Behind the Growing Calls to Close Rikers Island

By Ed Morales
November 24, 2015

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A federal lawsuit and the onslaught of bad press generated promises of reforms. But a growing chorus of politicians, former correction officials and commentators is now saying that Rikers is beyond saving.

"I think we should close Rikers, sell it, and build small community-based facilities," says Jeremy Travis, president of the John Jay College for Criminal Justice and former director of the National Institute of Justice under President Bill Clinton. "This is not an new idea.

It's not something I'm shouting from the rooftops but I believe it's an idea whose time has come."

Actually achieving that goal will be difficult in the face of numerous obstacles, both political and practical – including the fact that in 2013 the city broke ground on a new jail on the island.

In some ways, however, the city is already winding down its reliance on Rikers. The island's population has declined to just under 10,000 after cracking 20,000 in the early 90s, and efforts to reform bail laws, treat mental illness outside of the correction system and speed up the courts have encouraged the notion that Rikers is increasingly obsolete.
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Meanwhile, arrests are declining, the state prison system is dwindling and a nationwide, bipartisan consensus has formed around the need for criminal-justice reforms that would have been unthinkable a decade or two ago.

The key question might not be whether the city should live without Rikers, or how it would do so, but whether it has the political will to finish the transformation that has already started.

Travis traces the idea to close Rikers Island back to his days as a member of the Koch administration in the 1980s. "Herb Sturz was the deputy mayor and he proposed a swap of Rikers with the state," Travis says. "Then the idea was, the state was building up
prisons, so why not keep those incarcerated individuals close to New York, and use the money to build a distributed network of smaller pretrial detention facilities throughout the city?" Travis says the idea never materialized because the state couldn't come up with the money, but he felt it was a strong proposal because it would allow state inmates the chance to be closer to their city relatives and "give the city the opportunity to rethink and refocus attention to build a distributed network of small, presumably better designed, more humane and effective smaller facilities."

As recently as Mayor Michael Bloomberg's second term, the city tried to disperse the Rikers population to borough-based jails. Martin Horn, correction commissioner under Bloomberg and now a distinguished lecturer at John Jay, attempted to double the capacity of the Brooklyn Detention Complex in Boerum Hill, as well as build a $375 million jail in the South Bronx. Horn believed that dispersed jails in local settings would actually benefit the community. "It would be better for families and for justice – it would make the prisoners more accessible to the lawyers and social service organizations," Horn says now. Neighborhood opposition torpedoed the move. "Everybody would wring their hands and say, 'Yes, it's terrible, Rikers Island stinks, but nobody wanted to do anything about it,'" Horn recalls.

The idea of closing Rikers in the face of the level of opposition encountered in 2007 would be "very unrealistic," Horn says. But the politics surrounding the issue have changed over the past eight years. A few elected leaders openly support a move to close the island. One of them, Queens City Councilman Daniel Dromm, says putting together a plan to "demolish Rikers" is a win-win. "We know we're going to have (not-in-my-backyard) objections but I think we have to educate the public about why it is important to keep facilities close to home and we need to have elected officials who can stand up and have the courage to say this is the right thing to do," Dromm says.

Neil Barsky, a former Wall Street Journal reporter, hedge fund manager and founder of an investigative journalism site called The Marshall Project, jump-started the debate this summer with an op-ed in The New York Times. Invoking comparisons to Guantánamo Bay (the analogy came up again in a recent Marshall Project post by former Gov. Eliot Spitzer) and Rikers' significance in the growing national debate on criminal justice reform, Barsky described the potential benefits of its closure on several big-picture levels.

"I think it's a great opportunity for Mayor de Blasio," he said.

The political argument that advocates of closing Rikers make boils down to this: At a time when de Blasio is being battered by critics from the left and right, closing Rikers could be a crucial legacy-builder. While tabloid headlines scream about the perception of a spike in street crime, they have also painted Rikers as an evil that must be cured. The mayor has a chance to make a major statement in the country's larger debate about criminal justice reform. And the island itself could even represent an opportunity for real-estate development with no risk of gentrification.
While much of the impetus for closing Rikers has come from policymakers and politicians, there is a growing grass-roots movement calling for change. Various groups like JustLeadershipUSA and the New York City Jails Action Coalition are part of a coalition that has circulated a petition on change.org calling for Rikers' closing. A significant component of the activist movement is motivated by a recognition that blacks and Latinos are over-represented in the criminal justice system, a critique deeply woven into the evolving national debate about race.

Of course, de Blasio faces real obstacles to making a move to shutter Rikers. Besieged by the governor, charter networks, tabloid editorial boards, activists who feel he's contracting with and hiring too few minorities, and a number of potential challengers from within his own party, de Blasio isn't exactly rolling in political capital. His reforms of the bail system have been modest compared with what closing Rikers would involve, and critics have already accused him of being "soft on crime." His greatest vulnerability has always been a rise in violence during his administration, and an uptick in the NYPD crime statistics could make closing Rikers all but impossible. Plus, the mayor already faces major fights over building affordable housing in certain neighborhoods; imagine the uproar in the communities where new jails would go.

