facet of the community come together,” said Mr. Elegudin, 31, who has a spinal-cord injury from a car accident. “We’re often divided by diagnosis.”

“If you love the ADA, clap your hands,” sang students and others, to the tune of “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” on a balloon-adorned, City University of New York float.

While the atmosphere was largely celebratory, those in the parade said problems remain, particularly surrounding employment, housing, discrimination and accessibility.

“We’re going through a big fight in transporting folks to schools,” said Johnnie Stevens, whose 12-year-old son has autism.

On one stretch of Broadway, friends Kathleen Downes and Nick Holzthum, both of whom use wheelchairs, took a break from the parade.

“Generally speaking, people with disabilities tend to be underrepresented in diversity initiatives, and it’s exciting to see our community celebrated,” said the 22-year-old Ms. Downes, an incoming graduate student at Adelphi University who has cerebral palsy.

The parade arrived at a slightly transformed Union Square: The number of wheelchair-accessible portable toilets was roughly equal to the number of conventional ones, and sign-language interpreters were widespread.

Victor Calise, commissioner of the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities, wheeled around the square grinning and offering high-fives, including to Maximus Wong, a member of the sled-hockey team that Mr. Calise coaches.

Asked about his favorite part of the parade, 7-year-old Maximus didn’t mention disabilities.

“I like waving to people and saying hi,” said Maximus, sitting in a wheelchair with his little sister in his lap. “I’m excited.”
Father, 2 Children Killed In Fiery Crash On Southern State Parkway

July 12, 2015 7:55 PM

BAY SHORE, N.Y. (CBSNewYork/AP) — A man and his two children died early Sunday morning when they were trapped in their car after another vehicle rear-ended them on a Long Island Parkway roadway. The man's wife escaped and survived.

The man was identified as Ancio Ostane, 37, of St. Albans, Queens. His children were Andy, 8, and Sephora, 4, CBS2's Hazel Sanchez reported.

They were traveling in a 2005 Toyota westbound on the Southern State Parkway near exit 41 in Bay Shore around 1:30 a.m. Sunday. They were returning home from a family gathering in Central Islip, Newsday reported.

"My children will be in my heart forever," Bouaz-Ostane told 1010 WINS' Carol D'Auria. "My dear, humble husband — no words. Great guy."

Ancio Ostane was a professor at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn.

The driver of the BMW, Oneil Sharpe Jr., fled, police said. He was later arrested at the home of the car's registered owner on charges of driving while intoxicated and leaving the scene of an accident.

"I don't care what they do to that person because that's not a human being to begin with," Bouaz-Ostane said. "All I want is my family, and that's impossible."

Neighbor Robert Williams is stunned and heartbroken about the tragic loss of his neighbors.

"We wave we say hi," Williams remembers. "We see him cutting the grass the kids running around. It's kinda sad. It's really sad."

A stretch of the highway was shut down for hours Sunday morning, but just before 8 a.m., police had cleared the scene and traffic was moving again.

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Charles Winick, Author Who Challenged Views on Drugs and Gender, Dies at 92

By SAM ROBERTS  JULY 12, 2015

Charles Winick, a professor of anthropology and sociology who wrote a book bemoaning the blurring of lines between the sexes and who challenged prevailing views about the dangers of drug abuse, died on July 4 in Manhattan. He was 92.

His death was confirmed by his brother, Dr. Jesse Winick.

The author of 20 books and hundreds of articles, Professor Winick taught at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, but he augmented ivory tower philosophizing with fieldwork in some of society’s seamier venues.

Discussing his “The New People: Desexualization in American Life” in 1968, a Chicago Tribune columnist wrote that he “deserves, if nothing else, respect for self-sacrifice” because he “subjected himself to endless B movies, comic strips, mass magazines, TV series, fashion trade papers, rock music, fulsome best-sellers, second-rate musicals, and whatever other aspects of our pop culture he felt it necessary to observe in order to document his thesis that ‘unisex’ is here.”

Professor Winick feared that America, following the path of ancient
Greece and Rome, had been devolving into a neutered society. He insisted that “equality does not mean equivalence, and a difference is not deficiency.”

“Archaeologists of the future may regard a radical dislocation of sexual identity as the single most important event of our time,” he wrote.

As evidence, he warned that “sexy automatized” Barbie dolls were bad role models for marriage and motherhood in the 1960s and affirmed in a 1994 edition of his book that “the increase of teenage pregnancy has roughly corresponded with Barbie’s popularity.”

He noticed that marital beds were getting wider and men were hugging more in public. (Comparing the prolonged embrace between Bill Clinton and Al Gore at the 1993 inauguration with the cultural climate in 1968 when the book was first published, he wrote, “How unlikely it would have been for male hugging to have occurred at the Nixon inauguration.”)

A review in The New York Times concluded that Professor Winick’s book scored “some valid points,” but found “his forecasts of doom a trifle overwrought.”

His views on drug addiction provoked controversy. He said that opiates “are usually harmless, but they are taken under unsatisfactory conditions” (including malnutrition and infection), that most heroin addicts eventually outgrow their addiction, that many addicts with sufficient financial resources can function normally, and that those who cannot should be treated as patients with a chronic disease.

Tackling the previously taboo topic of drug addiction among musicians, he organized a public forum at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1957, established a clinic to treat addicted musicians and participated in a discussion with Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington and others that was transcribed and published in Playboy in 1960 as a precursor to the magazine’s interview feature.
"The substances they imbibed," he later wrote of the musicians, "may have been instrumental in liberating these artists mentally from preoccupation with their life circumstances and subsequently may have provided the opportunity for these artists to tap into their utmost level of creativity."

Professor Winick was also a pioneer in applying a sociologist’s tools to jury selection, advising lawyers on whom to choose or reject in murder cases against Jean Harris and Claus von Bülow and in First Amendment suits.

He also advised a presidential commission that recommended in 1970 that criminal laws against pornography be abolished — a suggestion that President Richard Nixon rejected.

Charles Winick was born in the Bronx on Aug. 4, 1922, the son of Jewish immigrants from Russia. His father, David, was a house painter. His mother was the former Sadie Brussel. During the Depression, he recalled, his parents and four brothers were featured in The New York Times Neediest Cases campaign, and the reporter who interviewed them in their two-bedroom apartment was so appalled by their circumstances that he gave them his own overcoat.

Professor Winick graduated from City College in 1941, before turning 19. Enlisting in the Army that year, he served first in London, assigned to military intelligence at Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s headquarters, and then at a secret post at Fort Hunt, Va., where German-speaking American soldiers were recruited to interrogate valuable prisoners of war, including spymasters, submariners and scientists (among them Wernher von Braun).

He remained in the reserves and retired as a lieutenant colonel and continued his education, earning a doctorate from New York University.

He married the former Mariann Pezzella, who co-wrote a number of his books and articles. She died in 2006. Besides his brother Jesse, he is survived
by two children, Raphael and Laura Winick, and another brother, Martin.

Professor Winick first applied his analytical skills as research director for the Anti-Defamation League, the New York State Narcotics Commission and J. Walter Thompson, the advertising agency.

His books include “Dictionary of Anthropology,” “The Television Experience: What Children See” (written with his wife) and “The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States” (with Paul M. Kinsie). In “The Lively Commerce,” based on more than 2,000 interviews with prostitutes, he found that they were often suicidal and made little more money than they could doing clerical work.

But his recurring theme was the disappearing line between men and women. He recalled an amateur astronomer who told Albert Einstein that she studied Venus every night through her telescope. Einstein peered through the scope, but identified the planet as Jupiter.

“You certainly are brilliant to be able to tell the sex of a planet at such a great distance,” the woman said.

“It is increasingly difficult to tell the sex of many things, at almost any distance, in America today,” Professor Winick wrote. He said scientists had warned that radical changes in sex roles might lead to the end of the species.

“This does not mean that we, the New People, will fail to survive or we are unable to create a viable substitute for rejected lifestyles,” he concluded. “It does suggest that the new tone of life, a bitter, metallic existence, may simply not be worth the price of enduring it.”

A version of this article appears in print on July 13, 2015, on page A17 of the New York edition with the headline: Charles Winick, Author Who Challenged Views on Drugs and Gender, Dies at 92.
Federal Audits Of Medicare Advantage Reveal Widespread Overcharges

By FRED SCHULTE

Government audits just released as the result of a lawsuit detail widespread billing errors in private Medicare Advantage health plans going back years, including overpayments of thousands of dollars a year for some patients.

Since 2004, private insurers that run Medicare Advantage plans, an increasingly popular alternative to traditional Medicare, have been paid using a risk score (http://www.publicintegrity.org/2014/06/04/16865/low-risk-scores-web) calculated for each patient who joins. Medicare expects to pay higher rates for sicker people and less for those in good health.

