The Gray Whale Sneaks Back into the Atlantic, Two Centuries Later
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Gray Whale

(Merrill Gosho, NOAA / Wikipedia Commons)

Oct 8, 2015 · by Alec Hamilton
Two years ago, tour boats taking passengers to look for dolphins off the coast of Namibia saw a strange sight (<http://namibiandolphinproject.blogspot.com/2013/05/a-rare-and-mysterious-visitor-in-walvis.html>): out of the water, a humped, bumpy dark gray back rose up, striped with scars and spotted with barnacles.

It looked like a gray whale. Except gray whales had been extinct in the Atlantic Ocean since the 18th century.

Liz Alter (<https://www.york.cuny.edu/portal_college/alter-susan-e>), an assistant professor of biology at the City University of New York, says it actually wasn't the first sighting. In 2011, a gray whale was spotted in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Israel.

"It came as huge shock to me and other marine mammologists," she recalled. "Many of us didn't believe it at first. There were even suggestions that maybe the picture had been Photoshopped. But gray whales are extremely distinctive. When you see a gray whale there's basically nothing else it could be."

Gray whales are considered "ecosystem engineers" — species that reshape the world they live in, like beavers, ants and coral. Like bulldozers — or giant earthworms — gray whales feed in the mud, creating huge holes and stirring up nutrients stuck on the ocean floor so that other creatures can eat them. The population in Pacific remains strong, but in the Atlantic they have been long gone.

Until these two sightings.
Researchers confirmed it. The creature spotted off Namibia was indeed a gray whale. But researchers still assumed it and the one spotted off Israel were anomalies, possibly whales that got lost while feeding.

Now Alter and her team have released a paper <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/mec.13121/abstract> that sheds light into what may be going on.

Alter and her team were able to access an unusually large collection of bone fossils that had been collected by a fisherman over a long career and who had stored them in his garage. They radio carbon-dated the samples and compared the genetic data to Pacific gray whales. The researchers hoped to pinpoint when the two populations had branched.

"We found to our great surprise that Atlantic and Pacific gray whales were not separated by millions of years like other whales," Alter said. "But rather our genetic evidence showed they had made several migrations over the past 100,000 years or so. And the period in which they migrated corresponded nicely to times when the oceans were a bit warmer, when the ice cover was less and the Bering Strait was open."

Basically, Alter said, "Gray whales started moving from Pacific to the Atlantic as soon as climate conditions permitted them to."

Now, with the Arctic currently receding, Alter says it will become more and more likely that gray whales will again find their way into the Atlantic.
"I don't expect that we'll see a brand new population of gray whales in the Atlantic anytime in the very near future," she said, "but it shouldn't surprise us if we start to see steady trickle of gray whales arriving in the Atlantic."

Alter says what amazes her is getting new information from bones more than 45,000 years old.

"Working on ancient samples is really exciting," she said. "You get this view into the past that you've only been able to hypothesize about. Having direct evidence of what was going on in the past is super exciting as a biologist. It's all made possible by technology that wasn't there 20 years ago."

Hypothesis is written and produced by Alec Hamilton and edited by Matthew Schuerman. Sound design and engineering by Liora Noam-Kravitz. Original music by Josh Burnett.
One Man’s Opus to New York’s Subway Art, Decades in the Making

OCT. 7, 2015

Building Blocks

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

If the subway is not New York’s greatest single work of civic art (Central Park and the Brooklyn Bridge are serious contenders), it is certainly the most sprawling.

It is tempting, in fact, to say that no one could possibly take in the entire system.

But then you peer around a column at a station on the Lexington Avenue line and spy a slight, diffident 67-year-old, with something of Alan Arkin’s intensity, focusing his gaze on what looks to you like just another wall. With an inexpensive ballpoint pen, he exactingly draws what he sees — one mosaic tile after the next — in a small spiral notebook. Then he moves on.

Meet Phillip Ashforth Coppola of Somerset, N.J.

He set out in 1978 to chronicle the artistic décor of the subway system and to credit its creators. He has self-published six illustrated volumes under the title “Silver Connections.” He expects to finish the project in 2030.
Whether he finally documents all 469 stations or not, Mr. Coppola can already be counted among civic historians like David T. Valentine, I. N. Phelps Stokes, Henry Collins Brown and Robert A. M. Stern who backed into projects far larger than they first imagined but — thankfully for posterity — just kept on going.