So far, the de Blasio administration is not seizing on the opportunity. Instead, the city continues to put its faith in the reform process.

There has been a succession of jail-policy changes since the Times' series on the abuse of mentally ill inmates in July 2014 and the release of Bharara's report that August. By last November, de Blasio was promising more money to treat mental illness in the correction system. A few weeks into the new year the city's Board of Correction adopted changes to the minimum standards governing life of Rikers, and in March the mayor and Correction Commissioner Joseph Ponte announced a 14-point plan to address violence on the island.

In late June, the city agreed to an additional set of reforms that included the end of solitary confinement for all inmates under 18—Browder had spent months in solitary—and the installation of a federal monitor at the Department of Correction as part of a settlement in a lawsuit filed by Rikers inmates through the Legal Aid Society. The promised reforms included the use of body cameras by correction officers, increased video surveillance, a new use-of-force policy and new disciplinary guidelines. In addition, the settlement required the city to "make best efforts" to house inmates under 18 at facilities that would be accessible by public transit and allow for direct supervision.

On Oct. 7, the mayor quietly signed new legislation mandating additional Department of Correction reforms. Among other changes, the bills established reporting requirements involving statistics on inmate demographics, the use of segregated housing units, visitation, bail amounts, sentence lengths and inmate grievances. An inmate "bill of rights" and a public posting of the department's use-of-force policy are also now required.

The reforms have had mixed results so far. The end of solitary confinement for detainees and inmates under 18 and the reforms in the bail system pursued by the City Council
have at least symbolically addressed some of the problems. But just a few weeks ago internal emails were released showing that the Bronx district attorney's office has a backlog of about 70 cases of violence from Rikers and appears overwhelmed. A new lawsuit was filed by a jail visitor who claimed she was groped by a Rikers guard who made her take her clothes off in front of her 5-year-old daughter. While it's only fair to give the reforms time to work, there was a spike in violence at Rikers reported this July, and a newly released report by city Comptroller Scott Stringer's office asserts that violence has exploded as the inmate population has declined.

The reforms implemented so far seem like common-sense measures, offering more reporting and transparency and an end to the practices most prone to abuse. But they mirror the policies being used to reduce incidents of excessive force by police – a reliance on technology here, a changing of codes there. The question for both sets of initiatives is whether they address the systemic issues at play. It seems unlikely that any modest reform will change the essential fact that Rikers is a dumping ground for pretrial detainees mired in a disgracefully slow case-processing system, a poorly suited home to thousands of the mentally ill, and a decaying physical asset on an isolated island that makes life difficult for everyone involved.

What's needed, says John Jay's Travis, is for the city to wipe the board and start over.

"Let's think creatively about a system that treats individuals with dignity, gives corrections officers a good working environment, provides opportunities for people that are mentally ill to be treated like mental patients rather than inmates, treats young people differently and maybe not there at all – and let's do the visioning exercise that says in 10 years, where do we want to be?" Travis says. "If we did that, we would not want to keep Rikers."
De Blasio, McCray: Proactive Mental Health Initiative Will Save Lives & Money
By Lenore Fedow
November 24, 2015

Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray yesterday released ThriveNYC: A Mental Health Roadmap for All, a plan designed to support the City’s mental health. The plan outlines a total of 54 initiatives, including 23 new ideas to improve the mental health system.

Based on data from The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, the City estimates that at least one in five adult New Yorkers will experience a mental health disorder in any given year. Eight percent of high school students in New York City report attempting suicide, and more than one in four report feeling persistently sad or hopeless. Deaths because of unintentional drug overdose now outnumber both homicide and motor vehicle fatalities.

In addition to the human toll, failure to adequately address mental illness and substance misuse costs New York City’s economy an estimated $14 billion annually in productivity losses, according to the ThriveNYC release.

“If you look at how mental illness has been addressed over the years, you see a lot of broken promises,” said de Blasio. “You don’t see a concerted, holistic effort to help people be well and stay well. The people of NYC needed something different, something like ThriveNYC. It will take years to address the problem the way it should be addressed.

But we need to start now, we need to start aggressively. The people of NYC deserve nothing less.”

ThriveNYC sets forth a plan to make sure that New Yorkers can get the treatment that they need – and lays out an approach that will improve the mental wellbeing of all New Yorkers. The plan sets forth six principles for achieving long-term change:

- **Change the culture** by making mental health everybody’s business and having an open conversation about mental health.
- **Act early** to prevent, intervene more quickly and give New Yorkers more tools to weather challenges.
- **Close treatment gaps** by providing equal access to care for New Yorkers in every neighborhood.
- **Partner with communities** to embrace their wisdom and strength and to collaborate for culturally competent solutions.
- **Use data better** to address gaps and improve programs.
- **Strengthen government’s ability to lead** by coordinating an unprecedented effort to support the mental health of all New Yorkers.