But the internal audits, never before made public, provide striking new evidence of billing mistakes — mostly overcharges — in the Medicare Advantage plans. Four of the audits were recently obtained by the Center for Public Integrity through a court order (https://www.documentedia.org/documents/2006290-faa-order.html) in a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit (https://www.publicintegrity.org/2014/06/27/16860/center-sues-efforts-make-medicare-advantage-files-public).

The audits involve four health plans: an Aetna Health Inc. plan in New Jersey, Independence Blue Cross in the Philadelphia area; Lovelace Health Plan in Albuquerque, N.M., and a Care Plus plan in South Florida. Care Plus is a division of Humana, Inc.

Last month, the Center for Public Integrity reported on (http://www.publicintegrity.org/2015/06/17/17491/audit-feds-overpaid-half-patients-unitedhealth-medicare-advantage-plan) a fifth such audit at PacifiCare in Washington state, an arm of giant UnitedHealth Group, the nation's largest Medicare Advantage operator.

In all five audits, two sets of auditors inspected medical records for a sample of 201 patients at each plan for 2007. If the medical chart didn't document that a patient had the illnesses the plan reported, Medicare asked for a refund. Auditors also gave plans credit for underpayments they discovered.

Among the findings:

- Medicare paid the wrong amount for 654 of the 1,005 patients in the sample, an error rate of nearly two-thirds. The payments were too high for 579 patients and too low for 75 of them. The total payment error topped $3.3 million in the sample.

- Auditors concluded that risk scores were too high for more than 800 of the 1,005 patients, which in many cases, but not all, led to hefty overpayments. Medicare's annual payment for more than 200 patients was at least $5,000 higher than merited, according to the audits.

- Auditors could not confirm one-third of the 3,950 medical conditions the health plans reported, mostly because records lacked "sufficient documentation of a diagnosis." The names of the medical conditions were redacted by federal officials.

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS, which conducted the audits, had no comment.

None of the health plans would discuss the audit findings. Aetna, in a statement, said
the company had "raised a number of questions and concerns" regarding the results and was "awaiting a response from CMS."

Clare Krusing, a spokeswoman for America’s Health Insurance Plans, the insurance industry's primary trade group, said the audits "overstated" the payment errors. Health plans have since improved their record keeping and offer better care for people with chronic health conditions than traditional Medicare, Krusing said.

"The evidence is overwhelmingly clear that these programs (Medicare Advantage) deliver the right care for beneficiaries," she said.

The records are coming to light at a time of rapid expansion — and consolidation — in the Medicare Advantage market. Enrollment has neared 17 million, about 1 in 3 people eligible for Medicare. Last week, Aetna announced plans to buy competitor Humana for $37 billion.

But the industry also is drawing scrutiny over the accuracy of risk-based payments—and a penchant for secrecy.

The Center for Public Integrity first reported last year that billions (http://www.publicintegrity.org/2014/06/04/aetna-taxpayer-billions-risk-based-payments) of tax dollars are wasted every year due to plans that appear to exaggerate how sick their patients are, a practice known as "upcoding."

The government audits, known as Risk Adjustment Data Validation, or RADV, are the government’s primary tool for catching these sorts of billing mistakes and holding the industry accountable.

Yet the process has proven unwieldy at best, partly due to a complex and lengthy appeals process and partly to indecision over how much the health plans should refund to the government.

It’s not clear how the five audits were settled because CMS officials have refused to release these records.

The five RADV audits were launched in 2008, but findings weren’t issued until August 2012, when CMS officials sent each plan a form letter detailing the amount of the overpayment and the plan’s extensive appeal rights. CMS has refused to make public the status of the audits—or even how many total RADV audits have been conducted. CMS cites an exemption to the Freedom of Information Act that shields “trade secrets.”

This stance has largely concealed Medicare Advantage billing records. It wasn’t until April 15, 2011, that CMS announced it would release minimal billing data annually. Doing so would "inform the public on how their tax dollars are being spent," the agency said at the time, citing President Obama’s January 2009 Memo on Transparency and Open Government (https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/memoranda_f/c2010/mem-12-01.pdf).

But much to the chagrin of some researchers, CMS has never expanded on what is released, even though it has made public a huge cache of billing data and audits centering on thousands of doctors, hospitals and other medical suppliers.

"It’s astonishing," said Brian Biles, a professor at George Washington University who successfully sued CMS to win release of the limited billing data now available. "They are dumping huge amounts of data in other areas. Medicare Advantage is now 30 percent of the Medicare program." (Biles assisted the Center for Public Integrity with its 2014 analysis(http://www.publicintegrity.org/health/medicare/medicare-advantage-memos.pdf) of that data.

Timothy Layton, a Harvard Medical School researcher who recently co-authored a paper (http://www.bjog.org/epaper/pv492421) on health plan upcoding, said scholars "are definitely hindered" by the lack of data. For instance, researchers can’t examine individual risk scores and the various medical conditions that raise and lower them, he said.
"Without the ability to answer these questions, we can keep pointing out how big the overpayment to MA (Medicare Advantage) is, but we can never really provide the optimal solution to the problem," Layton said.

David Himmelstein, a physician and professor in the CUNY School of Public Health at Hunter College who supports a single payer medical system, agreed.

"Medicare publishes detailed data on almost every doctor and hospital that gets paid a penny, but it leaves the public — and researchers — almost completely in the dark about the giant Medicare Advantage plans that will collect more than $150 billion from Medicare this year," he said.

Still, Medicare Advantage insurers are facing calls for closer scrutiny of their operations. In May, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, wrote [http://www.publicintegrity.org/2015/05/29/17247/grassley-attorney-general-lynn-c收紧 medicare-advantage-overbilling] to Attorney General Loretta Lynch and CMS administrator Andrew Slavitt asking how many risk score fraud investigations had been conducted over the past five years and their results. He's still waiting for an answer.

"Sen. Grassley continues to expect responses to his letters and will continue to press for responses," said Grassley spokeswoman Jill Gerber. "This is an important issue involving a large amount of taxpayer money".

In a separate letter, Sen. Claire McCaskill, the senior Democrat on the Senate Aging Committee, asked [http://www.publicintegrity.org/2015/05/29/17229/mccaskill-medicare-advantage-fraud-must-be-investigated] CMS officials to advise her of government efforts to curb Medicare Advantage billing abuses.

"After meeting with CMS we have continued concerns about the level of oversight taking place with respect to Medicare Advantage plans and will continue working to increase oversight and accountability in this area," said McCaskill spokesman Drew Pusateri.

This piece comes from the Center for Public Integrity [http://www.publicintegrity.org/], a nonpartisan, nonprofit investigative news organization. For more, follow the center on Twitter @Publici [https://twitter.com/Publici], or sign up for its newsletter [http://www.publicintegrity.org/email-subscribe].
Puerto Rico crisis strengthens island’s ties with Central Florida

By Steven Lemongello
Orlando Sentinel

JULY 11, 2015, 9:23 PM

Like many Puerto Ricans, John Quiñones already had family living in Osceola County when he arrived in Central Florida as a teenager more than 30 years ago.

"I think my story is very similar to many Puerto Ricans who came here in the 1980s," said Quiñones, a former Osceola County commissioner. "You had some relatives waiting for you."

The current financial crisis in Puerto Rico is sure to spark a new migration of islanders moving to Central Florida, said Quiñones. The area already is home to about 271,000 Puerto Ricans in Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties.

That’s more than 14 percent of the total population of those three counties, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau estimates in 2013.

In the last decade, Central Florida "has become the mecca for Puerto Rican migration — more than New York," said Jorge Duany, professor of anthropology at Florida International University.

In Osceola County in particular, the 76,000 residents of Puerto Rican descent make up more than a quarter of the population.

The area’s history with the Puerto Rican community is different from that of other areas of the U.S., said Duany.

Puerto Ricans were made U.S. citizens in 1917 — just in time to be drafted for World War I — and could travel freely to and from the continental U.S., mostly for seasonal agricultural work in the Northeast. The Puerto Rican government discouraged work in the South because of racial discrimination, Duany said.

But then came the Magic Kingdom.

"The opening of Disney World was the main impetus for the massive wave of Puerto Ricans settling in the Orlando area," Duany said. Their motivation was a familiar story, he said. They came here for jobs, "a safe lifestyle and the weather."

Real-estate companies also made a major push in Puerto Rico to sell lots in developments such as Poinciana and Buenaventura Lakes.

Probably the key recruiter was Landstar Homes, which lured hundreds of families to Buenaventura Lakes through aggressive marketing in Puerto Rico and the company’s sales offices in New York and Chicago, which have sizable Hispanic populations. Landstar even paid up to $500 at the time to fly customers to Central Florida.

"I remember living in Puerto Rico seeing little advertising movies of Poinciana," Quiñones said. "They went to Puerto Rico to promote Central Florida. ... There was an active recruitment that went on with not only [private
companies], but also counties."

