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By William Herkewitz

When oil tankers crash and inevitably spill oil into the open seas, a go-to clean-up method is coralling the rapidly spreading oil and burning it. But in some places, like the ice-strewn Arctic ocean, physically corralling that oil with boats and booms is practically impossible. Now, there's a better way to collect that leaked gunk—and the methods users, greener, more biodegradable chemicals, too.
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To make coralling that oil easier, chemists developed a tool called an oil herder. Essentially, oil herders make oil clump together naturally when sprayed in the ocean around a spill. The problem is that these silicone-based herders will stay in the ocean more or less indefinitely. And although they're already being tested in open water, we have no idea what ecological toll they take.
"WE'VE TESTED OUR CHEMICAL IN ROOM TEMPERATURE, COLD, ICE, AND HOT WATER."

In a new study out today, a group of chemists at Tulane University and City College of New York just announced the development of the first class of "eco-friendly, biodegradable, and plant-based [oil] herders," says George John, a chemist at CUNY who's part of the research team. As John and his colleagues report in the journal Science Advances, the inexpensive new oil herder is chiefly made of plant-sourced phytol (a key component of chlorophyll), which already exists in great abundance in the natural marine environment thanks to organisms like green algae.

"We've tested our chemical in room temperature, cold, ice, and hot water, as well as different salinity levels of water. In every case our chemical works with exactly the same results and efficiency as do the silicon-based herders," John says. "Normally you need these herders to work and keep oil contracted for maybe 10 to 15 minutes before you can start a fire. Our chemical starts [biodegrading] in around a few hours, and completely [degrades] in maybe two weeks to a month."

Raising the tension

When oil spills into the sea, it floats to the top of the water and spreads... fast. That's because the surface tension of water is remarkably strong, much stronger than that of the floating oil, and the difference in tension causes the oil to be continually squeezed up across the top of the water until it's stretched extremely thin. That's a problem, according to John, because oil can only be burnt effectively when it's clumped together and at least 1/10 of an inch thick. Light oil naturally wants to spread much, much thinner than that.

Like soap, John's biodegradable chemicals break up and drop the surface tension dramatically, making the oil prefer to clump together rather than spread out. The chemical does this by forming a hyper-thin single-molecule layer, which, on a molecular level, looks a little bit like millions of pins poking out of the water. The sharp body of each pin is the plant-sourced phytol molecule, and the head is a simple sugar molecule or harmless amino acid. At no point does the oil herder attach to or alter the floating oil—it only reduces the surface tension of the water around it. After a few hours, the connection between the head and the body of the molecular pin will break down, causing both parts to dissolve into the ocean's water column.
Biodegradable, but better?

How much better for the environment are these new oil herders compared to the old ones? The short answer is: We actually have no idea. Gary Shigenaka, a biologist with the Emergency Response Division of the US's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, says that despite new 'interest in herders, especially for waters [like the Arctic] where floating ice may preclude the use of other more traditional mechanical cleanup methods... there are currently no herders approved by [the EPA] for use during oil spills.' The upshot: No long-term (or even short-term) ecological studies have ever been done to see the ecological toll that herders can take.

"OUR CHEMICAL STARTS BIODEGRADING IN AROUND A FEW HOURS, AND COMPLETELY DEGRADES IN TWO WEEKS."

Until scientists compare the two chemicals, Shigenaka is cautious to say whether, even on principle, John's plant-based oil herder would be ecologically safer than a non-biodegradable option. "'Eco-friendly' and 'biodegradable' are rather tricky descriptors for any product," he says. "Some of the green cleaners that are based on pine or citrus oils, for example, can kill exposed marine organisms quite readily. When I lecture on toxicity for our Science of Oil Spills classes, I try to point out that nothing is really nontoxic, it all just comes down to dose," he says.

For the most part, John readily agrees with Shigenaka. "But keep in mind," John says, "Our motive was just to see if it would even be possible to use, simple, naturally occurring molecules to develop an [oil herder] that would work as well as what's already commercially available. We found that we could. What we hope for now is that our research will spark a new initiative to talk about these herders, to test them, and to design newer and even better ones."
CCNY researchers develop eco-friendly oil spill solution

CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK

City College of New York researchers led by chemist George John have developed an eco-friendly biodegradable green "herding" agent that can be used to clean up light crude oil spills on water.

Derived from the plant-based small molecule phytol abundant in the marine environment, the new substance would potentially replace chemical herders currently in use. According to John, professor of chemistry in City College's Division of Science, "the best known chemical herders are chemically stable, non-biodegradable, and hence remain in the marine ecosystem for years."

"Our goal was to develop an eco-friendly herding molecule as an alternative to the current silicone-based polymers," said John.

Herding agents are surface-active molecules (surfactants) that when added to a liquid, such as seawater, reduce the surface tension. In the case of oil spills, when they are added along the periphery of an oil spill slick, they contract and thicken the slick or push slicks together so that they can be collected or burned.

"Understanding the interfacial behavior is crucial to design the next generation eco-friendly herding agents" said Charles Maldarelli, a professor of chemical engineering in CCNY's Benjamin Levich Institute for Physico-Chemical Hydrodynamics who participated in the study.

John's research team also included Deeksha Gupta, a postdoctoral student now at the Royal Society of Chemistry, and Vijay John of Tulane University.

Their finding will be published in the June 26 issue of Science Advances.
An Eco-Friendly Chemical for Oil Spill Clean-Ups

Scientists create a plant-based chemical that could one day be used to help clean up oil spills in the Arctic.

KATE WHEELING · JUN 26, 2015

In May, an oil pipeline in Santa Barbara County, pouring some 21,000 gallons of oil into the Pacific Ocean. Despite clean-up crews’ efforts to contain it, the oil slick stretched along the coast for miles, serving as a glaring reminder that spill mitigation strategies are still lacking. But responders may soon have a new tool to aid in clean-up efforts: Researchers today in Science Advances that a plant-based, eco-friendly molecule could be used to clean up the inevitable spills of the future.

Right now, booms are most often used to reign in oil, or dispersants are deployed that take advantage of wave action to break up slicks. But in the calm, ice-dotted seas of the Arctic, where oil exploration is at the top of the United States’ agenda, these strategies won’t work. Controlled burning of spills on the ocean’s surface is one way to quickly remove oil from the water, minimizing the effects of the rogue oil on the environment. In order to burn oil, slicks have to be relatively thick, but they tend to spread out in thin layers across the ocean’s surface. The high surface tension of water—the same property that allows bugs to walk on water—pulls the oil slick outward. Silicone-based products called chemical herders can be sprayed around the edges of the slick to lower the surface tension of the water, causing the oil slick to contract.

Phytol-based herders aren’t a universal remedy for oil spills, but in certain scenarios they could become the go-to mitigation strategy.

The trouble is, after the oil is burned away, today’s silicone-based chemical herders remain in the water and their full effects on ocean habitats, and the animals that live there, are still unknown. That fact prompted a team of researchers from the City College of New York and Tulane University to create an eco-friendly herder from a substance already abundant in the ocean: phytol, an organic compound released from Chlorophyll.

The phytol-based molecules are amphiphiles, molecules with a water-loving head and water-repelling tail. That structure allows the molecules to align themselves in a single layer across the surface of the water, ensuring a sufficient drop in surface tension.
To find out how the eco-friendly chemical compared to silicone herders, the team created tiny oil spills in trays of water at varying temperatures and salinities in the lab. And the new herders worked just as well as the silicone-based molecules, according to the authors. When they deployed the phytol herders, the tiny slicks contracted, thickening by as much as 500 percent in five degree Celsius water, and 2,500 percent in water at 35 degrees Celsius.

Another advantage of the phytol herders: Unlike traditional silicone herders, they are broken down by water in just one month. "Once [the herder] does the job, then it goes away," says George John, a professor of chemistry at the City College of New York, and principle author on the study.

Phytol-based herders aren't a universal remedy for oil spills, but in certain scenarios they could become the go-to mitigation strategy, John says. "It's a new tool in the toolbox."
In recent months, more than a dozen members of the 2016 Republican presidential field have made appearances on a certain interview show based out of New York City: Chris Christie, Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Scott Walker, Mike Huckabee, Lindsey Graham, Jim Gilmore, Ben Carson, George Pataki, Bobby Jindal, Carly Fiorina, the Ricks Perry and Santorum and—lest anyone forget—Donald Trump.

Various other past and present political luminaries also have been flocking to this seemingly prime piece of broadcast real estate, including John McCain, Dick Cheney, Newt Gingrich, Andrew Cuomo, Rudy Giuliani, Ed Rendell, Chuck Schumer and Richard Blumenthal.

So have New York power brokers (Bill Bratton, Kathryn Wylde, Cyrus Vance Jr., Ray Kelly, John Miller); media personalities (Larry Kudlow, Rikki Klieman, Geraldo Rivera, Dr. Oz); diplomats (Patrick Theros, Zalmay Khalilzad, John Bolton); activists (Kerry Kennedy, Niger Innis); a former British Prime Minister (Tony Blair); and Blair’s barrister wife (Cherie).