ThriveNYC argues that similar proactive approaches have dramatically improved public health issues. For example, through a combination of policy bans on smoking, broad public communications, increased federal, state and local excise taxes and increased access to treatment tools, New York City cut the adult smoking rate by 35 percent in about a decade. The youth rate fell even more – by 52 percent.
“We want New York City to be a place where people can live their lives to the fullest,” said McCray. “ThriveNYC is about more services, better services and easier access to services. It’s a plan of action that shows us how to treat mental illness – and also promote mental health.”

Under the initiative, the city will also hire more people capable of providing this specialized type of mental health care. This includes around 400 clinicians, some Master and Doctoral-level, will be hired to work in mental health clinics and primary care practices in the City’s high-need communities. The NYC Mental Health Corps will be able to provide 400,000 additional hours of services when fully staffed.

The City will fund and help train 250,000 New Yorkers in mental health First Aid, teaching them to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness and addiction as well how to provide those who suffer from these illnesses with support.

The City will hire 100 School Mental Health Consultants to work with school staff to connect students in need of help to mental health care providers. ThriveNYC is also launching a public awareness campaign to promote a conversation about mental health and let New Yorkers know that services are available.

The initiative is also drawing wide support from both within the de Blasio Administration and within the health care sector.

“Having worked in public service for more than 35 years, for more than five mayors, this is the first time that I’ve seen a thoughtful and concrete plan that lays out the public policy rationale and concrete plan to care for people’s mental and physical health in a thoughtful way,” said Pam Brier, President and CEO of Maimonides Medical Center.

“The City’s new Roadmap so obviously makes perfect sense, and it will have an enormous impact on the health and well-being of New Yorkers in a new and profound way.”

James B. Milliken, Chancellor of The City University of New York, said CUNY is delighted to join Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in the ground-breaking citywide initiative, ThriveNYC: A Mental Health Roadmap for All.

“This exciting new set of strategies, involving CUNY’s School of Public Health and Hunter’s School of Social Work, will offer much-needed resources for CUNY students and their communities throughout New York,” said Milliken.

In 2016, the City will host the first Mayor’s Conference for Mental Health. The conference will allow cities to discuss mental health and emphasize the importance of including mental wellness in policy development.
Education and Arts & Culture: How this Longtime Wall Streeter does his Philanthropy

By Ade Adeniji
November 24, 2015

Now in his early 80s, Donald B. Marron began his career at the New York Trust Company and is currently the chairman of Lightyear Capital, a private equity firm he founded in the early 2000s. Marron was once on the Forbes billionaire list, though it’s unclear how much he’s currently worth. Marron has been engaged in philanthropy and moves his charitable contributions through the Donald B. Marron Charitable Trust, which doesn’t have much of a web presence, or a clear way to get in touch. In a recent tax year, the trust held around $20 million in assets and gave away about $8.3 million.

Marron made big waves a few years ago when he made a large $40 million gift to New York University to launch the Marron Institute on Cities and the Urban Environment, a new hub for research on cities and the urban environment. Marron is a lifelong New York resident and a product of New York City public schools. He also attended City University of New York. Other recent education philanthropy by Marron through his trust has involved outfits such as Abyssinian Development Corporation, which works in educational programming, human services and community development in Harlem; Barnard College, which received $350,000 in the 2014 fiscal year; Bronx High School of Science Alumni Association; Dwight School Foundation; University of Michigan; Harvard, where he’s funded a graduate scholarship in his name; and Georgetown University, which received $750,000 in the 2013 fiscal year.

Marron also has a strong interest in arts and culture philanthropy, which is driven at least in part by his wife Catherine, whose own charitable vehicle also flies under the radar.

Catherine once served as chairman of the New York Public Library, and is currently on the board of trustees. She is also chair of Friends of the High Line, and is passionate about green spaces. Between 2004 and 2010, at least $9.35 million went to New York Public Library. Friends of the High Line, meanwhile, has received at least least $3.2 million in the two most recent available tax years. Recent grants have gone to outfits such as Carnegie Hall, the Met, Metropolitan Opera, Municipal Art Society of New York, Modern Museum of Art, Neue Galerie New York, and New York Philharmonic.

Grantmaking has also involved health and human services outfits, such as Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (which received more than $1 million in the 2014 fiscal year), Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration, New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Coalition for Homeless, and Phoenix House, a nonprofit drug and alcohol rehabilitation organization. A component of Marron’s philanthropy involves international and policy issues. Recent grantmaking includes outfits such as Council on Foreign Relations, and Center for Strategic and International Studies.
Taking Up The Torch At AJWS
By Steve Lipman
November 24, 2015

American Jewish World Service, the 30-year-old nonprofit organization that supports human rights and anti-poverty activism in the developing world and educates the American Jewish community about global justice, recently announced that in July, Robert Bank, executive vice president, will succeed Ruth Messinger as president. Messinger has headed AJWS since 1998.