The population growth has had political implications as well. Puerto Ricans in Central Florida area tend to be Democratic-leaning. In Osceola County, Democrats took the lead in voter registration and control of the County Commission.

Democrats also have the edge in registered voters in Orange County.

That, in turn, has spurred Republicans to reach out to Hispanic voters and candidates — including Quiñones, who was also a GOP state representative.

During the past 10 years, the Great Recession and Puerto Rico's recent economic woes have led to a new migration of white-collar workers from the island, Quiñones said.

Even in 2000, more than half of all Puerto Rican workers in Central Florida were employed in administrative support, sales, professional, technical, and managerial occupations, according to a City University of New York study co-authored by Duany.

But recently "a lot of professionals, people with bachelor's degrees, they're just leaving the island because of the economic circumstances," Quiñones said. "It's a new wave of Puerto Ricans coming to Central Florida — and you're certainly going to see a lot of relatives of people already living here."

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New York Boricuas react to island’s crushing debt

Economic crisis is no shock to the 4.6 million Puerto Ricans who live in the U.S., more than 700,000 in NYC alone

July 13, 2015 5:00AM ET

by Kate Kilpatrick (/profiles/k/kate-kilpatrick.html)

@azuregilman (http://www.twitter.com/azureg)

Maria Guzmán, 63, from Puerto Rico when she was 6 years old. She visits the island every year and planned to retire there — she has a house in Guánica on the southern coast. But with the island facing economic crisis, those plans have changed.

“I don’t think so. I’m going upstate, not to Puerto Rico,” said Guzmán, standing outside her apartment in Bushwick, Brooklyn. “Every day, like 400 people leave Puerto Rico. Can’t nobody afford the food there. Everything is expensive.”

Guzmán said she has many family members in Puerto Rico, including her father, who moved back 12 years ago.

“My father’s about to pack up and come to New York again. He worked so many years here, went to Puerto Rico — that was his dream, buying his house, retired, being there — and he can’t even afford the medicine [anymore]. He’s 75 years old.”


But the economic crisis came as little surprise to the 4.6 million Puerto Ricans who live on the U.S. mainland, including more than 700,000 in New York City who, despite heavy migration flows to Florida in recent years, still make up the largest Puerto Rican population outside the island.

“Puerto Rico only exists when it becomes a problem and suddenly attention is galvanized in that area,” said Nelson Denis, an attorney, journalist, former New York State Assemblyman and author of the recent book War Against All Puerto Ricans (http://waragainstallpuertorican.com/).

“Doctors, teachers, they’re flying out to Miami like crazy. They don’t want to be there,” said César Fuentes, 73, a retired counselor standing outside El Cataño Community Garden while his friends played dominoes on 110th Street, aka Tito Puente Way. “What’s going to happen to a country like that? Doom.”

Puerto Rico faces regular electricity and water shortages, and high rates of poverty and crime. The government has implemented austerity measures to stave off financial crisis, including reducing pension payments, raising property and small business taxes, increasing
water and gas prices, and laying off government workers. Despite these measures, Puerto Rico's credit was downgraded to junk earlier this year, making borrowing extremely expensive. On July 1, the sales tax was raised from 7 percent to 11.5 percent — the highest in any U.S. state or territory.

"As a Nuyorican, my impression is that Puerto Rico is in the situation it's in right now due to the politics and the mismanagement of the funds that are being available for the island," said Fuentes, the retired counselor.

Others point to the country's troubled political status as a U.S. territory.

"Puerto Rico's been a colony since 1917, so anything that affects Puerto Rico is directly tied to the American system," said Marcos Dimas, executive director of the Puerto Rican workshops at the Julia de Burgos Cultural Arts Center (http://www.juliadeburgos.org/). "So what else can I say? I'm not a banker but I know that Puerto Rico is like a captive economy for the U.S."

Wherever the blame lies, the fallout is record migration from the island that has surpassed the rates of the 1950s. According to American Community Survey estimates, Puerto Rico has seen a net population loss of nearly 50,000 residents per year in recent years.

"'We are millions. And we are looking at the President and the candidate for President in the United States about the situation on our isle.'"

— María Cortés
Brooklyn resident

While earlier generations of Puerto Ricans settled in New York City and other northeastern cities, residents leaving the island these days tend to opt for central Florida, particularly Orlando. Jorge Duany, director of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University, has studied the Puerto Rican diaspora. According to Duany, Florida's Puerto Rican population (http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=las_hhfc) has grown from slightly more than 2 percent of all U.S. Puerto Ricans in 1960 to more than 18 percent in 2010, making Puerto Ricans the second largest Latino group in Florida after Cubans.
"They are going to Orlando, Florida; Texas ... I don't think the movement right now is to New York," said Jorge Ayala, 51, owner of the La Fonda Boricua restaurant in East Harlem. "After they finish whatever they’re studying the need to get out to get a better job or better salary or better opportunities in other places."

While New York is seeing fewer new arrivals from the island than other parts of the country, local Boricuas are nonetheless alarmed.

“It’s affected people who are from there and our relatives who are living over there,” said Michelle Centeno, president of the New York Chapter of the National Conference of Puerto Rican Women.

“We are suffering now ... the people who are living there and the people who are living here,” said María Cortés, 63, a part-time home aide in New York City. “We are still working and sending money to Puerto Rico to support all the family because they don't have no way to provide on our isle.”

According to the "Puerto Rico — A Way Forward" report (http://www.gdbpr.com/documents/PuertoRicoAWayForward.pdf), written by former IMF employees and released June 29, Puerto Rico’s economy has contracted at a rate of 1 percent a year for nearly a decade. It’s a reduction the authors of the report describe as “remarkable for an economy suffering neither civil strife nor overt financial crisis.”

The report says that only 40 percent of adults in Puerto Rico — versus 63 percent on the U.S. mainland — are employed or looking for work. “The rest are economically idle or working in the gray economy,” the report adds.

Hector Cordero, a professor in the School of Public Affairs at Baruch College, has researched the demographics of low-income families on the island.

“Clearly low-income people will be asked now to bear the brunt of the challenges and pay for what needs to be paid for — cuts in services and reduction in quality of services, higher fees, higher taxes in consumption,” he said.

Still, those on the island may need to rely on those on the mainland for not just economic and housing assistance but political mobilization, according to Angelo Falcón, president of the National Institute for Latino Policy, a nonpartisan policy center that focuses on Latino issues in the U.S.
"Ironically now the politicians in Puerto Rico who have themselves ignored the community here, the diaspora, in many ways, are now having to become very dependent on possibly the Puerto Ricans here in the U.S. stateside bringing attention to the problem of Puerto Rico," Falcón said.

José Calderón, president of the Hispanic Federation, a New York-based organization whose mission is to empower the Hispanic community, said Padilla’s announcement was a turning point that has compelled his and other organizations to focus attention on Puerto Rico.

"Like any Latino organization, our principal charge is what’s happening to Latinos in the United States and there are a multitude of issues… job creation, immigration, environment," Calderón said. "This has made this a top priority without a question."

The federation is busy organizing Latino and Puerto Rican leadership across the country to articulate a unified position on what the U.S. government response should be.

Meanwhile, New Yorkers like Cortés are figuring out how to make their own positions heard, perhaps at the ballot box.

"We have a very big populations of Puerto Ricans over here in the United States," said Cortés. "We are millions. And we are looking at the President and the candidate for President in the United States about the situation on our isle."
Some animals just aren’t that social. Like octopuses. They don’t live in groups. They don’t have big chatterfests like prairie dogs. They don’t write, they don’t call.

But new evidence shows that an octopus may signal its intentions when it is about to whomp another octopus.

David Scheel, a biologist at Alaska Pacific University; Peter Godfrey-Smith, a philosopher of science who has appointments at City University of New York and the University of Sydney; and Matthew Lawrence, an Australian diver, collaborated to record interactions between common Sydney octopuses off the Australian island of Tasmania.

Their method was to put cameras on the sea floor in areas where there were plenty of these octopuses and then comb through hours and hours of video.

They aren’t done yet, but Dr. Scheel presented some of their initial findings in Anchorage at the annual meeting last month of the Animal Behavior Society, and they have about two dozen examples of octopuses
signaling their aggressive intent.

He showed video of one octopus moving swiftly toward another as it made itself look taller and turned very dark. Octopuses have a remarkable ability to change their coloration to blend in with their surroundings, like chameleons. But this color change is the opposite. A darkened octopus stands out against a sandy bottom like an avenging cephalopod.

Dr. Scheel said there were hints in previous octopus studies of postures and behaviors like the ones he and his colleagues recorded. But there is very little evidence of any signals between octopuses.

He said that he and his colleagues had documented a number of signals of aggression — standing tall by rising up on the tentacles, turning dark, climbing onto higher (underwater) ground, spreading its tentacles and raising its mantle, which is the main part of an octopus body.