Millions of viewers watch lineups like this every Sunday morning on the broadcast and cable news networks’ weekly public affairs shows. But they also happen to be the bread and butter of a 90-minute, 16-month-old radio program with a presumably much smaller audience that airs around the same time on AM 970 The Answer: “The Cats Roundtable,” hosted by the self-made billionaire supermarket magnate, prolific political donor, defeated New York mayoral contender and, most recently, aspiring media executive John Catsimatidis.
With an amply physique, unabashedly demotic speaking style and apparently extravagant tastes (his 2013 family Christmas card looked like it could have been ripped straight from promotional posters for "Keeping Up with the Kardashians"), the 66-year-old Manhattan resident cuts an atypical figure among New York’s power elites. But he’s no less of a draw. When his daughter (who might be classed by the tabloid that Catsimatidis is currently trying to buy as a “blonde bombshell”) tied the knot with Richard Nixon’s grandson in a June 2011 fête at the Waldorf Astoria, the affair brought out 700 guests from Henry Kissinger to Hillary Clinton. Catsimatidis’ influence owes to his sizable business empire and track record of philanthropic donations (cancer research, Alzheimer’s, juvenile diabetes, business scholarships, the Boy Scouts, etc.), as well as the campaign contributions that have flowed from his $3.1 billion coffers (as of press time, according to Forbes) to a laundry list of candidates including Gov. Cuomo, the Clintons, Jeb Bush, Mitch McConnell and Mitt Romney. (Catsimatidis’ war chest didn’t lift his arguably longshot campaign to victory during New York’s G.O.P. mayoral primary in 2013.)

And Catsimatidis is steadfast in his characterization of that influence as the capstone to his American Dream story—a go-getter born to humble Greek immigrants and possessed of the mettle that it takes to rise from supermarket stockboy to the owner of Manhattan’s largest grocery chain (Gristedes, whose employees, it’s worth noting, have successfully sued him for labor violations), and a wide ranging investment company (Red Apple Group) that spans real estate, retail, aviation and oil.

Now, with a little more than a year of “The Cats Roundtable” under his belt, Catsimatidis can add radio host to his resume—and maybe soon, newspaper mogul, if fellow real estate honcho Mort Zuckerman accepts Catsimatidis’ offer to take the money-losing Daily News off his hands. A decision is expected soon, as Catsimatidis vies against several other bidders including Jimmy Finkelstein, owner of congressional newspaper The Hill, and Steve Wolkoff, yet another real estate investor.

You might say Catsimatidis’ inchoate media interests are something of a fourth-quarter life crisis. In a phone interview one Friday afternoon recently, as he sat in traffic on the Long Island Expressway while being chauffeured to his Hamptons beach house, Catsimatidis said he’s experiencing “post-65 syndrome,” as he calls it.

“You’re in the fourth quarter, hopefully going into overtime,” he said. "You try to do things you feel are worthwhile."

The cynical view of his News pursuit, as suggested by conversations with politics and media insiders, is that Catsimatidis probably wants to run for mayor again, and that owning New York’s Hometown Newspaper—which is a shell of its former self in terms of
circulation and revenue but nonetheless carries weight among local government officials— is a step in that direction.

One News veteran, anonymously characterizing internal sentiment because this source did not want to irk management by speaking publicly, said, "The paper still has a voice politically within the city, and most people believe Catsimatidis is desperate for that sort of voice."

Why else buy a daily newspaper that is believed to be losing between $20 million and $30 million annually?

"It's part of going through the changes of life," said Catsimatidis. "It's got nothing to do with running again."

Catsimatidis has a history with the News. He's a recurring speaker at the News and CUNY's annual legal clinic for immigrants, where he's known to share his story of coming to America at six months old and going on to do big things.

At one point, he was a major advertiser, which is how he struck up a friendship more than 20 years ago with Les Goodstein, a former president and chief operating officer at the News who has been helping Catsimatidis with his bid. (Asked whether he would consider returning to run the business side of the paper if the bid were accepted, Goodstein declined to comment.)

At the same time, Catsimatidis has battled the News over negative coverage, including a 2001 episode where he led an ad boycott over a damaging investigative series on supermarkets. (A spokesman for Catsimatidis confirmed that he does not currently advertise in the News, placing his dollars instead with the rival New York Post.)

Catsimatidis wouldn't go into detail about what his turnaround strategy might entail, citing the confidentiality of a sale process that began in February. That was likewise his reason for not saying how close his offer came to Zuckerman's reported $150 million price tag for the paper and its Jersey City printing presses.

He did however tease out a couple core components of his plan: preservation of the print edition, which has seen its weekday circulation plummet to around 300,000 from a peak of more than 2 million, and digital innovation.

On that latter point, Catsimatidis described a technology that sounds like something you'd see on "The Jetsons."

"If you're laying in bed, you press a button, without holding an iPad or a computer, and it"—meaning the paper—"just appears virtually a foot away from you in mid air."

Pressed on whether such a technology is anywhere close to existing and who might be developing such a thing, Catsimatidis said, "It's in the experimental stage. I know some people."

Knowing people seems to be a theme in the world of John Catsimatidis. At least that's how he manages to get so many high-profile guests for an AM radio show produced on the cheap out of his offices in far west Midtown.

"I've been in politics a long time and I have a lot of friends," he said.

Of course it doesn't hurt that many of his guests are precisely the types of people with
good incentive to be in the graces of a well connected, deep pocketed donor. Catsimatidis, a primarily pro-business Republican with bipartisan ties to prominent Democrats, has contributed to a handful of the presidential candidates he's interviewed, including Walker, Pataki, Rubio and Gilmore, his spokesman confirmed.

E. O'Brien Murray, a Republican strategist who's appeared on The Roundtable, quoted something he's heard people say about Catsimatidis: "Some people have sex appeal. John's got check appeal."

All the same, Murray said the Roundtable has become a good platform for newsmakers to get their messages out in a non-confrontational format.

"He's not gonna hit them with a sledge hammer," he said. "Listeners don't need a sledgehammer on Sunday mornings."

"The Cats Roundtable" debuted in March 2014 as a 9 a.m. confab with New York notables. In January it tacked on an extra half-hour to accommodate a national edition. Catsimatidis says he draws an honorary salary of $1 per year: "I'm just doing it for fun."

Jerry Crowley, vice president and general manager of AM 970 The Answer, which is also home to "The Joe Piscopo Show" and John Gambling's morning talk program, said the station's listernership is not audited, so he couldn't put a number on Catsimatidis' audience.

Producer Frank Morano said that apart from nationally syndicated shows like Mike Gallagher and Dr. Joy Browne, The Roundtable brings the most A-list guests and generates the most headlines for the station.

"It's been far greater than our bosses anticipated," said Morano. "He has this knack not only for getting newsmakers, but getting them to let their hair down." The secret weapon? "John talks how normal people talk."

Indeed, as Catsimatidis likes to say on the program, "Getch yaw cup of caffee ready!"

Here he is rapping with Dick Cheney about the Islamic State on June 7: "Mr. Vice President, we have air superiority. Why aren't our troops just zeroing in on some of the ISIS people and just going in there and wiping them out section by section by section?"

Here he is with Tony Blair during an April 26 discussion about the Ebola outbreak: "Are you optimistic about Africa's future? So many things are happening there. They have so many assets and so many people are trying to steal their assets. Tell the American people that normally don't know about it, what's the other side of Africa?"

(Did we mention the eclectic soundtrack? Think Neil Diamond, Johnny Cash, Thompson Twins.)

As far as Catsimatidis' broader media ambitions are concerned, it will be nice to have a passion project to fall back on if his designs on the Daily News fall through. Catsimatidis is optimistic about his chances, though. He said talks are in the "final stages."

And if things don't go his way?

"Maybe I'll buy a movie studio," he said. "Maybe I'll buy a radio station. I just want to enjoy life and do the right thing."
The Future of Worker Education in New York City

By Global Research News
Global Research, June 26, 2015

URL of this article:

After more than three years of the collective efforts by The Committee of Concerned Alumni, Students, Faculty and Staff to save and restore the Brooklyn College Graduate Center for Worker Education, City University of New York, we have deeply disturbing developments to report about management’s recent actions.

First, we proudly and defiantly note our struggle to save Worker Education is as strong as ever. The Committee of Concerned Students, Alumni, Faculty and Staff has thousands of supporters including the New York City union movement and elected officials. The labor movement is aware of our ongoing mobilization efforts and shares a common vision that access to higher education in NYC for youth, people of color and the working class hinges on the access to Worker Education, which was removed without cause by Brooklyn College. This is why our campaign will continue until we restore a graduate program in public policy at the Graduate Center for Worker Education.