Bank, a native of South Africa, moved to New York to study piano at Juilliard. He went on to study law at the City University of New York Law School and worked for the New York City Law Department and Gay Men’s Health Crisis before joining AJWS in 2009.

We caught up with Bank by phone earlier this month.

Q: You lead a prominent Jewish organization that has “Jewish” in its title but a mission of Tikkun Olam to the wider, non-Jewish world. How do you reach a balance between Jewish and general values?

A: The mission of AJWS since 1985 has been to serve as proud Jews who stand as Jews to repair the world for those who are poorest and most oppressed. Everything we do at American Jewish World Service is deeply embedded in Jewish values. We draw from the lessons of Jewish history, from the tzelm elokim [being created in God’s image], the inherent dignity of every human being, tikkun olam [repairing the world] and tzedakah [charity]. We give American Jews the tremendous opportunity to support some of the poorest and most oppressed people in the world today. These are the strangers of today that our Jewish tradition teaches us about.

We have a seminal Jewish program called the Global Justice Fellowship, which connects American Jews to the work of our partners in the developing world by taking them to the developing world and teaching them together with rabbis.

The millennial generation, according to anecdotal and statistical evidence, is increasingly divorced from specifically religious — in our case, Jewish — values. They may see AJWS as “too Jewish.” How do you make the work of AJWS service attractive to them?

Young American Jews are enormously attracted to the global justice work that American Jewish World Service offers. We are at that intersection between global justice and Judaism; young American Jews that may not be that connected to Judaism find a home at AJWS.

How has your background, growing up in South Africa in the last years of apartheid and as an out-of-the-closet gay man, sensitized you to the work of AJWS?
Deeply. Both my experience of growing up in a racist regime, my experience of growing up in a Jewish minority in the diaspora, and my experience of being gay at a time when it was very difficult to be out of the closet and open about who I was has encouraged me to pursue justice for those who are discriminated against, persecuted and treated poorly.

The coverage of your appointment at AJWS hardly mentioned your gay identity. Have we reached a point — at least in parts of the Jewish community — that one’s gayness does not play a role in a candidate’s fitness for a leadership position, or in outsiders’ reactions to the appointment?

I am deeply proud of being an openly gay man who is serving in this role, as I’m deeply proud to be Jewish, South African, an immigrant, a lawyer and an activist. I feel very gratified that the Jewish community is more embracing of LGBT people and particularly gratified by the recent decision by the Reform movement to embrace people who are transgender.

You’re following an iconic figure, Ruth Messinger, who has largely defined what AJWS has become. How do you follow in the footsteps of such a person, carving out your own identity while keeping faithful to her vision?

Ruth is one of my heroes. She has been my mentor and my partner in the work. I have worked very, very closely with her in the past six and a half years, and we have together devised a strategy for the organization going forward.
Assemblyman Leads DOT Commissioner on Tour of Rockaway Rail Line; Goldfeder makes case for reactivation of abandoned right-of-way

By Michael V. Cusenza
November 24, 2015

Assemblyman Phil Goldfeder (D-Howard Beach) last week welcomed city Transportation officials to the 23rd District and led them on a tour of part of the abandoned Rockaway Beach Rail Line.

Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg and DOT Queens Borough Commissioner Nicole Garcia last Friday joined Goldfeder on a tour of the Ozone Park portion of the defunct RBRL. Starting at the corner of 99th Street and 97th Avenue, the officials trekked along 99th Street to discuss reactivating the line that ceased operating in 1962.

“It was an honor to lead DOT Commissioner Trottenberg on a tour of the Rockaway Beach Rail Line and discuss various options for restoration of the old line,” Goldfeder said. “Commissioner Trottenberg and her team have been tremendous advocates for improving transportation here in Queens and I appreciate her coming to see the rail line firsthand and considering what its reactivation could mean for our transit-starved families.”

Last Friday's tour came on the heels of Goldfeder's testimony at a City Council Transportation Committee oversight hearing on proposals to improve access to mass transit in underserved communities in all five boroughs.

Specifically, Goldfeder pledged his support of Council Resolution 903-2015, calling on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to conduct a feasibility study of the Rockaway Beach line and other city-owned rail rights-of-way.

“There is no greater asset to our transit network than existing rights-of-way. With the Rockaway Beach Rail Line and the other underutilized rights-of-way throughout the city, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make lasting improvements to our transportation network and meet the demands of our growing populations,” Goldfeder testified. “I fully support the proposed Council Resolution 903-2015 calling on the MTA to study the potential use of these vital assets; and urge the City Council to continue its advocacy on behalf of our families as we work to end transportation deserts and create the equal access to transit options we deserve. As Queens residents, we are not asking for more than others, but rather for a fair share, to give our families the opportunity to thrive and grow.”