Most of the interactions don’t culminate in an actual struggle. Dr. Scheel said that although they were still analyzing the video, the signals seem to say: “I’m this big. I’m this tall. And I’m certain that I’m not going to back down.”

But that signal could be a way of avoiding a fight. The target octopus could read the signals and decide that keeping his spot on a pile of shells is just not worth it.

How many of the signals occur seemed to depend on how intense the encounter is. If all are displayed, then a fight is about to happen.

But sometimes, two octopuses just grow dark, slap tentacles and then settle down where they are. Perhaps it’s an octopus treaty, with both sides laying down their many arms.
ASU professor says city planning is key to combating urban heat

Posted: July 10, 2015

In the opening weeks of this summer thousands of people across the globe succumbed to heat-related deaths, and more loss is imminent. While Pakistan, India and Europe have been hit the hardest, the U.S. is not immune to the ravages of extreme heat and, like the rest of the world, is expected to face increasingly dire fallout in the years to come.

New findings by researchers at the City University of New York and the National Center for Atmospheric Research show the number of Americans exposed to extreme heat could quadruple by 2070.

Not only is climate change amping up the heat, but burgeoning urbanization is centering people in dense, built-up areas where heat is often at its worst.

Inside Climate News recently reported on the situation and asked Arizona State University sociologist Sharon Harlan to offer insight.

Harlan, who has done long-term research on the human effects of urban heat, emphasized the need for advanced planning that accounts for the most vulnerable populations, like the poor, elderly and sick, who are more inclined toward heat-related health issues. In addition, the poor often have homes ill equipped to handle high heat or are unable to afford air conditioning.

She promoted city planning that includes shade trees and landscaping that reduces temperatures, as well as energy-efficient buildings that deflect heat.

"We need to look toward the future and do the kind of planning to change lifestyles and address climate change issues," said, Harlan, a professor in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. "A lot of what the future holds involves a public policy discussion and everyone's recognition of what they need to do to protect themselves."
This snail-eating fish was named after the Obamas

By Richard Schiffman (http://grist.org/author/richard-schiffman/) on 11 Jul 2015

During their final years in office, presidents often become preoccupied with their legacy, worrying about how they will be remembered by future generations. In case such thoughts are troubling Barack Obama, Grist would like to reassure the president that his place in history is assured.

In addition to serving as our first black president, under whose watch the United States recovered from a severe financial crisis and mandated health insurance for all of its citizens, Obama recently had a species of fish named after him.

*Teleogramma obamaorum*, a small snail-eating ciclid was discovered in 2011 in the lower Congo River by biologist Liz Alter of the City University of New York and Melanie Stiassny, of the Department of Ichthyology at the American Museum of Natural History. In April, the team named the new species after Barack and Michelle Obama to taxonomically honor the president’s commitment to the economic development of Africa, and the first lady’s campaign to train more women scientists.

So what is so special about this new Obama fish?

“T. obamaorum, is distinguished by numerous morphological and ecological attributes,” the authors offer helpfully in the abstract to their study (http://digitallibrary.amnh.org/dspace/handle/2246/6586), “including the lack of
dorsoventral head and body depression, absence of sexual dichromatism, and features of laterosensory anatomy, pharyngeal and gut morphology, and dietary preference."

Talk about eerie similarities!

The White House has not yet responded to Grist’s request for a comment on the naming of the Obama fish. *T. obamaorum* is not the first newly discovered species named after the 44th president. There is also a trapdoor spider named after Obama (*Aptostichus barackobamai*) in recognition of the president’s ability to protect himself from the Republican Congress while entrapping them, and there is a lichen native to California’s Santa Rosa Island, (*Calopla ca obamae*) to honor his support for environmental protection and education.

And let’s not forget the small insect-snaring Cretaceous lizard (*Obamadon gracilis*). The *Boston Globe* reported (http://www.boston.com/news/science/blogs/science-in-mind/2012/12/10/yale-scientists-name-obamadon-slender-jawed-lizard-after-the-president/8VELtuwNDxWjbOcI5YphM/blog.html) that the Harvard paleontologists waited until after the last presidential election to file the name, since they didn’t want to jinx candidate Obama by linking him with an extinct creature.

Up to 24,000 new species are identified — and assigned a Latin name — every year. Obama is not the first government official to be so honored. In 2005, former Cornell University entomologists named three new species of slime mold beetle from southern Mexico after President George Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (*Agathidium bushi, Agathidium cheneyi*, and *Agathidium rumsfeldi*.) These peace-loving creatures could not be reached for comment on whether they appreciated being named after the architects of the Iraq War.

Naming new species after politicians might be viewed as a gimmick to garner coverage for otherwise snooze-able scientific discoveries. But Obama-fish namer Liz Alter told Grist that she hopes that it will help draw attention to a larger issue.

“Tropical freshwater habitats are some of the most endangered in the world,” says Alter. “The Congo River in particular is a little explored library of evolutionary diversity. There are an extraordinary number of unique lifeforms like the Obama fish that live only in this place. But the habitat is under threat from climate change, overfishing, and a major new proposed dam. We’re hoping that discovering and cataloging this extraordinary wealth of life will help us to protect it.”

Thousands on New York payroll make below ‘living wage’

By Carl Campanile
July 13, 2015 | 5:59am

Gov. Andrew Cuomo
Photo: Chad Rachman

State workers may be better off flipping burgers.

Gov. Cuomo, who is pushing to raise the minimum wage for fast-food workers, oversees a government work force in which more than 15,000 employees make less than a $15-an-
hour “living wage,” a Post review of payroll records reveals.

Some workers make as a little as $8.75 per hour, the minimum wage currently set by the state, records kept by Comptroller Tom DiNapoli’s office show.

Among them were some aides at the Parks Department, as well as cleaner trainees at facilities for the developmentally disabled.

Student interns at agencies typically were paid between minimum wage and $10 per hour.

A nursing assistant at the New York State Veterans’ Homes, a nursing home in upstate Oxford, made $10 an hour, records show.

Campus-security assistants for City University of New York make as little as $11.47. CUNY is considered a state institution and largely financed by Albany as well as student tuition.

Lifeguards at state beaches make $12.77 an hour, the records showed.

More than 200,000 workers are on the state payroll.

Restaurant owners accused Cuomo of unfairly singling out the fast-food industry while overlooking his own state workers.

“This entire process has been nothing but a show of smoke and mirrors from the start,” said Christin Fernandez, spokeswoman for the National Restaurant Association.

“Governor Cuomo claims he wants ‘fairness for all,’ but targeting a single segment of a single industry not only leaves hundreds of thousands of other hardworking New Yorkers behind but sends the message loud and clear that New York is closed for business.”

“Maybe the governor should look within his own ranks before he attacks an industry that’s giving folks across the state a foothold into the work force and the opportunity to grow their careers.”

Labor advocates are pushing the state to boost the minimum wage to $15 an hour, which they consider a “living wage.”

Other cities, including Los Angeles and Seattle, have raised their minimum wages.

In New York, Albany sets the minimum wage for all parts of the state.

In May, Cuomo set up a wage board to consider raising the starting pay for fast-food workers after the Republican-run Senate opposed his bid to boost the minimum wage to
$11.50 in the city and $10.50 for the rest of the state.

Under current law, the minimum wage is scheduled to go to $9 on Dec. 31.

While applauding Cuomo’s push to boost the wages of 60,000 fast-food workers in the city, labor advocates said he must also practice what he preaches with his own government work force.

“The state needs to raise the wages of workers directly under its control,” said James Parrott, director of the liberal Fiscal Policy Institute.

Parrott said his group is recommending Cuomo set aside funds in next year’s budget to raise pay for thousands of low-wage social workers employed by state contractors.

He noted Mayor de Blasio and the City Council set aside $25 million to increase wages for social-service workers employed by city contractors.

The Cuomo administration said it was concerned about raising the minimum wage for all.

“The governor agrees that all minimum-wage workers are underpaid, hence his determination to increase that wage across the board this year,” it said.

The fast-food wage board will meet July 22.
New York City is changing its bail requirements. City officials announced this week that starting next year, many people accused of nonviolent crimes and misdemeanors will no longer have to pay bail. Instead, the low-level offenders will be under court supervision until their trial. The city says this program would reduce the number of people awaiting trial on Rikers Island. Joining us now is Karin Martin. She's professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. Welcome.

KARIN MARTIN: Hi.

GOODWYN: So what brought about this change to the bail system in New York City, and why specifically are we focused on Rikers?

MARTIN: We're focused on Rikers because it has the - an unfortunately-long history of horrible abuses of people, people dying and being injured and unfortunately, a lot of people have been there just awaiting trial. So essentially, Rikers is an excellent example of failing to save jail for people who are convicted, as opposed to people who have just been accused. So the changes in New York are coming about because there's something of a trend happening nationwide. We're realizing that we can't afford, both financially and kind of morally, the horrible impacts of mass incarceration. And New York is a great place to start with this type of reform.