In 2013, as a result of all of our work, Brooklyn College’s administration was forced to claim that they would adhere to the original mission of the Graduate Center for Worker Education. As our struggle gained strength among working people in New York, the Brooklyn College administration agreed to speak with our Committee, but, after numerous meetings with their administrators giving “assurances” – tragically, no Masters in Urban Policy exists at the Graduate Center for Worker Education, nor any similarly themed program.

Incredibly, and shamefully, a hedge fund program - The M.D. Sass Investment Academy - will be housed at the Graduate Center for Worker Education. As such, it remains clear for all to see that Brooklyn College has removed any pretense of serving African American, Latino, and working class students. Moreover, Brooklyn College administrators mislead faculty that they would play a meaningful role in the governance of the Center. Instead the Graduate Center for Worker Education has been corrupted to serve as a training ground for future hedge funders, which seek to privatize public education. This violates the principle of faculty governance and contradicts the very nature of Worker Education and community empowerment, which is the mission of CUNY; and is diametrically opposed to the progressive tradition of the Graduate Center for Worker Education.

To make matters worse, the Political Science Department and the Humanities and Social Science Dean’s Office placed at the Center a so-called “Human Rights in Iran Unit”, a US state department-funded program, which operates without faculty oversight and was previously rejected by Rutgers University. This demonstrates Brooklyn College’s priority to defend the one-percent in the US and support US State Department secret programs to destabilize governments overseas paving the way for war in the Middle East and Central America.

The purge and non-replacement of adjunct and full time faculty and staff at the Graduate
Center for Worker Education demonstrates that President Gould disregards faculty as it seeks to transform Brooklyn College into a playground for the elite.

Former director, Professor Joseph Wilson, has filed a major civil rights lawsuit against CUNY, Brooklyn College and those who attacked him and dismantled the program to expropriate valuable Manhattan real estate and the modern campus located at 25 Broadway. Originally intended for working class students, the Center has been made available to elements of the upper class and US foreign policy operatives.

Meanwhile, to deflect criticism about how it is using the Center, the Brooklyn College administration is cynically offering its auditorium and space for public events around labor and worker rights to give the appearance of legitimacy. We call for a mass boycott of all public events and activities at Brooklyn College's 25 Broadway campus, ironically still called the Graduate Center for Worker Education. We will continue to call upon elected officials, trade unions, civil rights organizations and the CUNY Chancellor to demand that President Gould cease her harmful, shameless, and deceitful actions until a responsible Worker Education center committed to the values of social and economic justice, racial equality, which shuns all forms of xenophobia, is restored.

We demand underrepresented workers have a graduate degree program at the Graduate Center for Worker Education!

The struggle to save Worker Education continues. This battle is an integral part of the defense against the class warfare waged on unions, public education and institutions, the working class and those who work toward a democratic society, and human rights and opportunity for the oppressed, not hedge funders and warmongers.

Please join the movement to save worker education at CUNY. Spread the word and repost on social media.

-The Committee of Concerned Students, Alumni, Faculty and Staff

John Alter, Chair
MPC, Reaching Mid-Year Mark, Logs Long List of 2015 Projects

June 28, 2015 at 12:00 AM

THE MOSHOLU PRESERVATION CORPORATION (MPC) recruits these students from University Heights High School to clean up Williamsbridge Oval Park on May 29, thanks to a grant by Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz. It was one of a litany of accomplishments by the nonprofit so far this year.

Photo courtesy MPC

By NORWOOD NEWS

The Mosholu Preservation Corporation (MPC), a nonprofit support corporation of Montefiore Medical Center, continues to hit its mark as an active not-for-profit serving the Norwood community and other neighboring communities with its brand of economic development and community initiatives, including the award-winning Norwood News.

“Since 1981, MPC has been a force of economic and community development in the north Bronx. Through strong partnerships and dedicated staff, we have been able to accomplish major programming that positively impacts the communities we serve,” said Roberto S. Garcia, executive director of MPC.

Among its bevy of accomplishments:

- Grants totaling $132,000 were awarded to MPC from local city agencies, elected officials and foundations for Fiscal Year 2014-2015. This is an increase of $57,000 or 76 percent from the previous program year. This funding allowed MPC to continue conducting Economic & Community Development programming and to publish the Norwood News. MPC continues to provide Economic Development initiatives in five commercial corridors and build on the Sanitation Initiative in four commercial districts.

- MPC continues to grow its relationship with the New York City Parks Department. During the spring and early summer seasons, MPC supported local cleanup initiatives in the Williamsbridge Oval Park and on Moshulu Parkway.

- The Norwood News, published by MPC, won several awards this year including Best Small Circulation Publication and Best Photograph, given by the CUNY School of Journalism, and third place prize for
Coverage in Business, Economic and Financial News by the New York Press Association. Due to this funding, MPC also hosted two Bronx Youth Heard sessions through the Norwood News.

- MPC received $60,000 in funding from Small Business Services for both East 233rd Street and White Plains Road and Webster Avenue merchant associations. In addition, MPC also received $25,000 for business attraction and retention for the Jerome-Gun Hill Business Improvement District to assist in the BID expansion.

- MPC, in conjunction with JGH-BID, hosted the second annual Easter Egg Hunt at Williamsbridge Oval Park with over 1500 attendees. This event was hugely successful with families participating together in the activities.

- Through grant funding, MPC planned and hosted three separate merchant sidewalk sales in collaboration with the East 233rd Street and White Plains Road Merchant Association. These were hugely successful, with many merchants participating. This event was held in collaboration with Councilman Andy King, a major booster of MPC’s efforts.

- MPC planned and coordinated five capacity building workshops for the merchants along the East 233rd Street and White Plains Road commercial corridor.

- MPC hosted a strategic visioning session for the East 233rd Street and White Plains Road commercial corridor in collaboration with Councilmember Andrew Cohen and Councilmember Andy King. The goal is to create a five-year strategic plan for the corridor, leading to the formation of a business improvement district.

- MPC developed and created merchant directories for Kingsbridge Road, Webster Avenue and East 233rd Street and White Plains Road merchant associations. In addition, tote bags and decals were also created for Webster Avenue and East 233rd Street and White Plains Road merchant associations.

- MPC recently hosted the first ever sidewalk sale for the Webster Avenue Merchant Association. This event brought together merchants, residents and local community leaders.

“Other projects included a top-down redesign of MPC’s website, with the Norwood News website not too far behind. Both websites will have mobile compatibility,” said Marcia Cameron, deputy director for MPC. “We have certainly hit the ground running for quite some time, and are extremely thankful to our supporters, and elected officials.”

With the year half over, MPC still has several events in the works. They include a series of movie screenings at Williamsbridge Oval Park, with help from JGH-BID and the Parks Department this July. The event is made possible by Partnership for Parks, who awarded MPC $2,000.
Letter: Guns, lost values and the tragedy of Charleston  

June 28, 2015

I pray for help for the people’s pain at the historic Emanuel AME Church of Charleston, South Carolina. I pray especially for the families of the victims, and for the deeply wounded soul of all of the people of Charleston, and America.

I pay homage to the life of the Rev. Clementa Pinckney and the eight prayerful parishioners attending a Bible study and prayer meeting. They are modern-day Christian martyrs in the current movement for civil and human rights in America.

America is all too often moving in the wrong direction. Now is the time to move forward and make a difference, and not backward into pure hatred and racial bigotry. The struggle continues.

Black lives matter, because every single life is made in the image of God.

The Rev. Arthur L. Mackey Jr., Roosevelt

Editor's note: The writer is the senior pastor of the Mount Sinai Baptist Church Cathedral in Roosevelt.

All those in favor of guns say guns don't kill people, people kill people. Why can't we get guns off the streets? Why are we waiting to do something? Our society is becoming out of control. I wonder how National Rifle Association members would feel if one of their relatives became a victim of the gun violence.

Alice McTighe, Rockville Centre

So now politicians in South Carolina are scratching their heads and bemoaning that one of their own white supremacists, a ticking timebomb, has finally gone off.

Dylann Roof, the accused shooter, reportedly bought a powerful handgun with money he got as a birthday present. This is a good example of why we need not only background checks for all
modern firearms transactions, but also even more complete background investigations performed by, say, the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. That should include sales or transfers between friends and family members, something the National Rifle Association vehemently opposes.

Additionally, we need a federal licensing system -- no more state or local gun licenses with all the widely varying requirements or lack of requirements.

Roof otherwise might have been able to obtain a gun illegally, but it is not as easy as people think. As President Barack Obama has often asked, when will this country join other civilized nations in having sensible gun control?

*Stuart H. Cooper, Kew Gardens*

**Editor's note:** The writer is retired from law enforcement and is a member of the National Rifle Association.

Let's get real. Guns don't turn people into mass murderers. Extreme anger and confusion are well-documented side effects of Suboxone, which is used to treat dependence on opiates. It allegedly was found in Dylann Roof's possession a few months ago. A little research reveals that many mass murders in recent years were committed by users of psychoactive drugs with similar side effects. Guns are a mere convenience for these people.