Trottenberg also testified at the Nov. 12 hearing, detailing DOT’s efforts to improve road infrastructure in the five boroughs.
Goldfeder has been rallying for reactivation for years. In 2014, he trumpeted the findings of a highly anticipated Queens College study that indicated, in part, that a revitalized RBRL could generate 500,000 subway rides per day, and that many residents in the communities through which the line runs—Rego Park, Forest Hills, Glendale, Richmond Hill, Woodhaven and Ozone Park—favor reactivation over transforming it into a park.

Reactivating the old line would cost approximately $1 billion, according to the study.

Also last year, Goldfeder coordinated a joint letter in which a majority of his Queens Assembly colleagues signed on in support of asking the MTA for a feasibility study into reactivating the line.

Beginning in the late 1800s, the Rockaway Beach Branch of the Long Island Rail Road served commuters from the Rockaway Peninsula through Rego Park. For more than 50 years, the line provided a 35-minute ride to midtown Manhattan.

Financial woes and disrepair led to the transfer of the line to the city from the LIRR shortly before it was shuttered in 1962. The southern section of the line was later converted into the present-day A Train, while the sections north of Liberty Avenue were left untouched. To this day, the right-of-way is still in city hands and much of the original elevated train trestle remains intact, according to Goldfeder.
Fine-Tuning Conversation Skills Improves Health Outcomes

By Glenn Albright, Ph.D.
November 25, 2015

What is the key element that could improve healthcare for doctors and patients around the world? The answer is simple — communication. Research has shown that collaborative communication between providers and patients has multiple benefits, including increased patient satisfaction, treatment adherence, and decreased rates of 30-day readmissions. For practitioners, who average approximately 250,000 patient encounters over a lifetime, collaborative communication can help reduce patient safety risks and insurance costs, while increasing their sense of effectiveness and job satisfaction. Yet an overwhelming majority of physicians have never received professional development on how to manage patient communication.

Provider-patient collaborative conversations are powerful tools to bring about change in attitudes while building life skills, knowledge, trust, and confidence. This can ultimately result in meaningful and sustained changes in health behaviors. In a sense, this collaboration allows for clearer expectations, understanding and knowledge that can enable the doctor to better understand and meet the patients’ needs. It also can help them empower patients to assume responsibility and take steps, albeit sometimes small ones, to manage their own healthcare. This type of collaborative interaction engenders empathy and trust, all of which increase health outcomes, as well as patient and doctor satisfaction.

However, collaborative conversations surrounding health, wellness, and social issues don’t come easy for either patients or physicians. Learning to ignite and execute a meaningful conversation begins with practice. Some physicians have begun using new conversation-practicing simulations with virtual patients to make the most of their patient interactions.

These simulations provide physicians and other healthcare providers with a virtual, risk-free practice environment, where different dialogue choices and approaches in managing a challenging health conversation can be experimented. The skills addressed often include motivational interviewing, shared decision-making, and social-emotional skills such as empathy, trust, and emotional self-regulation. In addition, conversations build knowledge on specific topics and provide practice in applying specific processes, such as screening patients using validated tools or conducting a brief intervention.

Empirically-based communication strategies such as Motivation Interviewing (MI), theory of the mind (or mentalizing), and emotional regulation — all constructs shown to increase patient engagement, collaboration, and health outcomes — are important elements of any conversation-practicing solution that physicians may consider.

MI is a goal-oriented, client-centered counseling approach designed to actively engage patients in identifying their problems and to increase their intrinsic motivation to change
their behavior. MI skills can be summarized in the acronym OARS where collaborative communication skills involve Open-ended questions, Affirmation statements, Reflecting back what the patient said and Summarizing. When healthcare providers implement OARS, as well as ask permission to give information and advice, they build trust, empower their patients, and increase adherence to treatment.

Mentalizing is our ability to understand and accept without judgement a patient’s own set of beliefs, understandings, and emotions about their health. This facilitates a provider’s ability to experience empathy or empathic accuracy, also known as cognitive empathy, which is knowing what the patient is feeling without experiencing it themselves. Both of these constructs can lead to better health outcomes.

Emotional regulation in communication, particularly the use of reappraisal strategy, which involves being aware of the patient’s emotions and one’s own emotions as a physician, allows the provider to better implement MI and mentalization.

The use of simulations with virtual humans that integrate MI, mentalizing, and emotional regulation has great promise in providing physicians the necessary collaborative communication skills to positively impact the health of their patients. This is particularly the case for those in treatment for chronic diseases, where identifying intrinsic motivators and developing patient trust and satisfaction affects treatment compliance.

From a more generalist perspective, simulations that enable users to better manage difficult or challenging health conversations offer potential landscape-changing solutions for learning sustained behavior change. By combining recent neuroscience and social cognitive research with groundbreaking developments in simulation and gaming technology, virtual humans are poised to transform how we engage individuals and professionals in building the communication skills that are key to collaboration and better health.