GOODWYN: So what exactly will they replace bail with?

MARTIN: Yeah, there's lots of good options. So in New York specifically, they're going to be doing things like having people just get text reminders, offering people mental health and substance abuse treatment. The idea is that as opposed to making a person who tends to be more often than not poor pay money that they don't have, you do something else. The goal is just to get somebody back to court, right. And so there's lots of other ways to do that.

GOODWYN: I mean, explain a little bit more to me how it would work. They would text somebody, and you'd text back and that's how they'd keep track of where you are?

MARTIN: Right, well, the idea is that you just want somebody to come back to court. That is the point of bail. And so if somebody is low-risk to themselves, low-risk to society and they want themselves to be done and over with this, you know, incident, then you can just remind somebody to come and that will happen. So it could just be a text reminder - don't forget your court date. This is when it is. This is where you show up. And a lot of times that actually works quite well.
GOODWYN: Is this part of a trend against bail in this country?

MARTIN: I think it is perhaps the tip of a trend against bail. Advocates have been arguing that we need bail reform for quite a long time.

GOODWYN: Why reform? What has been wrong with the bail system up to this point?

MARTIN: It is extremely unfair. Essentially, what you're doing is taking people who have zero dollars and asking them to pay you dollars to preserve their own liberty. In New York, it's something like 45,000 people per year are detained on bail. And of those, 85 percent have a bail that they can't afford to pay, even though it's less than $500. And we have to keep in mind that in New York City, the cost of jail is something like $400 - at least $400 a day, so the math quickly does not add up.

GOODWYN: Which is why I'm wondering, you know, why does the system do it this way? How does the system benefit from the current way of asking for bail?

MARTIN: I think that it's kind of a version of inertia. I think, you know, the idea was that the most important thing we have in our society and culture is money, so if you take that away from somebody or threaten to take it away from them, then you can compel them to do what you want them to do, which is to return to court. And then we have an industry that this set up - often, you know, in any downtown area, you see the bail bondsmen is right next-door to the court. And so we have an industry that has a lot of entrenched interest to keep the current system alive and well.

GOODWYN: Karin Martin is a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. Karin, thank you.
July 12, 2015 9:00 p.m.

The Would-Be High-School Valedictorian in His Cap and Gown

By Alexis Sverdloff

"I'm going to Brooklyn College next year as part of the Macaulay Honors College." Photo: Bobby Doherty

Benjamin Karasik, Student

Congratulations! What are you graduating from? High school. I'm valedictorian — well, not really. My school actually doesn't do that stuff, but if they did, I would be. I had the highest GPA: a 4.0, a 96-point-something. I'm going to Brooklyn College next year as part of the Macaulay Honors College.

Would you ever live anywhere other than New York? Maybe France. I lived there when I was in middle school, in the Charente-Maritime region. I liked the fresh air, and the stars, and the quiet nights. And I loved snails.

Big summer plans? I'm probably going to Russia to stay with my grandmother, who's a really old-fashioned babushka type of lady, for a few weeks in a small house in the middle of the woods, without internet, without TV. I want to spend some time in nature before college.
Court Observers Learn Stories Behind New York’s Jaywalkers and Subway Scufflers

By ALAN FEUER    JULY 10, 2015

When Michael Gayed, a street vendor, appeared in Manhattan criminal court last month accused of violating Subsection 1-05(b) of Section 56 of the Rules of New York City, the person who spoke with him in most detail about the charges he was facing was not the judge, the prosecutor or even his own lawyer. It was a tall, bald man named Robert Gangi, who at the conclusion of the hearing followed Mr. Gayed from the dreary room at 111 Centre Street and approached him in a hallway.

“So,” Mr. Gangi said, sidling up and taking out a notebook, “you wound up in court — for selling smoothies?”

“Yes, yes,” Mr. Gayed answered. “They put me in the handcuffs and everything.”

According to a court complaint, Mr. Gayed, 33, had parked his food cart just south of the American Museum of Natural History on May 2 when he was approached by Officer Matthew Caniglia of the 20th Precinct. The officer had observed Mr. Gayed selling “smoothie drinks” without “a permit issued by the New York City Parks Department.” Although Mr. Gayed
claimed that his boss — the official permit holder — was due to arrive in minutes, he was detained and subsequently issued a desk appearance ticket for his infraction of the law: unlawful vending in a park.

In 2014, 620,000 summonses and misdemeanor charges, including desk appearance tickets, were levied by the New York police, compelling the recipients — a group roughly the size of the population of Las Vegas — to make their way through the city’s lower court for infractions that ranged in severity from simple assault to jaywalking. Mr. Gangi’s advocacy group, the Police Reform Organizing Project, is trying to get beyond the sheer number of those violations to learn the stories of defendants, like Mr. Gayed. Last summer, the group established a court monitoring program that occasionally sent observers into the lower courts to watch proceedings and to speak with people charged with minor offenses. A couple of weeks ago, staffed by a crop of summer interns, the group restarted and expanded the endeavor.

As part of the expansion, the program’s volunteers — college students, freelance writers, criminal-justice activists — will spend at least two days a week over the next few months talking with lawbreakers like turnstile jumpers and bicyclists caught riding on the sidewalk. Mr. Gangi, who is something of an oral historian of petty crime, plans to publish the strangest of their tales in a new report — he issued one last summer — that promises to read like an issue of The Police Gazette as if edited by Kafka.

The monitoring program has not coincidentally ramped up at a moment when violent crime in New York has reached historic lows. Despite a recent uptick in homicides and shootings, the city’s crime rate remains remarkably far below its apex in the early 1990s and, in this atmosphere of relative security, the policy debate about policing has shifted away from felonies to less severe, quality-of-life crimes.

In April, Police Commissioner William J. Bratton issued a report,
“Broken Windows and Quality-of-Life Policing in New York City,” which defended cracking down on minor violations and argued that crime had decreased greatly in direct proportion to the issuances of summonses and misdemeanor arrests. One of his report’s key findings was that more than half of those brought up on misdemeanor charges in the city were potential recidivists with a prior record of more serious felony arrests.

Opposing Mr. Bratton that same month, Melissa Mark-Viverito, the City Council speaker, announced a proposal to decriminalize a host of small offenses, like public urination and being in a park after dark. And just three weeks ago, the Brooklyn district attorney’s office held an amnesty day at a church in Clinton Hill, at which hundreds of people with outstanding warrants for petty violations were allowed — by simply showing up — to wipe them off the books.

Soon, Mayor Bill de Blasio will join the conversation. In the coming weeks, he is expected to release his own plan about how to deal with minor crimes, answering the question of “how much policing is too much and how much is too little,” his criminal justice coordinator, Elizabeth Glazer, said.

“Our work is an effort to expose the tragic and sometimes absurd consequences of ‘broken windows’ policing,” Mr. Gangi said on a recent morning as he was mustering his troops outside the Manhattan courthouse. Among his volunteers was Charles Bachmann, a 20-year-old Hunter College student with a sardonic understanding of the criminal justice system.

“You always hear about the stupid stuff people are arrested for,” Mr. Bachmann said. “But it’s one thing to hear about it, and another thing to see it for yourself.”

What Mr. Bachmann and his fellow observers saw that day, and on those that followed, was a police blotter’s worth of small-bore offenses: people caught begging on the subway, or scuffling on the subway, or evading subway fares. One defendant had been called to court for the unlicensed
practice of massage. Another was issued a summons for driving with “a loud vehicular exhaust pipe.” Yet a third was arrested for opening a taxi door near the Port Authority bus terminal — illegal because he did so in expectation of a tip.

A few days after watching Mr. Gayed’s case on Centre Street, Mr. Gangi turned up at Criminal Court in Brooklyn for another round of observation. Sitting beside his teammates, he uncapped his pen and asked, “So, any white people yet?”

Several studies, including Mr. Bratton’s, have shown that most of the city’s enforcement of petty crime takes place in minority communities and focuses, in particular, on young black men. As an activist of nearly 50 years, Mr. Gangi has attacked this trend — most recently in the opinion pages of The Daily News — as one that inflicts “serious harm and hardship on New York’s most vulnerable citizens.” The police insist that they do not deploy officers based on a neighborhood’s racial composition, but rather in response to crime rates, emergency calls and residents’ complaints.

In either case, there were a few white people in the Brooklyn court that day — but only a few. One was a Kingsborough Community College student who had received a summons for smoking pot; his case was dismissed. Another was a Russian woman arrested on an assault charge. Exactly what happened was unclear; the acoustics in the cavernous rooms make monitoring difficult. She pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of disorderly conduct and was sentenced to time served.

A vast majority of the cases the monitors observed were disposed of in similar fashion. Both police officials and policing experts say that nearly 80 percent of misdemeanor cases are either found to be legally deficient or result in a sentence of time served (which could be a night in jail), an outright dismissal or an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal, which means that the charge will be officially expunged if the defendant stays out
of trouble for the next six months.