“If I could,” Mr. Coppola said, “I’d still like to finish it.”

Each “Silver Connections” volume has hundreds of 8 1/2-by-11-inch pages, bound in card stock with thermographed cover artwork. Station by station, readers are taken through the system in order of the contracts under which they were built.

Besides his typewritten narrative — earnest, exhaustive art history that can drift off into whimsical flights of fancy — Mr. Coppola has produced hundreds of black-and-white line drawings of the stations’ ornamentation. Many take up an entire page. His hand-printed marginal notes describe the colors.

“Silver Connections” is not just about art. It is also a work of art in its own right.

Subway artwork now falls under the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s Arts and Design Unit. But it has been integral to the system from the beginning. Contract 1 of 1900, the genesis of the system, included this striking clause:

“The railway and its equipment as contemplated by the contract constitute a great public work. All parts of the structure where exposed to public sight shall, therefore, be designed, constructed and maintained with a view to the beauty of their appearance, as well as to their efficiency.”

Mr. Coppola had been interested in subway artwork since boyhood, when his father told him about “pictures” on the station walls showing old New York.

“Way down beneath the streets of Manhattan,” Mr. Coppola wrote in his first volume, “there is still an ancient crow-stepped Dutch house on Wall Street, and for that matter, the spire of St. John’s Chapel still needles the sky over Varick Street, sloops go a-sailing from the Battery like they did back around 1800, and an old foot bridge still crosses the Harlem River from Third Avenue, and locomotives sporting big black funnels pull in at Grand Central by the hour.”
A Treasury of Artwork in the Subway

First and Grandest

"First and Gracdest"

"As least 7,000 Nickels"

A Second Monument to Columbus

"A Second Monument to Columbus, ""he said, ""is a great and glorious sight. The art is so grand, and the workmanship so perfect, that one cannot but be struck with admiration."

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As an adult, and an alumnus of the Rhode Island School of Design, Mr. Coppola wanted to know more. Who, exactly, was responsible for all those plaques, shields, festoons and reliefs? One thing led to the next.

Though he might shy from naming a favorite, it’s apparent that Mr. Coppola holds the architectural firm Heins & LaFarge in high regard. About their Borough Hall station in Brooklyn, he said: “It’s like the Roman empire come to life, it’s such a regal station. It’s simply the height. The apex.”

Volume 1, published in 1984 as a two-book set, sold for $40. One hundred and five copies were run off. This is not a viable publishing model. Mr. Coppola is a printer by trade, however, and that’s what puts bread on the table.

A revised edition of Volume 1, published in an edition of 60, costs $175, which is much more commensurate with the effort Mr. Coppola put into it. It is available through New York Bound Books, as is his portfolio on the Pelham Bay line.

After 37 years, Mr. Coppola is only now getting around to the stations on the Lexington Avenue line from Grand Central Terminal northward. That’s why you might have spotted him last Sunday at East 86th Street in Manhattan.

You can also watch him in the 30-minute 2005 documentary “One Track Mind,” by Jeremy Workman. It was shown on Wednesday at the New York Transit Museum in Downtown Brooklyn.

“You meet Phil and you think, ‘This is some kind of Joe Gould-Joseph Mitchell thing,'” Mr. Workman said, referring to writers who famously did not write. “Then you realize that he’s actually written 2,000 or 3,000 pages and drawn this painstaking, meticulously detailed artwork that numbers in the hundreds or thousands. It seems like something a novelist would come up with.”
Student Debt Is Worse Than You Think

OCT. 7, 2015

Kevin Carey

After a series of blockbuster hearings held 25 years ago on abuses in the higher education industry, Congress created a system to protect undergraduates from risky student loans.

But two weeks ago, the Education Department released a trove of new data suggesting that the system is failing and that, at some colleges, the saddling of students with loans they cannot afford to pay down is far more dire than anyone knew.