Glenn Albright, a clinical psychologist and director of research at Kognito, received his Ph.D. from City University of New York in the area of experimental cognition, with concentrations in neuropsychology and applied psychophysiology. He is a former chair of the department of psychology at Baruch College.
PA Executive Director Speaks At Queens College Business Forum Breakfast
By Thomas Cogan
November 25, 2015

At the last Queens College Business Forum breakfast, in early June, it was announced that the guest speaker at the next one, in November, would be Patrick J. Foye, executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The day in November arrived and so did Foye, though by the time of this latest meeting he had just announced his resignation from the PA after being its head for four years. Queens College President Felix V. Matos Rodríguez introduced Foye by calling him a man of his word and therefore, though he had surprised Matos and many others by saying he was stepping down, he would still appear as speaker. Foye talked about the PA in the present tense, as if he would see the projects he described being completed under his directorship. His enthusiasm was high, and it’s easy to imagine he’ll be gratified by their completion and attend the inauguration ceremonies.

Foye began by explaining that the Port Authority runs the three metropolitan airports, 1 World Trade Center, the Port Authority Trans Hudson (PATH) trains, the Port Authority Bus Terminal and many bridges and tunnels. He had absolutely nothing to say about the infamous traffic jam on the George Washington Bridge in the fall of 2013, though he was the one who ordered it cleared; he had initially come to talk about the well-run or problematic parts of the vast, two-state system, without commenting on the incident known now and forever as Bridgegate. His resignation would not change the content of his address. He said that running the La Guardia, John F. Kennedy and Newark International Airports and the George Washington Bridge is “a terrific business” and 1 World Trade Center is also a big winner; PATH and the bus terminal “not so much.”

Foye, who was appointed PA executive director in November 2011 by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, is the son of Irish immigrants and was brought up in Jackson Heights, so it was easy for him to emphasize the importance of the La Guardia and JFK Airports to Queens. He said they provide $35 billion worth of economic activity and $12 billion in wages, so it’s not surprising that they are “the single largest factor in Queens’ economy.” But they and Newark International had $7 billion in maintenance funds stripped from them after the 9/11 attack as part of the drive to rebuild the destroyed World Trade Center. He said that they are now beginning to recover, but the post 9/11 period has been tough for them, particularly La Guardia. Foye said that Vice President Joe Biden’s harsh reference to La Guardia as a “third world” airport last year was just.

He predicted though that it had a bright future, because it is being given a major overhaul under a public-private partnership (PPP) with the Swedish development and construction company, Skanska. He said it will be “the PPP of the decade” and that a fee excised from airplane fares finances much of the project. He predicted that the project will be finished in record time. For the present, he is amazed how it is being done without closing off any
part of the airport. He said that when work is completed, 45 months from now in 2019, the terminal will be half again as large as it is now.

More than a century ago, he said, private capital was the total builder of such projects as Grand Central Terminal, Pennsylvania Station and the first part of the New York subway. All eventually wound up as public entities. He said that private projects sometimes work even now, but the PPP seems to impress him most. Another such project is the Goethals Bridge, connecting New Jersey and Staten Island. It was opened in the 1920s and had become very much in need of repair. The project is an instance of public monitoring of the private contractor’s progress. There are no payments to the contractor until the project is seen as 70 percent completed, he said.

When he asked for questions, Thomas Grech, executive director of the Queens Chamber of Commerce, asked him about the main changes he foresees in the next 15 years. He predicted that the World Trade Center would be sold in the next few years, saying it should be. With La Guardia’s new look already mentioned, he saw modern airports, new and refurbished, “that aren’t an embarrassment.” He takes driverless cars seriously, saying they could be in effect almost before we know it. He said the bus terminal had not 15 years to go, but 20. He lamented its neglect but said any attempt to repair or replace it would be a $10 billion project. He assumed that one way or another it will remain—the largest bus lane in the world is in the Lincoln Tunnel, and it’s the pathway to and from the bus terminal. As PA head, PATH safety has been his chief concern, he said. Fearing a public transit disaster, he has always demanded instant contact, at any hour of the day or night, should large disruption occur on the PATH lines.

An inquirer suggested an Airtrain from JFK to La Guardia. Foye said it is imperative to build one exclusively to La Guardia, starting, he believes, from Penn Station. A question about a Hudson River rail tunnel brought him around to the proposed Gateway Tunnel between northern New Jersey and Penn Station, to replace the circa 1905 twin tunnels that currently carry New Jersey Transit and Amtrak trains back and forth. Those storm-damaged tunnels will fail eventually, he said, so Gateway is crucial, and better than the proposed ARC (Access to the Region’s Core) Tunnel, which New Jersey Governor Chris Christie canceled as too expensive in 2010, since ARC would not have been used by Amtrak. But whether crucial or not, tunnel permits take six or seven years to acquire in the United States, he said. He added that any delay costs billions and that as we delay we are breeding a disaster.