*Eric Merz, Shirley*

President Barack Obama did not actually use the N-word in his interview with comedian Marc Maron, but he did mention that word in his description of how far this nation's people still need to go [*"Removing flag is just a start," Editorial, June 23*].

The actual use of the N-word occurs when it is spoken or written in reference to a person or people, and this is not what the president did. The use of that word in reference to people is now widely deemed as so deplorable, painful and reprehensible as to invoke visceral reactions. But the president did not actually do that.

Some, including many philosophers, distinguish between the use of a word and the mention of a word, which is useful in describing this sort of situation. When comedian George Carlin listed the seven words not permitted on broadcast radio and television, as he would famously do with rapid-fire delivery, he was not using them but mentioning them.

The reaction to the mere mention of the word by a prominent speaker is but another example of Obama's point of how far we still need to go.

*Philip A. Pecorino, Bayside*

**Editor's note:** The writer is a professor of philosophy at CUNY's Queensborough Community College.

I am writing as a mother whose daughter was murdered with a gun in 2008, and I join the Charleston friends and family members in their grief.

Massacres, homicides, Fort Hood, Newtown and now Charleston are words that elicit horrific visions regarding gun violence. In fact, we are all victims -- those who died, the survivors and our nation.

Our society has suffered countless killings like the most recent one in Charleston. Guns are everywhere and easily accessible. The killings must stop.

Although 17 states have extended background-check requirements, it's not enough. At the very least, every concerned citizen should reach out to his or her legislative representative and
advocate for background checks until they are instituted in all 50 states.

Lois A. Schaffer, Great Neck

Will federal gun control laws eliminate the violence committed by warped, degenerate, evil individuals? Of course not! There will always be very sick people who will obtain weapons regardless of the law.

There is a chance, however, that federal gun control legislation would reduce the number of deaths. Comprehensive background checks would lessen the number of gun owners who are threats to society.

Norman Shainmark, Wantagh

Once again we are left to mourn, ponder and search for answers as to why, in the wake of yet another senseless act of horrific violence against innocent people. No doubt this will lead to the inevitable argument about the right to bear arms.

Your June 19 editorial, "No sanctuary in God's house," explains that Roof faced charges for drugs and trespassing. He bought a gun in April with birthday money.

That, I would argue, is the most telling statement in relation to this story. It's a condemnation of our society that rather than getting an obviously troubled young man help, someone would instead help him get a handgun. Whether it was the gun used in the massacre is irrelevant.

The solution to preventing incidents like this will never be found while arguing over constitutional rights and amendments, for those arguments will never reach a resolution that suits everyone. Instead, we as a society need to focus our energies on instilling values in our children through strong families, friends and role models. Surely that is something nobody can argue against.

Ed Clampitt, Huntington
Hunter Students Offer a Multi-Modal Vision for Queens Boulevard

by Stephen Miller

About a year ago, the Transportation Alternatives Queens activist committee approached the Hunter College urban planning program about Queens Boulevard. The advocates wanted help jumpstarting real-world changes on the street known as the Boulevard of Death.

It was just a few months after Mayor Bill de Blasio announced his Vision Zero initiative to eliminate traffic deaths. If there was ever going to be an ambitious redesign of Queens Boulevard, this was the time to make it happen. The TA activists wanted to show people how Queens Boulevard could be transformed.

"One of the obstacles we always faced was, 'Okay, how would you do that?" said TA Queens committee co-chair Péter Beadie. "There was a real inertia to overcome."

So the advocates got to work with a small team of Hunter graduate students under the leadership of professor Ralph Blessing. Over the course of two semesters, they surveyed people on the street, hosted workshops, reviewed crash and traffic data, and crunched Census numbers.

Then something interesting happened. In January, DOT announced that it would make Queens Boulevard a Vision Zero priority and hosted a workshop to gather ideas for how to redesign the street.

In March, the de Blasio administration committed $100 million to a total reconstruction of Queens Boulevard and revealed its interim design for the first segment, in Woodside, later that month. The plan got a sign-off from the local community board a few weeks ago and is set to be implemented later this summer, with a permanent reconstruction scheduled for 2016.

All this happened before the Hunter students released their final report, which came out at the end of May.

The Hunter students' design would add bus lanes, something DOT has not included in its plans for Queens Boulevard so far. Image: Hunter College

Now that the city has taken on the task of redesigning Queens Boulevard, the hope is that the Hunter
students' ideas will influence decisions about the permanent redesign. DOT has yet to reveal the details of the final design for the segment of Queens Boulevard in Woodside, and also hasn't come out with any designs for sections to the east.

"When you look at the Hunter work and the DOT work, a lot of those visions are similar, and certainly comparable," Beadle said. "Hunter also includes provisions for dedicated bus lanes, which is hopefully something we will see on Queens Boulevard one day."

The Hunter students call for a linear park in the median that's much wider than anything DOT has proposed so far. Their recommendations also touch on enforcement, urban design, and zoning issues that are beyond DOT's purview.

Beadle pointed to designs that architect John Massengale and photo-rendering firm Urban Advantage produced for TA last year that could provide additional inspiration as the city moves forward on Queens Boulevard.

"I hope everybody keeps an open mind and looks to this for inspiration on what can be done," Beadle said. "Because we need this kind of inspiration to bring Queens Boulevard to its full potential."

Stephen Miller is a reporter for Streetsblog NYC. He has been covering the movement for safer streets, effective transit, and livable cities since 2012.
'The Hand That Feeds You' by A.J. Rich review: In this thriller, college student's fiance is murdered; it's a great read up till a disappointing end

BY SHERRYL CONNELLY / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Sunday, June 28, 2015, 2:00 AM

"The Hand That Feeds You"

By A.J. Rich (Scribner)

"The Hand That Feeds You" is a psychological thriller that has everything going for it except, unfortunately, thrills.

Certainly the writing can be subtly powerful as one would expect from two authors with notable literary reputations. Amy Hempel and Jill Ciment, writing under the pseudonym A.J. Rich, have each deservedly collected awards and distinctions.

New York City is given its just due as a setting. The authors
display such intimate knowledge, particularly of the bars in Williamsburg, and write so evocatively that some scenes have cinematic immediacy.

The characters are intriguing. Morgan Frager, a 30-year-old student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, is researching her thesis on female victim psychology from a unique perspective. Her passion for rescuing dogs is presented so sympathetically only the hard-hearted won't be moved. Meanwhile, the animal rights lawyer who comes to her aid is just plain hot.

As for the plot? It's gripping from go. Morgan comes home to find her fiancé's body facedown on the bedroom floor, his leg on the bed. From the blood splatters, the criminologist-in-training can tell he's been ripped apart by the dogs. Terrified of her own pets, a Great Pyrenees and two pit bulls, she hides behind the closed door of the bathroom to make the call to 911.

Things only get worse but in unexpected ways. Grieving the death of her fiancé, Bennett, gets complicated when Morgan discovers he was simultaneously engaged to another woman who he's suspected of murdering. Is it possible her dogs ultimately
saved her life?

One of the pit bulls was shot by the police at the door. The other two animals are slated for execution. She's able to prove to her own satisfaction that the Great Pyrenees, at least, wasn't implicated in the killing. It's her crusade to save the dog that brings her to McKenzie, the animal rights lawyer.

He's a fine man, dedicated and caring. He also presents well in biking shorts. But Morgan has a compelling reason to doubt her romantic instincts. Her research focused on women whose compassionate nature attracted a certain kind of predator. She now figures among their number.

It turns out Bennett was involved with a total of three other women, one of whom claims he is still in touch with her. Another homicide convinces her she's still in danger, though the police don't take her seriously.

"The Hand That Feeds You" is a great read until suddenly it isn't. What should be a fear-infused finale is lethally muted. The authors may have been going for a bleak, noir affect, but at the culminating moment, the novel just flatlines.

When a good book goes bad,
sometimes the only thing you
can do is put it down.

***

"As Night Falls" by Jenny
Milchman

The story wasn't ripped from the
headlines but it certainly
resonates. As Sandy Tremont's
family nestles in for a wintry
evening in their isolated
Adirondacks home, two
escaped convicts make tracks
through the snow headed their
way. They arrive with demands
for supplies to carry out their
escape to Canada, but then
Sandy recognizes one of them.
Her secret is no longer locked
away.

"The English Spy" by Daniel
Silva

The 15th title in an immensely popular series featuring Gabriel Allon,
by day an internationally prized art restorer and also by day, a covert
agent for Israeli intelligence. This time he's hunting a hired assassin
who murdered the widely adored ex-wife of the Prince of Wales. It
seems, though, the princess was a red herring. The point was to
draw Allon into a deadly game.