The loan crisis hits hardest at colleges enrolling large numbers of students from low-income backgrounds. These undergraduates have to borrow for college, then often have difficulty finding well-paying jobs after graduation — if they graduate at all.

As a result, they struggle to repay their loans. The colleges with the lowest student-loan repayment rates include many for-profit colleges, but also some public and private nonprofit colleges, including a substantial number of historically black
institutions. Even some wealthier, more selective colleges turn out to have a bigger student loan problem than previously realized.

Along with recent research finding that student loan defaults are heavily concentrated among the most economically marginalized students, the new data suggests that debt is a major financial obstacle for people who already face barriers to opportunity.

When Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia led the investigation in the early 1990s, Congress found widespread fraud by for-profit colleges. Some trade schools had gone so far as to grab people from welfare lines to sign them up for loans without their consent. The loans were never repaid, and the colleges kept the money.

In response, Congress created a rule called the cohort default rate. Every year, the Education Department calculates the percentage of borrowers who have recently left a given college and have defaulted on their federal-government-backed loans. If the default rate is too high, the college is kicked out of the federal financial aid system. The rule was an immediate success — more than 1,500 for-profit colleges were pushed out. A number of public and nonprofit colleges were also forced to bring their default rates down.

But the system has limitations. Only colleges with a default rate above 30 percent for three consecutive years, or above 40 percent in any single year, are expelled from the financial aid system. And students who default more than two to three years after leaving college don’t count as defaulters. Nor do students who manage to avoid default, but struggle to repay their loans.

In September, the department made a different calculation. Instead of default rates, the department calculated nonrepayment rates, which include both defaulters and borrowers who have never paid a single dollar of principal on their loans.

The nonrepayment category includes people who are only paying interest, have delayed making payments by enrolling in graduate school or are getting loan extensions. The nonrepayment rates were calculated over a longer time period: at one, three, five and seven years after students leave college.

Some of the numbers are startling. American National University — a for-profit
chain offering degrees in business, health care and information technology, both 
online and at 30 campuses in six Midwestern states — has an official default rate of 
8.5 percent, well below the national average of 11.8 percent. But its five-year 
nonrepayment rate is 71 percent. Even after seven years, most of the university’s 
students, the large majority of whom borrow, have failed to pay back a penny of their 
loans.

How is this possible? Because, as American National’s Department of Repayment 
Success web page helpfully explains, students are legally allowed to defer or otherwise 
delay making their loan payments based on economic hardship, continuing education 
and other factors.

Of course, interest accumulates in the meantime. This is “repayment success” 
only in the sense that it successfully helps students postpone paying their loans long 
enough to push the moment of debt crisis beyond the federal default-rate window and 
keep American National eligible for more federal aid. Proving economic hardship is 
likely to be easy, since the typical former student earns only $22,400 a year 10 years 
after entering college.

Some more mainstream colleges also have significant nonrepayment rates. 
Georgia State and the Universities of Cincinnati, Houston, Louisville, South Florida 
and Alabama all have single-digit default rates but have five-year nonrepayment rates 
of over 20 percent. At the University of Memphis, 35 percent of students have not 
paid down principal after five years. More than half of the students who borrowed to 
attend the for-profit University of Phoenix, which enrolls hundreds of thousands of 
students, have been unable to pay back a dollar of their loan principal after five years.

All told, over 700 colleges and branch campuses, many of them small proprietary 
schools, but also some public and private nonprofit institutions, have over half of 
their borrowers fail to pay down any debt after seven years. Nearly all of those 
colleges remain eligible for federal financial aid.

Among both public and private nonprofit institutions, the debt problem is most 
acute when students with very little money attend colleges with very little money. All 
25 of the public universities with the highest five-year nonrepayment rates are 
historically black institutions. Of the 25 private colleges with the worst nonrepayment
rates, 22 are historically black. One example, Lane College in Jackson, Tenn., has a
12.9 percent default rate but a 78.2 percent nonrepayment rate.

Historically black colleges are neither unusually expensive nor profligate
institutions. Most have served their communities for decades or longer, enduring
racism and inadequate funding while enrolling young people who are often
low-income, first-generation college students. As a result, despite the fact that tuition
at historically black colleges is often much lower than at well-heeled private colleges,
a vast majority of their students borrow.