Even if he had not resigned, most or all of the matters Foye talked about would be resolved or continue long after he finally left office. But he had to project once more, when a student asked if Queens College students’ undergraduate studies have prepared them to seek employment to replace those who are retiring from the Port Authority. He said such majors as sociology and economics would certainly prepare them; even theology, since, he said, he knew a man at the PA who had a doctorate in theology. A more sobering question came from a woman who asked if there would be opportunities there for the formerly incarcerated. He answered that legal complications would have to be faced but that he believed it’s a worthy cause that could produce social benefits.
How Do You Make a Living, Visiting Professor?

Former adjunct Monica Brannon talks to Noah Davis about low pay, the difficulties of finishing a dissertation, and why she didn't just get a job in a restaurant.

By Noah Davis
November 24, 2015

While she was getting her Ph.D. in sociology from the New School, Monica Brannon spent hundreds of hours working as an adjunct at the City University of New York and other schools in order to help pay her rent and expenses. It's a path followed by thousands of would-be professors around the country and a serious issue in the world of academia.

Brannon, who now holds a temporary position at Bowdoin College, talked about low pay in the adjunct world, the difficulties of finishing a dissertation, and why she didn't just get a job in a restaurant.

What's your job now?

I'm a visiting assistant professor at Bowdoin College. It's a temporary position. I'm in my second year of doing this. There's no permanency to it. I'm just filling in for different people on sabbatical. But it's a very different position than adjuncting because of the institutional support that you get as a visiting professor versus an adjunct, as well as the status jump.

What do you mean by support?

An office. A computer. I get pens if I need them [laughs]. But also research money and teaching development. You get mentorship, which is a tremendous difference. You're actually part of a department, meaning you go to faculty meetings. You have a different relationship with students. You are expected to be present on campus outside of just your teaching.

How long were you adjuncting?

I did that through graduate school, probably about five years. I just finished graduate school last [year]. This is my first position after graduate school. I usually taught three classes a semester.

As a graduate student, I was also teaching at my own institution, so that was a different position with teaching fellowships.

Were your peers also adjuncting?

They all were at my graduate institution. I think my experience was a little bit different from others, meaning that everyone who went to the New School taught a tremendous amount compared to other students. That was both because we were living in New York and also because there was less funding at the New School. Every one of my peers that I knew was adjuncting.

Did that cut into the time you could spend working toward your Ph.D.?

Absolutely. We were expected to teach at the New School, and often we were teaching more than our professors were teaching. And we're also writing dissertations at the same time. And we were also adjuncting. One big disconnect is that at the institutions where you are adjuncting—in
my case, CUNY, primarily—no one has any understanding or concern with your own graduate work. It's not the same as teaching at your own institution where the faculty understands that you're writing or you're researching. There was never any relatability between those two worlds. I don't know the exact statistics, but it took all of us at the New School a lot longer to finish our dissertations than at schools where the students were fully funded and not teaching at all.

**How did you find adjuncting opportunities? Was there a graduate school network?**

I did two different things. There is a long line of this network at the New School. You can get advice about how to find these jobs or a peer will say something about a new opportunity. I actually sent my CV to every single chair of a sociology department in New York City and the surrounding areas. I happened to get a job because someone got my CV the moment that they realized they needed an instructor. It was the timing and nothing else. My peers got jobs more through the network.

**How much did you make per class?**

It's different at different places, but at CUNY it was about $3,000 a class, depending on how many you taught. It was $2,900 for one class but an average of $3,100 if you taught two classes.

I had a friend who taught at Rutgers-Newark and she made $4,500. The rumor is that New York University makes $5,000 a class. When I taught in the Midwest, the lowest I made was $2,100.

**Did you ever think about working at a restaurant or something where you could probably make more money?**

Yes. I also nannied through the first part of graduate school. I had friends who bartended or worked at a wine store and also adjuncted. A lot of people would package these jobs together.

But the idea is that adjuncting is actually helpful for your future. You are getting teaching experience. It does look better on your CV if you're teaching rather than nannying. There is a benefit to it. I do have way more teaching experience than a lot of my peers. That's what keeps people doing it, at least those who are in graduate school.

**Do you feel like having that experience helped when you applied for the job at Bowdoin?**

I could say: "I've taught this class six times. Here's my syllabus." But in another realm, it doesn't necessarily benefit you because it looks like you had to work. I've heard different advice. Some people tell me not to say how much I've taught because it's a mark on your record. My faculty told me that I had to explain that it took me so long to finish my dissertation because I was teaching and frame that as a positive thing. At least in my own position now, which is primarily a teaching position, it definitely helped.