While only 20 percent of such cases actually lead to jail time or a fine, Edward D. Mullins, the president of the city's Sergeants Benevolent Association, said they were worth pursuing. “We know that minor crimes can lead to other crimes,” Sergeant Mullins said. “The Son of Sam serial killer was captured on a parking violation.”

Still, after watching dozens of defendants walk into the courtroom, only to walk out again, with no perceptible penalty, Mr. Bachmann, the Hunter student, wondered what the point was.

“It’s confusing at first,” he said, “until you realize that the process itself is the punishment.”

For Mr. Gayed, the process meant that the Manhattan district attorney’s office gave him a chance to settle the smoothie matter by performing community service. He rejected the offer, one of the few people the observers saw make that choice.

When Mr. Gangi asked him why, Mr. Gayed said, “Because I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Even though he could face at least three months in jail, he preferred to take his case to trial.

A version of this article appears in print on July 12, 2015, on page B1 of the New York edition with the headline: Their Days in Court.
Petition in Support of Michelle Fine Exceeds Expectations

By NATALIE HEARD HACKETT
July 13, 2015 at 6:25 AM

MONTCLAIR, NJ - More than 2,000 people have signed an online petition in support of community leader Michelle Fine.

Over the past few months, there has been a battle brewing in Montclair between neighbors. In what began as concerned parents and educators speaking up about their concerns over the PARCC assessment, has now turned into an all-out battle between groups that is playing out in the public eye.

Fine, a college professor, led up at the forefront of the issue when she co-founded the group Montclair Cares About Kids (MCAS) and began speaking up at Montclair Board of Education meetings. This resulted in Fine being part of a growing opt-out movement that sent shockwaves across the country, bringing attention to the concerns of parents nationwide with the PARCC assessment. Many in New Jersey were in disbelief when the final numbers revealed that over 47 percent of Montclair families opted their children out of the PARCC, the highest in the state of New Jersey. Another group, Montclair Kids First (MKF), emerged towards the end of the school year and became publicly critical of Fine and her message.

MKF supporters state that they were not critical of Fine, but merely wanted to provide transparency and a balanced viewpoint of the repercussions of the opt-out movement, such as withholding of funding. Although Education Commissioner Hespe has publicly stated that withholding of funding is a possibility for districts with high opt-out rates, New Jersey legislators have responded with proposed bills to stop that from happening.

MKF, which began as an anonymous group with only legal representation revealing themselves, has now emerged with key community leaders representing the group. MKF says on their website that they are a coalition of Montclair parents and residents who believe deeply in the promise of Public Education and in Montclair's Public School system. They also state that they want to empower every Montclair parent with a strong voice to provide solutions and supporting initiatives that strengthen the public schools.
In addition to mailers being sent to every Montclair household, MKF had filed an FOIA request to obtain over 400 of Fine’s emails. These emails were released by MKF to the community.

Lynn Fedele of Montclair wrote in support of Fine saying, "Michelle is a dedicated, talented educator and researcher. It is deplorable the lengths some will go to in order to limit free speech and stop the spreading of truth."

Councilman Sean Spiller has also come under fire from MKF for his position on the Board of School Estimate. MKF has filed a lawsuit and stated that they believe Spiller’s affiliation with the NJEA is a conflict of interest. Spiller and his attorneys disagree and the case is currently in litigation.

In response to what some community members perceive as an attack on Fine, over two thousand people have signed a petition in support of her. Diane Ravitch has also written about the conflict between MCAS and MKF on her blog.

Some of Fine’s supporters are calling for legal action to be taken. Donald Malone of South Orange said, "Legal action must also be taken against those who have misused the FOIA or perhaps legislation is needed to prohibit its misuse."

With the online petition emerging sometime around July 8, it has surpassed the intended goal of 500, thus collecting over 2,000 signatures.

The message on the petition reads:

"Open letter in support of Dr. Michelle Fine:

We are concerned educators and scholars from around the country, voicing support for our colleague, Distinguished Professor Dr. Michelle Fine of The Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

When, along with other Montclair, New Jersey, parents, students, teachers (organized as Montclair Cares About Schools - MCAS), union activists and civil rights activists, Michelle raised critical questions about the validity of a new k-12 testing regime, she became a target of attacks by corporate education reformers who supported the new testing regimen.*

The attacks that Michelle is now enduring lend new meaning to the notion of “high stakes.” A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was filed anonymously for more than 1,000 of Michelle’s emails from her City University of New York email address. Recently, a slanderous video was made from material in these personal emails. This video is as profoundly disturbing as it is absurd, and we are shocked by these inaccurate, personal, and baseless attacks.

Michelle is internationally recognized for her passionate scholarship on educational and racial justice. From spearheading school restructuring in Philadelphia in the 1980s to being an expert witness in education discrimination cases to doing ground-breaking research into the "opportunity gap" in public schools to helping to develop the nationally regarded New York Performance Standards Consortium, Michelle has spent her career working with teachers, students, and parents to build schools that celebrate teaching and
learning, and that foster inquiry, creativity, inclusion, and equity for all students, especially those who have been most marginalized.

It is appalling that her efforts in support of public education in Montclair have been decontextualized and twisted in such a malicious and cowardly fashion. The underhanded tactics to intimidate and silence Michelle are unacceptable. Such tactics are also resulting in a ripple effect: many social scientists deeply engaged in community work now understand the capacity of privatized interests to malign those at all levels of public education, and the ease with which the public is misinformed in the name of equity and children's best interests. And, now attacks on public intellectuals in higher education are linked to the corporate assault on k-12 education.

Nationally and internationally renowned educators, students, university faculty, and advocates have taken notice, and we are in intent on speaking up. Michelle's work is an exemplar of true education reform: we stand behind Michelle - her work, her convictions, and her values.

*For additional details, see the following:
http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/29_03/29-...
http://dieneravitch.net/?s=hissy+fit

P.S. - This petition hosting website may ask you for a donation. You are under no obligation to donate and donations go to the company ipetitions.com"
Street Meat: The Rise of NYC's Halal Cart Culture

by Tove Danovich Jul 10, 2015, 12:20p

How halal carts have grown into some of the most ubiquitous food carts in the city.

...some, the food carts littering the sidewalks of New York City are nothing more than street meat. To others, they represent a gastronomic paradise. These two faces of street vending have been side-by-side since the first entrepreneur thought to peddle his food on the city’s streets centuries ago.

Historically, while certain food carts simply mirrored the foods available for cheap — like oysters in the late-19th century — others were a reflection of the outsider populations of the city. Kosher dill pickles, a staple of the Jewish deli and most grocery stores, were an early street food brought to New York by Eastern European Jews, according to food writer Tori Avey [0]. Italian residents opened street food stalls in downtown’s Little Italy. By the 1950s, Greek immigrants brought souvlaki and pita to the streets of New York, and became the predominant street food cuisine by the '80s. Today, hungry pedestrians are just as likely to find tacos, kati rolls, and shawarma on food carts, usually served by someone from that food's country of origin.

But in the midst of the city’s long street food history, halal carts are relative newcomers to the scene. Only a few decades ago, "halal" exclusively referred to a method of slaughter that rendered a meat acceptable for Muslims to eat. Today, it's become something more specific and entirely native to New York City. While other street vendors may serve halal meat as Indian or Chinese food, these are not the halal carts we're speaking of. Even the most street-food-phobic's mouth has to water as they pass a real halal cart's hot grill.
The History

"Street vending has always been an immigrant way into the paid economy of New York City," Brooks says. In the early 1800s, it was Italian peanut sellers — in Gastropolis, historian Andrew F. Smith writes the more enterprising vendors created a harsh franchise system that recruited peddlers and supplied them with carts and peanuts on credit. (Smith adds that one 1887 vendor was so successful that he was able to purchase a $24,000 house, equivalent to more than $600,000 today.) Jewish street vendors popularized pickles and knishes on the street and then upgraded to owning delis and other brick and mortar stores. Though Greek immigrants have long had a presence in New York City, their street food boom came in the latter half of the 20th century, coinciding with an increase in Greek immigrants to the United States [4] between 1960 to 1980. According to Brooks, as per the cycle of vending in the city, these Greek street vendors now own their own pizza places and diners. But every immigrant group has gotten their start — at least in part — on the streets.

The fight between brick-and-mortar restaurants and food carts is covered heavily in the media today, but it's old news in this town. In 1906, the mayor's "Push Cart Commission [5]" looked into the "evils" of street vending. The issues ranged from the familiar — street crowding and "additional odors and noise" — to more pointed criticisms like the fact that "this occupation without special qualifications" attracted additional immigrants to New York City. But even the fears of an expanding immigrant population were likely swayed during lunchtime. In a pre-refrigerator age, outdoor food carts and fruit stands were an extension of many urban kitchens, and the commission's "investigation goes to show that there is no special danger to the community from the food supplies sold from pushcarts, for the wares are usually as good, if not better, than the supplies sold in neighboring stores."