That so many graduates of black colleges struggle to repay their loans may
exacerbate racial wealth disparities. These nonrepayment rates, moreover, do not
include the private loans that many students take out once their federal aid is
exhausted, or the debt that parents are increasingly carrying to pay for their
children's college educations.

The new data may prompt Congress to revisit its system for ensuring that
students who take on debt have a fighting chance to pay it back.

Kevin Carey directs the education policy program at New America.

The Upshot provides news, analysis and graphics about politics, policy and everyday life.
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A version of this article appears in print on October 8, 2015, on page A3 of the New York edition with the
headline: Repayment Rates Show New Depths for Student Debt.
Military program inspires Microsoft tech bootcamp for the underemployed

Oct 7, 2015, 12:28pm EDT

Michael del Castillo
Reporter- New York Business Journal

On top of Microsoft's upcoming retail invasion of New York City, the software company announced today a technical training pilot program to help unemployed locals find jobs, launched in partnership with multiple city organizations.

It turns out, the 16-week "Tech Jobs Academy" was inspired directly by another Microsoft project designed to give returning military officers an education in technology.

"What was so cool about the Microsoft Software Systems Academy is we've been able to help hundreds of returning veterans prepare to return to civic life," said John Paul Farmer, Microsoft NY's director of technology and civic innovation, and co-founder of Barack Obama's Presidential Innovation Fellows program, during a phone conversation today.

See Also

- Google to help 120 N.Y.C. small business owners get online for free
- Microsoft sets grand opening date for huge Manhattan flagship store

"What we saw was a passion for tech skills that members of their community didn't normally get," he said.

Instead of a four-year degree, which might not be feasible for an unemployed or underemployed worker, the Tech Jobs Academy is designed to give students "expertise in cloud and server administration, including areas of focus such as network fundamentals, server infrastructure, and cloud integration," according to a blog post Farmer published today.

The exclusive academy for just 25 New Yorkers will be run with help from the Mayor's Tech
Talent Pipeline and CUNY’s New York City College of Technology.

In May 2014 Mayor Bill de Blasio launched the Tech Talent Pipeline with about a $10 million budget to help educate New Yorkers in tech skills so that they could land jobs in the city.

CUNY’s College of Technology was founded in 1946 as the New York State Institute for Applied Arts and Sciences, and offers 27 associate degrees and 24 baccalaureate degrees, in addition to helping with the academy.

An earlier study co-commissioned by advisory firm, HR&A, and co-led by Google, "The New York City Tech Ecosystem," found that 44 percent of all tech jobs in the city do not require a bachelor's degree.

"With Microsoft's experience in the field and with CUNY's demonstrated experience serving New Yorkers, the NYC Tech Jobs Academy presents a new training model with the potential to scale across institutions," said Kristen Titus, founding director of the NYC Tech Talent Pipeline in the blog post. "We look forward to the opportunities born of this work."

The academy begins Jan. 4, 2016 at the New York City College of Technology campus in downtown Brooklyn.

"We're piloting this program with the goal of making it sustainable," said Farmer. "It has to be a win for everyone."

William E. Paul, immunologist who shaped HIV/AIDS research, dies at 79

By Emily Langer  October 7 at 10:34 AM

William E. Paul, a leading immunologist with the National Institutes of Health who oversaw and redirected HIV/AIDS research in the United States in the mid-1990s, when some activists feared that an effective treatment was becoming increasingly elusive, died Sept. 18 at a hospital in New York City. He was 79.

The cause was complications from acute myeloid leukemia, said his son Matthew Paul.

Dr. Paul spent 45 years — from 1970 until his death — as chief of the immunology laboratory at NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, where he was credited with leading scientific advances, including the discovery of interleukin-4, a signaling chemical in the immune system.

But he assumed perhaps his most public role in 1994, when he was named director of the NIH Office of AIDS Research. Before his appointment, the director had only limited budgetary authority, leading some HIV/AIDS activists to complain that the federal response to the disease had been poorly coordinated and ultimately unfruitful.

In an effort to eliminate redundancy and focus resources effectively, Dr. Paul was granted broad authority to determine how the government would deploy its $1.3 billion allocated for research on HIV/AIDS.