"Gangland New York: The Places and Faces of Mob History" by
Anthony M. DeStefano

The author of "Vinny Gorgeous: The Ugly Rise and Fall of a New
York Mobster" and veteran Newsday crime reporter details
everything from the meet-and-greet spots to the crimes scenes of
famous mobsters. He reaches back in time to the Bowery Boys and
Five Points Gang working up to the once all powerful Italian mob.
Some big names here among the lesser knowns, including Meyer
Lansky and John Gotti.
Members of academic community earn various honors

Shanker Scholarship Awards
Staten Island Shanker scholarship award recipients at UFT headquarters in New York. L to R: UFT President Michael Mulgrew, Staten Island UFT representative Donna Coppola, Eleanor Gunasingh, Yasmin Butt, and David Kela. (Courtesy: Jonathan Fickles for UFT) (Jonathan Fickles)

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on June 26, 2015 at 9:56 AM

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- As the school year winds down, various Staten Islanders have been honored for their academic achievements.

UFT SCHOLARSHIPS

This year the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) awarded more than $900,000 worth of grants at the 46th annual Albert Shanker Scholarship Awards ceremony, which took place at UFT headquarters, Manhattan, earlier this month.

Three Staten Islanders each received a $5,000 scholarship for their accomplishments.

They are:

- David Kela, who emigrated from Ivory Coast in the middle of his freshman year of high school. During his time at Susan E. Wagner High School, Kela became an academic leader, and graduated as a member of the school's honor society. He plans to attend Binghamton University to study engineering.

- Yasmin Butt, who became an advocate for social justice at Staten Island Tech after a conversation with her guidance counselor led her to enrolling in a summer leadership program. She returned to Tech to found "Sheroes," a school club that deals with gender, race and class inequality. Butt plans to attend Columbia University to major in women and gender studies.

- Eleanor Gunasingh, who was the valedictorian of Port Richmond High School's class of 2015. In her free time, Gunasingh volunteers at a local music school, where she teaches children to play the piano, and at Staten Island University Hospital as an attendant. She plans to be a pediatric surgeon, and will be enrolling in Binghamton University's pre-med program.

PETER JENNINGS AWARD
Nabila Zubair was awarded the 2015 Peter Jennings Scholarship Laurel Award at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) recently.

The award recognizes 10 adults who have excelled in the completion of their coursework, earned a high school equivalency diploma, and who will continue their education at a CUNY college. Each student receives a $1,000 scholarship.

Zubair grew up in Kuwait, where she loved to study science. She was married at 17 years old, and her hopes to continue her education in her homeland were crushed. She was a newlywed with an infant when the first Persian Gulf War broke out. Zubair and her family arrived in the United States in 1999.

Zubair's first goal here was to further her education, but she had to learn the language first. In 2010, she enrolled in CUNY's Adult Learning Centers.

**ESSAY CONTEST**

Javier Smith and Jessica Johnson, two fifth-grade students at PS 18, won $500 in gift cards for writing essays on "Why Community Service Is Important to my Community and Me."

Brothers Care Inc., a local non-profit that helps less fortunate families, organized the essay contest. The essays were judged by Staten Island author Tracy Brown, who has written several novels focusing on urban communities.

**ROWE SCHOLARS**

The Rowe Scholars, formerly Y Scholars, a program organized by the YMCA, has been offered at Port Richmond High School for the past four years. The program helps students improve academically and prepare for college.

This year, 25 students involved in the program graduated from Port Richmond, the only Staten Island school with the program.

Through the program, students receive individualized academic planning, homework aid, tutoring, preparation with standardized testing, and preparation for the college application process. Students also take part in college tours organized by the Y throughout the academic year.

**THE ACADEMY OF TEACHERS**

Rachel Ward, a chemistry teacher at Staten Island Academy, was inducted as a fellow in The Academy of Teachers and selected to participate in a master class with Nobel Laureate Roald Hoffmann.

The New York Hall of Science hosted the class taught by Hoffmann, who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1981 for his work concerning the course of chemical reactions.
Jamaica business look forward to improvements

By Sadeq Ali Kully
TimesLedger Newspapers

The Jamaica Business Improvement District had its annual meeting Tuesday, where keynote speaker York College President Marcia Keisz talked about future projects ideas such as first ever CUNY School of Pharmacy and capital investment in the startup industry, at the Harvest Room since the launch of Jamaica Now action plan this year in downtown Jamaica.

Dozens of local business owners, community leaders and elected officials gathered to network and discuss the current state of business affairs in downtown Jamaica. The keynote speaker was York College President Marcia Keisz, who spoke about pipelines to higher education in Jamaica.

Keisz described how York College and its students are centered around the economy of downtown Jamaica and how it will be a part of its growth as well.

"Culturally and economically, we have in mind that the big dream is the concept of a pharmacist school, a CUNY school of pharmacy, the first of a downstate public school," said Keisz.

She also pointed out that the college is exploring start-up investments and has two "very real possibilities in the start-up world — one in environment and in technology."

The annual meeting provides an opportunity for BID members to preview strategic initiatives planned for the upcoming fiscal year.

"We are all the buzz and we are a great place for business," said Rhonda Binda, director of the BID. Binda also said new projects through collaborations will start in the fall, in line with Jamaica Now action plan.

The Jamaica Now action plan seeks to address the challenges that have faced the Jamaica area in recent years by providing workforce training and small business support, initiating new mixed-use development anchored by affordable housing, and improving the livability of the neighborhood through investments in safety measures, green spaces and more. The 21 strategic actions, 16 of which will be launched and implemented in the next three years, represent approximately $153 million in current public funding.

On Tuesday, Borough President Melinda Katz announced her appointees to the Jamaica Now Leadership Council, which
will oversee and evaluate efforts to unleash Jamaica's vast potential for economic growth. The Jamaica Now Leadership Council selected 36 community members and 11 elected officials out of 80 applicants, who include Rhonda Binda from the Jamaica BID and Simone Price from the Sutphin BID.

"Jamaica is a wonderful neighborhood with a huge untapped potential for growth," Katz said. "The Jamaica Now Leadership Council consists of stakeholders truly vested in the area's success. Each appointee is entrusted with overseeing the plan's rollout and ensuring that the community's interests are paramount throughout implementation."

The BID also honored Carlisle Towery, the retired president of Greater Jamaica Development Corporation, for his special services to the development of the greater Jamaica area and Marvin Falack of Cookies Children's department store for his exemplary services in leadership and collaboration with BID programs.

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Long Taught to Use Force, Police Warily Learn to De-escalate

By TIMOTHY WILLIAMS  JUNE 27, 2015

SEATTLE — Officer Corey Papinsky was recently showing a group of Seattle police officers how to reduce the chance of using force against a citizen during a suddenly antagonistic encounter.

Approaching a civilian with your hands on a weapon or making too much eye contact with someone could unnecessarily escalate a situation, Officer Papinsky said. “Keep your hands visible at all times,” he advised.

But he faced a tough crowd. “It seems good advice for the suspect,” one officer said. “We want to see their hands.”

Another officer had a different approach.

“Last week, there was a guy in a car who wouldn’t show me his hands,” the officer said. “I pulled my gun out and stuck it right in his nose, and I go, ‘Show me your hands now!’ That’s de-escalation.”

Across the country, police departments from Seattle to New York and Dallas to Salt Lake City are rethinking notions of policing that have held sway for 40 years, making major changes to how officers are trained in even the most quotidian parts of their work.

The changes that departments are considering include revising core training standards and tactics, reassessing when and how to make arrests, and re-evaluating how officers approach and interact with members of the public during street and traffic stops.
At the forefront are de-escalation tactics, the variety of methods officers use to defuse potentially violent encounters, such as talking and behaving calmly and reasonably with sometimes unreasonable people.

But some of the officers’ reactions in Seattle show just how hard it might be to change entrenched ideas about what their job involves.

For police departments, the question is whether today’s standard model of aggressive policing — based in part on the broken windows theory of making arrests and issuing citations for even the most minor offenses — is compatible with a more progressive goal of simultaneously catching criminals and building greater trust within neighborhoods.

“I was trained to fight the war on crime, and we were measured by the number of arrests we made and our speed in answering 911 calls,” said Kathleen O’Toole, the Seattle police chief, who is overseeing the department’s changes as part of a consent decree with the Justice Department.

“But over time,” she continued, “I realized that policing went well beyond that, and we are really making an effort here to engage with people, not just enforce the law.”

The efforts nationwide are largely a response to a series of fatal police shootings of unarmed African-American men and boys during the past year, and to pressure from both the White House and the public for local law enforcement agencies to become more transparent in their operations. They are also a recognition that as the high crime rates of the 1980s and 1990s have ebbed, the country’s appetite for a continuing war on crime seems to have diminished.

Officers at police academies have always been trained in de-escalation, but there has been less emphasis on such methods over the past 20 years. A recent Police Executive Research Forum survey of 281 police agencies found that the average young officer received 58 hours of firearms training and 49 hours of defensive tactical training, but only eight hours of de-escalation training.

The training regimens at nearly all of the nation’s police academies
continue to emphasize military-style exercises, including significant hours spent practicing drill, formation and saluting, said Maria R. Haberfeld, a professor of police science at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York.

Many police officials now say that even while these approaches might have helped reduce crime, they have also impeded officers' ability to win the public's cooperation and trust.