While there's no clear "first" in halal cart history (though many have staked the claim for themselves), some cart owners, like the now-ubiquitous Halal Guys [6], maintain that an influx of Muslim cab drivers kicked off demand for quick, halal meals that could be eaten on the go. The Halal Guys now boast multiple locations, a brick-and-mortar restaurant in the East Village, and are set to become a franchise [7] with locations throughout the United States and abroad. But before it was a halal cart, it was a hot dog stand, says Ahmed Abouelenein, Halal Guys's chief executive (and son of one of the
founding three partners). In 1992, the founding partners discovered that there was a huge, unmet demand for quick, filling halal food. So the meat became halal and the food switched from the glorified snack that is a hot dog into a cart-cooked entrée. Abouelenein says that the meat, rice, and salad combo came from a desire to make each platter as close to a “full meal” as possible. Even today, many of its long-lined carts have a special "taxi line" so drivers can get their food, eat, and carry on with their 12-hour shifts.

New York City doesn’t track religion among immigration statistics, but the high percentage of cab drivers from Bangladesh and Pakistan (both countries where more than 90 percent of the population is Muslim) gives credence to the theory that cabbies were at least partially responsible for the halal cart’s ascension. According to the New York Times [8], there were 400 Bangladeshi immigrants to the city per year in the 1980s, which increased to 3,900 in the mid-'90s — the sharp influx coincides almost exactly with the birth of halal carts in New York City.

But of course, the carts appeal extends beyond Muslim patrons. “Can food normalize [relations between ethnicities]?” asks Sameer Sarmast, whose blog Sameer’s Eats reviews halal food from restaurant to cart. “Of course it can. Just look at those lines.”
Halal carts of today

Many of the present-day halal carts operate according to a similar model. The Halal Guys’s Abouelenein says that most of their carts’ employees are Egyptian. And though employees must apply for the job like anyone else, there’s an aspect of community out on the street, with many hearing about employment opportunities through word-of-mouth. Mamoud Asaid, a Midtown Manhattan halal cart employee, says he was hanging around the garage where food carts are stored every night and ended up befriending some fellow Egyptians who connected him with the cart’s owner. This is Asaid’s second year on the job.

Gamal Hassad, the owner of a cart called Healthy Halal, says that when he first emigrated from Egypt in the late 1980s, he worked at a delicatessen for eight or nine months. “But I prefer to work for myself.” He has now had his cart for 26 years, making him one of the oldest in the NYC halal business. Hassad says that it’s hard work “to keep [the cart] running and build it up, but I’m happy.” He personally works the breakfast and lunch shift at his cart from 6 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. almost every day. Hassad has an advantage over many food cart owners in that someone else picks his cart up from the garage where it’s stored overnight and brings it to his corner at 55th Street between Madison and Park Avenues. He’s been successful enough to now own two food carts — the other located across the street from Healthy Halal — and commutes from New Jersey to Midtown every day for work.

To set themselves apart from other halal carts (including an impostor cart nearby), the Halal Guys adopted yellow bags, yellow branded T-shirts, and round containers instead of styrofoam. Recently, Halal Guys’ addictive red and white sauces have moved from the traditional plastic squeeze bottles into branded plastic squeeze packets.

But while Halal Guys used colors and logos to remind people that their food was different from the pushcart down the block, others have taken a more menu-focused approach. The Kwik Meal halal cart owned by Mohammed Rahman, a former sous chef at the Russian Tea Room, has become a media darling for its upscale take on the usual offerings. His lamb and rice plate isn’t made from the usual gyro (a roasted loaf of blended meats), but real lamb coupled with unusual flavors like a papaya puree. Then there’s Hassad’s Healthy Halal. Instead of chopped chicken pieces, Hassad uses grilled chicken tenders, broccoli florets, and other vegetables that he grills and serves up with salad and fat free dressing. “That makes it ‘healthy halal’ and that’s my difference,” he says. And his cart has been this way since the very beginning.

But today it’s becoming harder to turn street vending into a golden ticket. Hassad has his own license and mobile food-vending permit, which is rare for a business today. “It’s easy to work for someone but not to have your own place,” he says. Since the city put a cap on street vending permits in the 1980s, the line to own one has gotten longer — estimates
range between 10 and 20 years. While it hasn’t stopped new vendors from getting in the game, it’s made it more expensive. A business like Healthy Halal is charged only $200 for a two-year permit by the city. The only option for have-nots is to rent a permit (illegally) from another vendor at prices as high as $20,000 [12].

Sean Basinski, director of the Street Vendor Project, a nonprofit advocacy group, calls that an “insurmountable amount of money” for many of its members to pay upfront (in addition to the cost of a cart and food). “The idea of being a street vendor is ownership, but many work for other people because they can’t afford the $25,000 [of a black market permit],” Basinski says.

Though groups like SVP are working to change the rules, it hasn’t happened yet. Until then, the halal carts may be the last wholly original immigrant-created cuisine New York City has to offer, and it in itself might be on its last legs. Abouelenein’s advice to new food cart owners would be not to start a pushcart business at all: “It’s a 24-7 headache,” he says. That’s unfortunate for street vendors and gastronomes looking for their next great meal.
Cuomo Signs Executive Order: NYS Attorney General as Special Prosecutor in Cases Where Law Enforcement Officers Are Involved in Death of Civilians


Albany, NY - July 8, 2015 - Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order No. 147, which appoints the New York State Attorney General as a special prosecutor in matters relating to the deaths of unarmed civilians caused by law enforcement officers. The order also allows the special prosecutor to review cases where there is a question whether the civilian was armed and dangerous at the time of his or her death. The Governor signed the Executive Order this afternoon at CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City accompanied by dozens of community advocates and elected officials who have been pushing to strengthen the criminal justice system in New York.

Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner; Constance Malcolm, mother of Ramarley Graham; Iris Baez, mother of Anthony Baez; Hawa Bah, mother of Mohamed Bah; Margarita Rosario, mother of Anthony Rosario and aunt of Hilton Vega jointly said: "For decades, our families and those of other New Yorkers killed by police have faced repeated injustices, not only losing family members to police violence by those tasked with serving and protecting but also being failed by local district attorneys not holding officers accountable to the law for those deaths. Many of us have been calling for a special prosecutor for decades, so this reform stems from the legacies of New Yorkers whose unjust deaths go back a long time and the leadership of our families. Today, Governor Cuomo is listening to our voices of and those of other New Yorkers who support equal justice to enact an important reform to end this conflict of interest. Nothing will bring back the lives of our loved ones, and this was never simply about our families – it was about all those who come after us because we so deeply understand the pain and heartache of losing a loved one and then having their life not matter within our justice system. While New York takes national leadership with this reform, there remains much work to be done to ensure our children and family members are no longer unjustly killed by police in the first place. We hope to work with Governor Cuomo and other leaders in moving New York forward to build upon today's important step to end the discriminatory and abusive policing that threatens our families and communities."

Dr. Hazel N. Dukes, President of NAACP New York State Conference said: "This is a significant executive order that will ensure that communities of color including African Americans, Latinos and other minorities are protected from police misconduct. With this order a special prosecutor will have the power to review, investigate and prosecute cases where unarmed civilians are killed. We thank Governor Andrew Cuomo for his vision and commitment to protect all our communities."

Russell Simmons said: "I applaud Governor Cuomo for living up to his promise to sign an executive order appointing a special prosecutor for cases involving the deaths of unarmed civilians by law enforcement. This show of leadership by Governor Cuomo should spark a shift across the entire country, where every state has special, impartial prosecutors that investigate these cases. There is a dire need for broad reform of the criminal justice system in order to restore the trust between the community and law enforcement, and I believe this is a step in the right direction. However, I urge the New York State legislature to pass comprehensive reform when they return to session."

Michael Hardy, Executive Vice President & General Counsel of National Action Network said: "This executive order is exactly what we needed in New York to guarantee that cases of police-involved civilian deaths are investigated to the fullest extent of the law. I want to applaud Governor Cuomo for taking this step, because it is one that our state – and our nation – needed greatly. Next, I hope that other states will follow our lead to bring trust back to the judicial system."
Soffiyah Elijah, Executive Director of the Correctional Association of New York said: "Governor Cuomo's appointment of the Attorney General as Special Prosecutor in these troubling cases hopefully signals a new era of accountability that is critical in ensuring an objective process immune from political agendas."

Attorney General Eric Schneiderman said: "In December, I stood with reform advocates and other public officials to call attention to the crisis in confidence related to the investigation of deaths of unarmed civilians at the hands of police. Today, Governor Cuomo has issued an executive order to empower my office to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute such cases. I can imagine no more important responsibility, and my office will handle these cases with the highest level of care, professionalism, and independence."