“A turning point has been reached. Simple continuation of the policies of the past is likely to bring us only slow, fitful progress,” he wrote in the journal Science in 1995.

During nearly four years as director, Dr. Paul refocused federal efforts to favor basic research over clinical trials and individual scientists over government commissions. He also helped establish the NIH Vaccine Research Center, whose primary focus is the search for vaccines for AIDS.

In 1997, he stepped down as AIDS research director, returning to his research work in the immunology laboratory. Years later, in an interview with the American Association of Immunologists, he reflected on his relationship with the HIV/AIDS activists whose advocacy had helped lead to his strengthened role at the Office of AIDS Research.

“It turned out it was just at a tipping point. The advocacy community had gone for the view that you were going to make progress against this disease not by yelling at people, but by getting behind what ought to be the way forward, and the way forward was science,” he said. “Then they became the greatest supports for the Office of AIDS Research.”
William Erwin Paul was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., on June 12, 1936. His mother had several scientists in her family. His father, an immigrant from what is now Ukraine, ran an automobile repair shop.

William Paul graduated in 1956 from Brooklyn College and four years later from the State University of New York Downstate College of Medicine.

He did his early work at institutions including New York University, where he worked in the lab led by Baruj Benacerraf, an immunologist who shared the 1980 Nobel Prize in medicine.

Dr. Paul joined the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in 1968, becoming laboratory chief two years later. While working at NIH, he served in the U.S. Public Health Service, attaining the rank of rear admiral. He was the author of "Fundamental Immunology," a widely used textbook.

Dr. Paul, a longtime Potomac, Md., resident, lived most recently in Washington. Survivors include his wife of 57 years, the former Marilyn Heller of the District; two sons, Matthew Paul of Washington and Jonathan Carmel of Ann Arbor, Mich., and Kfar Netter, Israel; two sisters, Linda Weinstock of Arlington, Va., and Harriet Darvas of Mount Sinai, N.Y.; and six grandchildren.
Gary Barnett Sells 5 Ring Buildings to HLP in Over $250M Deal

By Charles Bernstein

In a deal worth more than $250 million, Gary Barnett's Extell Development has closed on the sale to HLP Properties of five of its Ring portfolio office buildings.

In the hearth of Manhattan's Midtown South, the commercials buildings expand over a combined total greater than 400,000 square feet. The buildings were a part of a 14-building acquisition that Barnett got from brothers Frank and Michael Ring.

The deal represents a 1031 exchange for HLP, which closed in May on the sale of a huge High Line development site to Zial Feldman's HFZ Capital Group for $870 million. HLP is an LLC affiliated with New Jersey-based Edison Properties and its equity partners. TRD reported on the deal for 45 West 27th Street last week, though the deal for the other properties was unknown at the time.

Gary Barnett is an American businessman born in 1956. He is President and founder of Extell Development Company, a real estate development company of residential, commercial, and hospitality properties, including several high profile buildings in Manhattan.

According to Wikipedia, "Barnett was born Gershon Swiatycki on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. His father Chaim Swiatycki was a rabbi and Talmudic scholar. He later moved to Monsey, New York. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in math from Queens College and received a Master of Economics degree from Hunter College."
Yonkers appoints Cheryl Green to IT post

Ernie Garcia, egarcia@lohud.com  6 a.m. EDT October 8, 2015

Green holds a bachelors of business administration in management information systems from Baruch College and she is completing an MS degree in human resource management from Mercy College.

Yonkers has appointed Cheryl Green deputy commissioner of information technology.

Green served as a business systems analyst for the department since 2005 and she began working for the city in 1996 as a help desk manager.

In most recent role she was tasked with facilitating and coordinating the implementation of computer systems for the City of Yonkers; she also assisted with the preparation of the annual department budget, recommended the purchase of new equipment and researched options to determine the feasibility of implementing new technology to all City departments.