**What's your plan from here?**

I'm on the job market because I'm still in a temporary position. I still hope that I'll get a tenure-track job. It's a huge problem that even in my own position, which is a little bit more stable and a little bit more guaranteed, I will spend a lot of time next year applying for jobs rather than doing my own research. But I feel very grateful that I have this rather than adjuncting. I'm teaching less at Bowdoin than I was as an adjunct and making way more money.
Becoming an au pair about more than just childcare, there’s a history lesson too

BY Victoria Pasquantonio
November 24, 2015

Robyn-Lee Malan has juggled 45 hours of childcare as an au pair, Saturday classes learning about the three branches of government and a new life in a new culture over the last six months, yet the 26-year old South African offers no complaints. “You always can read about another country, but it’s another thing to experience it,” she said.

Malan was one of nearly 300 au pairs from host families throughout the Northeast to travel to Washington D.C. over the weekend as part of the government’s three-decade long cultural exchange program. The trip served a second purpose for the au pairs: to fulfill education credits by the U.S. State Department required under the J-1 Visa.

The au pair program began in 1986 when a small group of au pairs arrived from Western Europe and now totals about 15,000 au pairs from six different continents, according to Jane Rolla, owner of Cultural Hi-Ways, an educational tour company.

As long as a course is held by an accredited U.S. post-secondary educational institution, the au pairs may fulfill the academic requirements, but many choose to register with “Learning Across America,” a popular continuing education program sponsored by CUNY’s Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).

Naomi Machado, the director of CUNY’s Language Immersion Program at BMCC, said that the State Department’s mandatory “six hours of academic credit or equivalent” turns out to be about two college classes a semester, or about 60 to 80 or more hours of classes a year, including the field trips, through CUNY’s program.

Alisa Alaca of Hamburg, Germany, who has worked as an au pair in a New York City suburb for eight months, said she has become more open-minded about the world. As Alaca walked passed a pro-refugee protest in front of the White House, she said she feels torn about the current political situation in Europe. While she expressed relief that a stadium attack was thwarted last week in Hanover, Germany, she was concerned when she heard her father had been verbally attacked over his Turkish heritage. “We should be one unit; the world is a big place. We should be together, and we should fight for each other instead of fighting against each other,” Alaca said.

Moritz Patsch, one of the few male au pairs on the D.C. trip, also from Germany, said that the recent attacks in Paris have complicated his views on Germany’s refugee policy.

“Right now, I feel a little safer here than I would feel at home,” Patsch said.

Christina Ernst, who teaches in the Learning Across America program, said Alaca and Patsch’s engagement in political discussions doesn’t surprise her. “They represent a
worldly group of young people who are aware and intelligent about international issues, and they know how to think in a different way than American students their age,” Ernst said.

The trips come together in large part due to Rolla, a former school teacher and previous host parent of several au pairs, who founded the tour company Cultural Hi-Ways in 1990.

Rolla started the organization as a way to provide au pairs with a fun, inexpensive way to explore the U.S. “It wasn’t like it is now,” Rolla said, adding that the State Department has become stricter concerning the education requirements since the early years of the program.

In 2007, Rolla partnered with CUNY’s Learning Across America, and in its first year, enrolled 30 au pairs. A year later, 2,000 au pairs signed up for courses. “To me this is a win-win. They can get their education and they can see North America,” Rolla said.

In preparation for the Washington D.C. trip, students researched the history of two memorials and made their own monuments from whatever craft materials they had at home, including cereal boxes, toilet paper rolls and paper, Ernst said.

“On the whole, I’d say the au pairs are really positive people,” CUNY’s Machado said.

“Some of the girls don’t want to do the classwork, but that’s very few. Most of them really have fun, and they seem to really enjoy learning about different parts of the U.S.,” she said.

At the World War II Memorial, Debora Brosco, a 26-year old au pair from São Paulo, Brazil, smiled when she heard that some of the green stones from the memorial came from Brazil. “When you hear something about your country, especially when you are far away, you feel proud. There’s a little piece of Brazil here,” Brosco said.

While exciting and overall positive for most of the au pairs, issues of fair wages and work conditions, loneliness, and sometimes just a poor match with the host family have been raised as concerns around the au pair program. Malan, the au pair from South Africa, recently switched families. She pointed to differences in child rearing, diminished hopes of feeling more like part of the family and early curfews as reasons for her departure.

Malan said she is very happy with her new family and would like to stay for another year.

“It’s all part of the learning experience,” she said.

Malan said she’s glad for the education requirements. She researched both Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr.’s Memorials because of her interest in civil rights and the connections to President Nelson Mandela. “It’s crazy to think what people went through for freedom,” she said.
Paid Notice: Deaths WATTS, JERRY GAFIO

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WATTS--Jerry Gafio. The Graduate Center, CUNY, deeply mourns the loss of Professor Jerry Gafio Watts, a leading scholar of African American political thought.

An exceptional teacher and mentor, Jerry was known for his intellectual courage and commitment to students, colleagues, and friends. We send deepest condolences to his family. In lieu of flowers, please send donations "In honor of Professor Jerry G. Watts" to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 40 Rector Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10006 or the United Negro College Fund, 1805 7th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001. Chase E. Robinson, President, The Graduate Center