"What is the collateral damage after that policing strategy?" asked Charles H. Ramsey, the police commissioner in Philadelphia, where the department is also under a federal order to make extensive policy changes, including in training. "Have we alienated people? Yeah, you solved the problem and lowered the numbers, but if you've alienated people, have you served your purpose?"

Officials say that given the combination of lower crime and elevated public mistrust of the police, defusing heated situations is simply better policing.

"If we ask people instead of telling them, and if we give them a reason for why we're doing something, we get much less resistance," said Gary T. Klugiewicz, a retired Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office captain and former chairman of the now defunct American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers, who trains police in de-escalation techniques. "If we just started to treat people with dignity and respect, things would go much better."

Robert Haas, the police commissioner in Cambridge, Mass., said he teaches his staff that it is sometimes best for an officer to simply pause if his or her presence is causing unreasonable, but not necessarily illegal, behavior.

"If I back away and the person calms down and the situation resolves itself, then I've done what I came to do," Mr. Haas said. "We are telling officers, 'You don't have to be so assertive about it, hitting people over the head with your authority.'"

Still, talking alone may have its drawbacks, some trainers say.

"The concern we have is that hesitation might end up having an officer getting killed or assaulted," said Harvey Hedden, executive director of the
International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association.

"Sometimes using the least amount of force turns out to be a bad idea," he added. "It's a myth that officers want to use more force."

In Seattle, the new training was developed as part of the consent decree, which came after the Justice Department found in 2012 that the police here had engaged in a pattern of excessive force. The finding was underscored by the 2010 fatal shooting of a woodcarver who had been carrying a carving knife while walking down the street.

In the training, required for the department's 1,300 officers, the officers are taught to ask open-ended questions, paraphrase what a person has just said so that he or she knows the officer is listening, and make statements that connote empathy with the person's situation. If properly executed, these techniques will significantly decrease the need for officers to use force, police officials say.

But the changes have caused unease among many veteran officers, some of whom have filed a lawsuit challenging use-of-force guidelines required by the Justice Department. Other officers have abruptly retired.

"We've always been supposed to help people, but the emphasis has gone way farther the other way," said J Moyer, 52, a 28-year veteran of the Seattle department. "The emphasis now is that we're supposed to be social services, whereas it had been our job to look for bad guys. We're not supposed to offend anybody, but the bad guys aren't playing by the same rules."

Some officers here and elsewhere also say the new policies can place officers in unnecessary danger.

"You can't de-escalate someone unwilling to establish rapport with you," said Chris Myers, 48, a 25-year veteran of the Seattle police force, after a training exercise last month.

But there have been notable successes.

One night late last month, a police officer confronted a man who was clutching a knife while walking down the middle of a residential street in North Seattle. When the officer ordered him to stop, the man responded with a vulgar gesture and kept going.
Over the next 30 minutes, the officer learned the man’s name from his wife and used it, beginning an unconventional peripatetic monologue to try to persuade him to surrender. “Hey, Gregory,” the officer said, “let me help you, brother!”

The man, disconsolate after an argument with his spouse, eventually dropped the knife. Instead of being arrested, he was taken to a hospital for a mental health checkup.

Still, officers say they have become more hesitant about confronting people they believe are acting suspiciously because the Justice Department now requires officers to write detailed reports when force is used or when someone is questioned during a street stop.

“Police work is very individualistic,” said Ben Kelly, 44, a 10-year veteran. “There’s 1,000 ways to do things, and you have to find a style that meshes with your personality.”

The department, however, says that is precisely the problem. Officials say they want officers to perform in a standard way both to reduce discriminatory policing and to cut down on errors.

“We want to limit officers’ discretion,” said Lt. Scott Bachler, who oversees the de-escalation training program. “People say, ‘I have a style of doing things.’ We are saying: ‘We don’t want 25 ways of doing things anymore. We want it to be uniform.’”

A version of this article appears in print on June 28, 2015, on page A16 of the New York edition with the headline: Police Begin Stressing De-escalation Tactics, Despite Skepticism in the Ranks.
The Art of Doing Time: Prisoner, Painter, Escapee

By RANDY KENNEDY, GRAHAM BOWLEY and COLIN MOYNIHAN  JUNE 27, 2015

The news that Richard W. Matt, the convicted murderer who was killed by the police on Friday after a weekslong manhunt, spent most of his time behind bars painting technically skilled portraits of Julia Roberts, President Obama and fellow inmates' relatives, and bartering them for preferential treatment, has come as a surprise to many.

But to those who have spent years teaching art in prisons or making it themselves as inmates, such a trade is a deeply ingrained ritual of incarcerated life. It is practiced informally or as part of established programs by a wide range of prisoners, many of them, like Mr. Matt, with profoundly violent pasts and little art experience.

Those who knew Mr. Matt at the Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, N.Y., say he painted to keep himself occupied and to obtain favors from guards and fellow prisoners. Such favors were “a pat on the back for doing portraits of loved ones of inmates,” said John Mulligan, who served two and a half years in the Clinton prison with Mr. Matt and after his release had Mr. Matt send him paintings and drawings. Mr. Mulligan added that painting “was a way for him not to be preoccupied with his thoughts all the time — it was an escape.”

Mr. Matt’s paintings tended toward what experts on prison art described as a popular genre that gets scant attention outside cellblock
walls: photo-based portraits of celebrities, political figures and fellow inmates’ loved ones.

His work appealed to at least one guard at the Clinton prison, in upstate New York, from which Mr. Matt escaped with another inmate, David Sweat, in early June. (Mr. Sweat was said to be in custody on Sunday.) Gene Palmer, who has worked at the prison since 1987, told investigators that he smuggled in a screwdriver and pliers and did other favors for Mr. Matt in exchange for a dozen paintings and other works by him, according to court documents and a person with knowledge of the situation. Mr. Palmer also told investigators that he helped Mr. Matt mail one of the paintings, of the television character Tony Soprano, to a woman in Florida, who sold it on eBay for $2,000.

Policies about whether inmates may mail art out or receive money for their work vary widely and change often at prisons across the country.

Mr. Mulligan, who described Mr. Matt as his “best friend” at Clinton, said that while he had not paid for Mr. Matt’s artwork, he had sent money and food after his release. Mr. Matt, he said, had taught himself to paint, probably while serving time many years earlier in Mexico. At Clinton, Mr. Matt was considered by far the most talented artist.

“He was the best in the system that anyone could recall,” Mr. Mulligan said. But he added that his efforts to get some recognition for Mr. Matt’s paintings in the outside world had gone nowhere. “The art community is tough,” he said.

Art by particularly notorious convicts — Charles Manson, John Wayne Gacy — has always found an avid, sometimes macabre, collector base. The market for inmate art typically ranges from small galleries and exhibitions to eBay and other collectibles websites, including murderauction.com and murderabilia.net.

The Prisons Foundation, established by former prisoners 12 years ago in Washington, says it receives about two works a week from prisoners or their families to sell. Prices for works range from $20 to more than $1,000. The foundation plans to hold an exhibition of prisoners’ art on Governors Island
in New York, opening on July 21, with about 80 items for sale.

Phyllis Kornfeld, who has taught art classes in prisons for more than 30 years, said that while some prison artists have shown great talent and their work has found its way to galleries and collectors, the vast majority of inmates making art have limited access to materials and instruction and simply paint, draw and sculpt to pass the time and as a form of expression.

“It’s very rarely about profit making,” said Ms. Kornfeld, author of “Cellblock Visions: Prison Art in America,” published by Princeton University Press in 1997. She has organized an exhibition, “Folk Arts and Artifacts From America’s Prison Culture,” that opens on Thursday at the Forbes Library in Northampton, Mass. “It’s just one of the expressions of humanity that is pushing itself out, as it always does,” she added.

Anthony Papa, who was serving 15 years to life in the Sing Sing prison in Ossining, N.Y., when a fellow inmate taught him how to paint, said that art was “a very powerful rehabilitating tool, not only for the prisoner but for the institution.” Mr. Papa, an advocate for drug-policy reform, has gone on to have some success as a painter since his release, selling works, usually with themes of social justice, in the low four figures.

For a while during his incarceration, he said, inmates could exhibit their work in an annual show, “Corrections on Canvas,” in the Legislative Office Building in Albany. But that program was ended by a New York state corrections commissioner who banned sales of inmates’ art in 2002, saying it had come to be seen as the state providing a forum for inmates to profit. The previous year, protests had arisen when that show featured work by Arthur Shawcross, a serial killer whose sketches of figures like Princess Diana and Santa Claus sometimes sold for several hundred dollars.

In many maximum-security prisons across the country that do encourage or allow art to be made, the range of permitted art materials is narrow, because of fears that things like paintbrushes or chemical-based paint could be used as weapons or for other illicit purposes. (Brushes, for example, can be broken down for their metal parts.)

“Nothing that was flammable,” Mr. Papa said, ticking off the list. “I
used mostly acrylic paint and watercolors. I bartered with guards for materials. If I was painting their portrait, they would bring in oil.”

Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, an associate professor at the University of Iowa who has taught art in prisons for several years, said that inmates made do with what they could get. In some cases, she said, they soaked M&M candies in water to use the coating for coloring, and made brushes out of dampened toilet paper.

“Prison toilet paper is wonderful for sculpture,” she said. “It holds together.”

Martin F. Horn, a former New York City corrections commissioner who now teaches at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said arts programs could benefit prison authorities as much as prisoners. Prisoners who violate rules can be deprived of programs, while prisoners who are cooperative can enjoy them.

“You want prisoners to have some modicum, some array of privileges that you can use to reward good behavior and punish bad behavior,” he said.

Mr. Matt, who had been serving a sentence of 25 years to life at Clinton since 2008, appears to have used tubes of paint that he kept hidden, perhaps because they were of a type that was considered contraband. But Mr. Mulligan, in prison for bank robbery, said that Mr. Matt painted openly in his cell and was widely known by guards and prisoners as an active artist who always worked from photographs.

“If the photograph wasn’t really perfect, he couldn’t do it,” Mr. Mulligan said. “He was always really specific about how he wanted the pictures. He was working on one of me and my fiancée and her cat, based on a photo portrait of us that I sent him. But that was the last I heard from him.”

He added that he had no qualms about collecting work by a convicted killer. “People who think there’s a moral problem with that are ignorant,” he said, adding, “They don’t understand the prison situation.”

He said that he had fielded a couple of offers for Mr. Matt’s works since the escape and that he expected more to come. “I’m hoping I can sell some,” Mr. Mulligan said. “I hope he gets some recognition out of this. I’m not going
to lie to you about that. If I was able to sell some of them, I'd send some of the money to his daughter. That's what he wanted to do."

Andrew Edlin, whose company owns and runs the Outsider Art Fair, said he had no real basis to determine whether Mr. Matt's work would be more valuable because of his notoriety or death. If it happened, he said, it would have little to do with collectors admiring the quality of the art, which is not particularly distinguished.

"Their reasons would be purely mercenary," he said. "I think, to me, this is sort of a pop-oddity culture story rather than an art world story."

William K. Rashbaum contributed reporting.

A version of this article appears in print on June 29, 2015, on page C1 of the New York edition with the headline: The Art of Prison: A Mental Escape.
4.5 Million Homes Are Led by Single Parents Like Jesus Benitez

At a time when fewer than half of children live in a two-parent home, a small program in New York City is making a huge difference for single fathers and their children.

BY CAROLINA GONZÁLEZ

June 25, 2015  Jesus Benitez made some mistakes. At 17, he dropped out of high school as a senior when he became a father to Mason, now 6. He had otherwise mostly stayed out of trouble, but he realized that earning $200 as a cashier at a store near his home in the Bronx offered no real future for him or his son, for whom he is the primary caretaker.

"I always worked in a kitchen, and I was tired of it," said Benitez. "The most I thought about was doing better working in a hotel."

But now the 23-year-old son of a Mexican immigrant single mom is hoping to graduate in December with an associate's degree in philosophy, and transfer to a bachelor's program in one of New York's public colleges. He also works as a counselor in a mentoring program helping students like him stay in school.
Most importantly, he said the emotional detachment he felt from his son a few years ago has been replaced with deep engagement, and the pair often go on walks and compare notes on what they’re learning in school.

"I prepare little topics on philosophy for us to talk about," he said.

To some people, a transformation like Benitez’s may seem too good to be true. But his circumstances as a single father have become more common in the past few decades. The number of households headed by single parents has increased dramatically in the past half-century, fourfold for single moms and ninefold for single dads, for a total of more than 4.5 million households headed by single parents around the country.

Even though we continue to think that the ideal family structure to provide kids with the resources and focus they need to succeed in life includes two married parents, American families have been reshaped dramatically over the past half century by divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation. Fewer than half of kids in the U.S. live with two married heterosexual parents, compared with 73 percent in 1960.

This is why some programs aimed at giving their parents tools that can help them improve their children’s educational and eventually economic success are zeroing in on single parents and their specific challenges.

Many efforts are focused on single mothers, who are often assumed to be the most likely heads of households in single-parent homes. But one program, the Fatherhood Academy at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, New York, works with young fathers, mostly men of color. The Academy operates on the belief that this is a population which has been sorely neglected in the move to help families improve their circumstances. Benitez went through the 16-week program, which has graduated 178 men since 2012 and has funding through 2019.

"Many of these dads haven’t had the support they needed to feel part of their families or to provide for their children," said Reheem Brooks, who directs the program.

For many young fathers like the ones who participate in the Academy, between the ages of 18 and 24 and mostly low-income and black or Latino, the most common difficulties to overcome to support their families financially and emotionally have to do with their lower educational attainment. Overall, 19 percent of single dads don’t have a high school diploma, compared with 10 percent of married dads. There’s also a higher likelihood that they have been involved with the criminal-justice system; 30 percent of African-American men and 26 percent of Latinos have been arrested by age 18, compared with 22 percent of white men.

The Academy’s program addresses both the practical and the less tangible issues these young men have. Three days a week, from morning through mid-afternoon, the participants work on education in the morning—many participants dropped out of high school, often as a result of becoming fathers, like Benitez. So far, 61 enrollees have gotten their high school equivalency degrees, with more than a dozen going on to college, in part inspired by the program’s on-campus setting.

"It makes a big difference for them to be on a college campus and to imagine that they too can be college students," said Brooks. "They can begin to imagine their future."
A Persistent, but Quiet, Campaign Made Lunar New Year a School Holiday

By LIZ ROBBINS  JUNE 26, 2015

On Wednesday night at the Yung Wing School, a public elementary school in Chinatown, students performed songs from the Disney musical “Mulan,” dancing crisply in traditional silk costumes ironed that morning by their parents. These were the voices of the next Asian-American generation in New York City — and they were loud.

Granted, many of them did not fully grasp the significance of Mayor Bill de Blasio’s announcement the day before: Lunar New Year will now become an official public school holiday.

But their parents and community leaders did. It had taken 10 years to get the winter holiday on the calendar, the culmination of a persistent campaign by a handful of officials and advocates representing a divided and often politically reticent population.

“It makes us proud that the city is paying attention to us — and our holiday,” Wendy Lam, 48, the mother of a fifth-grade actor, said in Mandarin. “It’s an important day for families to be together.” She added in English: “So proud. We tried to get the holiday for so many years.”

The calendar designation is new, but among the city’s Asian-Americans, who make up 15 percent of New Yorkers, the question of why it took so long has been a perennial conversation. Albeit a hushed one.

“It took a while for our community to speak up,” said Jenny Low, the
board chairwoman for the Chinese-American Planning Council, who was at the "Mulan" performance. "We've been a silent community for hundreds of years. We just have not been good about voicing our needs."

Ms. Low, 52, said that she grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution before moving to New York when she was 12. For her generation, speaking out against the government was disrespectful, if not dangerous. It is much the same in other Asian cultures.

"In Korea, if you make a noise, it is not an elegant thing to do — but here, even the squeaky wheel gets oil," said Christine Colligan, co-president of the Korean-American Parents Association of Greater New York. "You have to raise your voice."

The city’s Asian population has increased to about 1.3 million in 2014 from nearly 873,000 in 2000, according to an analysis of census data by the Asian American Federation, a nonprofit group based in New York. And yet, only four Asian-Americans, all Democrats, serve as elected city officials: two Council members, Margaret Chin and Peter Koo; Assemblyman Ron Kim; and United States Representative Grace Meng.

John C. Liu, a Democrat and the former city councilman and city comptroller, first led the campaign that overturned the 2002 veto of Republican Michael R. Bloomberg to enact alternate-side-of-the-street parking on the Lunar New Year. Over the next several years, lawmakers in Albany took up the cause, including Jimmy K. Meng, who was a Democratic Queens Assemblyman, and then his daughter, Ms. Meng. She worked with State Senator Daniel L. Squadron, a Democrat whose district includes Chinatown, to introduce a bill in 2009.

"When I first introduced it some people thought it was ridiculous and that I should focus on something a little more tangible and viable in my first term," Ms. Meng said. "Even some people in the Asian-American community told me not to waste my time."

She was determined, remembering as a child in Queens when her schoolmates laughed at her for bringing dumplings to celebrate the Lunar New Year.
Mr. Kim, who succeeded Ms. Meng in representing Flushing, endured the same skepticism, if not "soft racism," in Albany.

"I've had colleagues refer to some of the issues I'm advocating for as 'international issues,'" Mr. Kim said.

In 2014, Mr. Kim sponsored a bill that Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo signed into law, empowering the city to study the rate of student absences to determine whether the Lunar New Year merited a holiday. But Mayor de Blasio, a Democrat who had promised during his campaign to add the Lunar New Year and two Muslim holidays to the school calendar, never completed the study, Mr. Kim said, adding that lawmakers were frustrated.