Green holds an associate's degree in Business Administration from Westchester Community College; a bachelors of business administration in management information systems from Baruch College and she is completing a master of science degree in human resource management from Mercy College.
City Council Takes Aggressive Role in Workplace Issues


Council Member Miller & union workers (photo: @IDaneekMiller)

A slate of recent bills introduced in the New York City Council have a lofty objective indicative of the progressive streak running through city government and raising eyebrows in the business community. Through legislation, the Council is addressing the city's widespread economic disparities by incrementally tackling workforce issues such as wages, workers rights, and access to employment.
Since Mayor Bill de Blasio and Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito both came to power, there has been one big picture aim: to address income and other forms of inequality. Headline-making moves such as an expansion of paid sick leave came within a few months. Less flashy yet crucial bills followed. In August 2014, the Council passed the mayor’s proposal to supplement the wages of school bus drivers employed by private contractors.

De Blasio and Mark-Viverito have both been called anti-business, and there have been claims of overreach by the mayor and the Council. Business leaders are often loathe to see the hand of government reach further into industry.

In recent months, the Council’s formidable progressive caucus has done just that, pushing bills that address large-scale and nitty gritty workplace issues, including others in specific industries. The Council recently heard a bill (http://www.gothamgazette.com/index.php/government/5907-city-council-considers-regulation-of-grocery-personnel-decisions) aimed at regulating personnel decision in the grocery industry.

Council Member Brad Lander, a Brooklyn Democrat, has been closely involved. He is currently working with the Freelancers Union to develop legislation that would protect freelancers, and by extension other workers in the on-demand “gig” economy, from wage theft. Modelled on similar protections provided by the state Department of Labor and the Attorney General, this “administrative solution with an enforcement option” would protect the likes of writers, graphic designers, Uber drivers, and Handy.com cleaners from being denied their wages and having to go to court to redress grievances.

“The economy is constantly evolving,” Lander told Gotham Gazette. “Unfortunately it’s doing so in the direction of inequality. And it’s not only the Council but also the State which is fighting to level the playing field and lift up the floor in terms of wages for workers.” (Governor Andrew Cuomo recently came out (http://www.gothamgazette.com/index.php/government/5923-progressive-critics-largely-convinced-by-cuomos-wage-push) with a plan for an eventual $15 per hour minimum wage.)

At the city level, Lander called the Council’s efforts a “thumb on the scale” to help workers have paying jobs. Of course, Lander expects this rebalancing of the relationship between employers and workers to be debated and contested. But he insists that the Council wants to be responsible in implementing changes rather than run roughshod over industry and business interests.

For instance, in April this year, the Council passed a bill co-sponsored by Lander that bans employers from discriminating in hiring decisions on the basis of credit checks. But the Council did make accommodations, Lander said, after consulting with business owners and advocates.
From a business perspective, however, the Council's efforts have uncomfortable connotations of government intervention in private enterprise.

Late last month, two bills were discussed at a hearing of the Council's Committee on Civil Rights but received little attention. The bills aim at prohibiting employment discrimination based on a person's status as a caregiver and at clarifying reasonable accommodations that businesses could make for applicants with disabilities.

At the hearing, President and CEO of Partnership for New York City Kathryn Wylde provided written testimony opposing the bills. She stated that the Council was proposing more mandates on employers, driven by special interest advocacy groups that argue based on anecdotal evidence that discrimination and mistreatment of employees and applicants is widespread.

"There is no data that justifies new and costly laws and regulations that make it even more difficult to create jobs and grow a business in New York City," Wylde wrote. She also asserted that the bills would drain resources from businesses and make the city less competitive, and that additional Council mandates would accelerate the loss of middle class jobs (she said the city lost 100,000 middle class jobs in the last five years).

Data consistently shows that inequality has only risen in the city over the last many years. A report last year by The Graduate Center of the City University of New York showed that there was a significant uptick in the concentration of wealth among the richest 20 percent of New Yorkers between 1990 and 2010. According to the study, the median income of the upper one percent of all household income earned in New York City jumped from $452,000 in 1990 to $717,000 in 2010 while the lower 20 percent of New York City households' earned median income rose from $13,000 in 1990 to $14,000 in 2010.

James Parrott, deputy director and chief economist at the Fiscal Policy Institute, approaches any analysis of labor markets from a historical perspective. He said changes in the labor market in recent years have been unproductive and harmful to workers and to the economy. So there is definitely a need for regulation, he believes.