Former Governor David Paterson said: "For the families and friends that have lost a loved one to an altercation with police officers, this is welcome news. Appointing a special prosecutor will ensure that justice is served fairly and that these cases are given the required attention and care moving forward. I applaud Governor Cuomo for once again stepping up to a controversial issue and tackling it head-on."

Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie said: "I hope this Executive Order will provide some measure of comfort for families, because these are cases that deserve an independent review to ensure that justice is served. Along with Governor Cuomo, we will continue the fight for a new law which would allow for the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate cases when deadly force by a police officer is used. This will help to restore the public's confidence in our justice system and ensure that these proceedings are fair and impartial."

Congressman Hakeem Jeffries said: "In a democracy, everyone is entitled to equal protection under the law. However, when a police officer crosses the line and appears to use excessive force the criminal justice system often fails to hold that officer accountable. That must change. When a police officer takes the life of an unarmed civilian there should be a fair and objective investigation. The most effective way to bring this about is through the appointment of an independent prosecutor. Governor Cuomo should be commended for his vision and resolute leadership in this regard."

Assemblyman Keith L.T. Wright said: "In the wake of widespread community outcry and countless instances of injustice, appointing the Attorney General as special prosecutor in cases of police misconduct is the right step for New York. For decades I have been championing this effort in the legislature, and I am confident this will help restore trust between our communities and the police while ensuring justice to victims of these heinous crimes. New Yorkers stand to benefit greatly from Governor Cuomo's executive action and I look forward to continuing our collective efforts to develop a permanent resolution that includes grand jury reform."

Senator Adriano Espaillat said: "In recent months, communities across the nation have been torn by police-involved incidents of civilian deaths that have eroded the trust in our criminal justice system. I applaud Governor Cuomo's appointment of the attorney general as a special prosecutor in cases of police-involved civilian deaths, and look forward to continuing to work with him to find a permanent solution. In the interim I trust that Attorney General Eric Schneiderman will be a fair special prosecutor."

Senator Gustavo Rivera said: "This executive order is a positive step in light of the failure of the Republican led Senate in passing meaningful criminal justice reform. It will go a long way in restoring the public's trust in our justice system while we work to pass a permanent solution in the legislature. We have a broken system that does not treat all New Yorkers equally under the law and I commend Governor Cuomo for taking this important step in reforming it."

Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson said: "From Ramarley Graham to Michael Brown, our nation has seen too many deaths at the hands of law enforcement. Thanks to Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York is making the statement that these tragic cases will be handled with independence and fairness. Just one death is too many, and by appointing a special prosecutor, this state is taking a courageous step in the right direction."

Assemblyman Michael Blake said: "Today, the moral arc of the universe definitely bent towards justice as I congratulate Governor Cuomo on signing the executive order appointing Attorney General Schneiderman as a special prosecutor. As a Co-Chair of the Criminal Justice committee of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus, we pushed for this victory as part of our 'Before, During & After' criminal justice package to stand up for the families. When we have to use the phrase 'BlackLivesMatter,' it's a reminder that too many of us feel that too many others don't believe that our lives and our justice does matter. The families of these victims will never get back their loved ones. But, we give them dignity by taking a clear step to ensure that further families have a chance for justice. Most officers are doing great and noble work. Today's decision just ensures that when injustice happens, there's the opportunity for voices and lives to matter."

Assemblyman Nick Perry said: "For the families and advocates who have worked so hard to fight for a better justice system, the executive order released today is extremely significant. I am proud to stand alongside Governor Cuomo in his appointment of a special prosecutor, effectively helping those that otherwise do not have a voice. Today, we take a big step forward in the fight to reform our justice system, and I thank the Governor for taking swift action on this critically important issue."
Senator Kevin Parker said: "Recent cases of citizen deaths at the hands of law enforcement have left a discouraging sentiment for people across our nation. Today, under the leadership of Governor Cuomo, we are taking a major step forward in bringing more transparency to these cases that have eroded the public's trust in our criminal justice system. Because of the Governor's commitment to bridging the divide between our communities and law enforcement, we are moving forward as a city and as a state."

Senator Bill Perkins said: "When an unarmed person dies as the result of an interaction with law enforcement personnel, we must be absolutely sure that the resulting investigation is independent, thorough, and in the fully pursuit of justice. Today, Governor Cuomo is standing up to make sure that happens. I commend the Governor for his executive order to appoint the Attorney General to oversee these cases – it is the right thing to do."

New York City Public Advocate Letitia James said: "Governor Cuomo's decision to appoint a special prosecutor in crimes against civilians by police officers is a critical move towards criminal justice reform. District Attorneys inherently rely on cooperation from police every day, and we need mechanisms in place to avoid conflict of interests and maintain objectivity in cases of police violence. I first called for a special prosecutor in these types of cases immediately following the non-indictment of Officer Pantaleo in the case of Eric Garner, and I am glad to see progress."

View Executive Order Here
A New York Conservative Leaves City Hall for His Island

Vincent Ignizio is taking a job as executive director of Catholic Charities of Staten Island.

Vincent Ignizio, center, chats with supporters at a Republican fundraiser in Staten Island. He stepped down Friday from the New York City Council, where he was one of three Republican members. PHOTO: PETER FOLEY FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By JOSH DAWSEY
Updated July 10, 2015 7:27 p.m. ET

In a New York City of rising city spending, bicycle lanes and more expensive cocktail bars, Vincent Ignizio wants to cut spending, drive his SUV and drink cheap wine—sometimes from a box.

Mr. Ignizio, who stepped down from the City Council on Friday to take a job in the private sector, was a rare breed in today’s City Hall: the unabashed conservative.

"There are frustrating times when you are trying to present your side," said Mr. Ignizio, 40 years old, a Republican who represented a district on the South Shore of Staten
Island. “When one side has a louder and louder voice, they have all the tools to squelch the other side of the argument.”

With his departure, two Republicans remain on the 51-member council. All citywide elected officials are Democrats, led by Mayor Bill de Blasio. For the remaining Republicans, who were often heartened by 20 years under former Mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, these are trying times.

“We have no voice, not at all,” said Larry Mone, president of the conservative Manhattan Institute. “It’s perplexing to kind of watch the last 20 years of history vanish.”

Mr. Ignizio, who goes by Vinny, said he had watched in the last 18 months as City Hall had “taken a far left turn.” He won election to the council in 2007 after serving one term in the New York State Assembly.

Mr. Ignizio said he wasn’t leaving the council because of the city’s liberal bent but to pursue a simpler life. He is a man of rituals. On Saturdays, he drives with his family to New Jersey for lunch at their favorite Mexican restaurant. He pulls for the Dallas Cowboys, swims in his pool and often quotes from “The Godfather.”

Every Friday night, he gathers friends around his dining room table to drink wine and talk. The sessions sometimes last until well after midnight.

Mr. Ignizio isn’t known for spending freely on the vintage he serves. “You bring the good stuff, but he drinks the cheap stuff,” said Jimmy Oddo, the Staten Island borough president and a close friend.

Mr. Oddo said his friend once skipped a council dinner on Staten Island because it was about 10 miles away and pricey. He invited other council members to come to his house afterward for dessert, as long as they brought the sweets.

Mr. Ignizio’s district is more than an hour from much of Manhattan and has more touches of suburbia than the rest of the city: supermarkets, backyard pools and driveways. Almost everyone has a car.

Many issues that stir the rest of the city don’t necessarily resonate in Staten Island, where Mr. Ignizio grew up and has no plans to leave unless he retires to Florida. Residents fight over zoning issues, like a three-story diner that recently opened, the condition of roads and how the city is managing the recovery from superstorm Sandy.
"It’s the old John Cougar Mellencamp [song] of born in a small town, die in a small town," Mr. Oddo said.

Mr. Ignizio had some successes in the council, such as getting more road funding for Staten Island, helping to rid schools of toxic chemicals and securing government money and attention after superstorm Sandy.

Many of the most important issues for his district aren’t partisan, he said.

Even as a Republican, Mr. Ignizio forged close relationships with many of his liberal colleagues. He said he liked both Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mr. de Blasio. He earned a reputation on Staten Island for addressing constituent concerns, said Richard Flanagan, a political scientist at the College of Staten Island.

There have been failed quests, like bringing a ferry to the South Shore and getting better mass transit options. And Mr. Ignizio often had to deal with constituents who felt ignored by the city. “His district was overlooked a lot of the time,” said Mr. Oddo. “It’s just not prominent in the progressive narrative.”

Thursday night, Mr. Ignizio attended a fundraiser for Republicans on Staten Island. There were no champagne bottles on Friday, but he was planning to have friends over in the evening. He starts Monday as executive director of Catholic Charities of Staten Island.

An aide to Mr. Ignizio said the mayor wanted to stop by Mr. Ignizio’s office this week, but he had already cleared out and wasn’t planning to drive back to City Hall.

From where he lives on Staten Island, that drive can take an hour and 20 minutes.

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