So the Senate passed a bill two weeks ago that would establish the holiday. The Assembly, led by Mr. Kim, was planning to pass the bill before Mr. de Blasio declared that Lunar New Year would be an official school holiday starting in February 2016.

During the announcement on Tuesday, Mr. de Blasio said that a "strong message" from Albany helped spur his decision. "I said consistently it was something I intended to do, but it was taking us time to figure out how to do it right," he said.

Though it is not a religious holiday, the Lunar New Year is one of the biggest cultural holidays in several Asian countries including China, South Korea and Vietnam, where many generations of families mark the occasion with food, pride and pageantry.

"It is really about Asian-Americans overcoming the 'perpetual foreigner syndrome' — this notion of Asian-Americans, no matter what, that we are still not quite American enough," Mr. Kim said. "It validates Asian culture as part of the American fabric."

As Peter Kwong, a professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College, put it: "It's about time." Students, he said, already had off for the Jewish High Holy Days, and in March, the mayor added two Muslim holidays to the school calendar.

But whether the addition of the Lunar New Year would lead to greater political involvement from the Asian-American community was unclear.
Progress has been slow, Mr. Kwong said, because community leaders had historically been more focused internally and have not formed a weighty voting bloc.

"It takes two to tango," Mr. Kwong said. "And I will always say the established mainstream political parties do not see the need or inclination to develop Asian party strength."

Social welfare advocates, meanwhile, are focused on funding. "The dollars going to our community haven’t grown with our population," said Jo-Ann Yoo, the executive director of the Asian American Federation. Her organization published a report in May that showed that from 2002 to 2014, the Asian community received just 1.4 percent of the total dollars of all city social-service contracts.

Steven Choi, the director of the New York Immigration Coalition, who formed a group in 2008 to protest city budget cuts to programs affecting immigrant communities, applauded the mayor for at least addressing an "easier" issue first in designating the Lunar New Year.

"For Asian-Americans, it's a recognition that the community is more mobilized and organized than it has been," Mr. Choi said.

Already, a group of young leaders are taking on issues with broader appeal, saying that despite the perception of a "model minority," they are often subject to discrimination. The Asian American Student Advocacy Project, a program run by the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, a nonprofit group, spent the year working to improve college guidance in city high schools.

At the group's year-end party on Tuesday night, the members saw possibility in the Lunar New Year holiday designation.

"We want to make the issues we face as an Asian-Pacific-American community more prominent to decision makers today," said Samantha Ng, 17, a graduating senior at Beacon High School in Manhattan. "This is one big step for us, culturally."
Cheers to the Latino Leadership Institute

By Tom Allon

In a world dominated by skyrocketing tuitions and onerous student loans, the Latino Leadership Institute stands out in being able to provide a superlative education to young people who would otherwise not be able to afford it — for free.

That's right, free.

The organization, which pays the City University of New York for the space it occupies, does not charge for the excellent instruction it provides in that space. Everyone there, including the instructors—featuring noted experts like election lawyer Jerry Goldfeder — donates his or her considerable skills and expertise.

In this day, age, and city, this is nothing short of a small miracle.

Led by New York politico and visionary Jaime Estades, the institute was started in 1999 and has continued building its influence through the years, turning out graduates that have gone on to successful careers in politics and community organizing in New York and throughout the country.

Although its mission statement says the organization exists "to empower Latinos and other minorities by increasing their participation in the democratic process," Estades is quick to point out that it is no longer an Latino-only academy.

"More than half of the students each year are white, African-American, and Asian combined," he said.

Much has been made lately by politicians and pundits alike of the growing political importance of Latino voters in elections. According to the Pew Research Center, the Latino demographic in America has grown six-fold since 1970 and, in fact, Asians and Latinos are now the fastest rising demographic groups in the country.

In an important development for U.S. cities, nationally Latinos are displacing African-Americans as the dominant urban minority. Recently, a pollster for presidential candidate Sen. Marco Rubio said that the GOP must top 40 percent with Latinos to win the White House in 2016.

In short, there has never been a better time for the Latino Leadership Institute and others like it to be educating young minds and preparing them for the political and social justice battles of the future.

One shining example is recent graduate Sandra Hughes O'Brien, who garnered 2.1 million votes statewide to become the first Latino elected to the Wayne State University Board of Governors.
“Currently, I am in the third year of my eight-year term,” she said. “The Latino Leadership Institute played a huge part in my winning.”

So it was no surprise to me when, in Lower Manhattan a couple of weeks ago, an event took place heralding the institute that has also produced such notable New York movers as Shaun D. Francois, President Local 372; Marvin Holland, Political Action Director TWU Local 100; Anthony Perez, Executive Director, Bronx County Democratic Party; and CUNY Dreamers Monica Sibri, Jazmin Cruz and Ana Guillcatanda.

One by one, local political luminaries took the stage and spoke passionately of the positive impact that this remarkable organization and its leader have had on politics and leadership in New York.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., Congressman Charles Rangel, Assemblywoman Rebecca Seawright, Assemblyman Keith Wright, Anthony Wells, President Local 371, John Samuelsen, President TWU Local 100 and many others, all spoke of the commitment to the education of budding young leaders in the areas of public policy, electoral politics, ethics, Latino history and more.

The Institute has had many success stories like this one and they all lead to one inevitable conclusion: While it may be Sen. Marco Rubio, Sen. Ted Cruz, and others who are the political influencers in this generation, it will almost certainly be Jaime Estades’ Latino Leadership Institute and others like them who will be developing the young leaders who will shape America in the next generation.

Moments to savor are rare in politics and, indeed, even when contemplating the future of our country sometimes, but when I think about the Latino Leadership Institute and other organizations like it, I get the feeling that America’s future just might be in good hands after all.

Tom Allon, president of City & State NY, was a Republican and Liberal Party-backed mayoral candidate in 2013 before he left to return to the private sector. Reach him at tallon@cityandstateny.com.
Dreamers no longer face legal barriers to college, but cost burdens are just as bad

Because they can't pay tuition many of them are going to wind up trapped in the low-income jobs waiting for those without college degrees

Amanda Bennett and Carlos Gutierrez
Friday 26 June 2015 08.30 EDT

Thanks to an executive action by President Barack Obama, Dreamers - the sons and daughters of undocumented immigrants who have been in the US since they were children - now have the ability to attend college. But too many aren’t pursuing higher education because they don’t have the means to pay for it.

According to the US Department of Education, 85% of all full time students get some form of financial aid. But for most non-citizens, including these Dreamers, this aid is nearly non-existent. This is largely because undocumented students (including Dreamers) by law aren’t eligible, as all their classmates are, for federal grants or even loans to fund their education, which is by far the largest source of support for low-income students’ college education.

While many juggle jobs, often helping support their families and scraping together college hours one course at a time when they can accumulate funds, this is a slow, painful and often impossible way to finish school. It took Cristina Constantino four years to finish a two-year degree, getting up at 5 am to make it to class and working in a restaurant when she wasn’t in school. There are at least 550,000 of these Dreamers in the US, and perhaps as many as 1.9m. Many of them, despite their best efforts, are going to wind up trapped in the low-income jobs waiting for those without college degrees.

Objections to helping Dreamers get a college degree make little economic sense. By 2020, 65% of all US jobs will require some education beyond high school. At the current production rate, the United States will fall short by 5m workers with postsecondary education by 2020. Cultivating a more educated workforce is essential to the nation’s economic future as baby boomers leave the job market and our economy increasingly requires skilled workers. This isn’t just a mission for Dreamers’ higher education, but a mission for the nation’s future workforce and economic development.

Many of these young adults are highly motivated and talented individuals who want nothing more than to go to college and contribute to the economic and social richness of our nation. Many graduate at the top of their class. Many get 4.0 grade point averages. They do community service. They play sports. Some have struggled to complete their high school education, all the while working to help support their families. They want to be teachers,
nurses, lawyers, engineers, veterinarians and accountants. They want to start businesses and help other people. The barriers they face are beyond their control.

These young people come from El Salvador, Mexico, Poland, Korea and almost 80 other countries. If we help educate these students, we can create a powerful resource for their communities and for all of us in this country. If we fail to do so, we lose a whole generation of motivated talent and ability.

Over the past 25 years, we have worked to make scholarships available to low-income students, and we’ve seen the transformation a college degree can make in the life not only of an individual, but of his or her entire family. With a scholarship, Cristina Constantino plans to finish her BA degree over the next two years and plans to go to graduate school. Korean-born Dreamer Grace Couch dropped out of college for years when juggling full-time work and nighttime classes became impossible; today, at age 29 and with scholarship help, she is starting a nursing career. “I am planning to follow my professors’ footsteps in obtaining my masters and eventually a PhD in nursing. I want to become a nurse educator and a leader to speak up for our immigrant and minority populations,” she told her graduating class at City University of New York in May.

These students want to learn, to grow, to contribute. The promise of a better future for these young people is also the promise of our own country’s future - their education is an investment we would be foolish not to make.