Ideally, he said, regulation would be at the national level and enforced by federal compliance officials. But, with federal action being hampered by an inactive Congress, it has fallen to state and local governments. He called the Council's bent in addressing these issues "reasonable and appropriate."

"Businesses tend to oppose any regulation at all. But a lot of history and analysis shows us that informed regulation is good for businesses," Parrott said, insisting that it keeps the competition honest as well.
In particular, he referenced the Grocery Worker Retention Act (GWRA), introduced by Council Member I. Daneek Miller. Miller, a former labor union leader, is now chair of the Council's civil service and labor committee. The bill would require (http://www.gothamgazette.com/index.php/government/5907-city-council-consider-regulation-of-grocery-personnel-decisions) large grocery chains to at least temporarily retain the workforce when an ownership change occurs, and then handle any personnel moves on an individual basis after three months.

Parrott testified years ago when a similar bill (Local Law 39 from 2002) dealing with building service workers was passed. "I don't see how one could oppose doing that in concept," he said, referring to the opposition from industry representatives who argued feverishly against the GWRA at a hearing two weeks ago.

For Council Member Miller, a Queens Democrat, the bill is just another of many measures to remedy an economic imbalance created by three successive Bloomberg terms.

"To a certain degree, we have come through 12 years of an administration that for all intents and purposes undermined the value of workers," Miller told Gotham Gazette.

His bill mandates personnel practice and grants workers legal remedies against unfair termination. It would help both union and non-union workers, he says, and create transparency and protect employees in an industry with a history of exploitation.

"Organized or unorganized, in order for the middle class to thrive, we need for people to have a voice," Miller said. "Without that, we see the wage disparity and wage suppression that we've seen in the last decade or two."

As expected, industry officials criticized the proposed bill for what they see as an overreaching mandate and even questioned the legal implications of the Council's intervention. But Miller said these objections are not supported by certifiable data and that he is confident the bill will be voted out of the labor committee and brought to a full Council vote.

(On a related note, Miller also sponsored a resolution that was approved by the Council in June calling on the state legislature to extend labor protections to farm workers statewide.)

"My personal preference is that we can educate and we don't have to legislate," he said.

Most of the workforce measures have received wide support from Council members and the mayor. Some have even come from de Blasio or Mark-Viverito themselves.

Last year, de Blasio issued an executive order that expanded the city's living wage law to
thousands of individuals. Mark-Viverito successfully sponsored a bill that passed in June this year requiring car wash businesses to operate under licenses and enforcing stronger safeguards for employees. Another employment bill goes into effect by the end of October: the Fair Chance Act prohibits employers from discriminating against applicants based on their arrest record or criminal convictions.

But wide support does not mean unanimous. There are concerns even within the Council about the scope of legislation. Council minority leader Steve Matteo, a Republican from Staten Island, shares his colleagues' interest in improving working conditions but worries about possible harmful unintended consequences.

Matteo said he is a "firm believer" in the free market's ability to self-correct and adapt whether in response to consumer demands for healthier food or safer products, or to compete for better employees with higher pay, more benefits, and a better work environment. "Over-reaching government mandates, on the other hand, as many economic studies have shown, can be financially devastating to small businesses and lead to job cuts and fewer new hires," he said.

On the other hand, some question how easily workers can adapt to the free market.

"Businesses have a better ability to shift their economic resources to adapt to changing economic conditions, more so than workers, especially low-income workers who lack access to education, child care, the basic necessities of life," said Christian Gonzalez-Rivera, research associate at the Center for an Urban Future, who believes that the balance of resources has tilted towards businesses.

Gonzalez-Rivera said more people than ever before are working low-wage jobs in the city; even those working full-time are not able to make ends meet and are being treated as if they are expendable.

Gonzalez-Rivera praised the City's increased support for worker cooperatives. The Council announced in its budget this year that it will invest an additional $2.1 million in its Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative and create 22 new worker cooperatives.

"Government does need to step in and provide protection," he said. It's a sentiment that Council Member Lander echoes: "Looking to give people a fair shot is part of our job," he said.

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Buffalo Billion Boss Offers, Cancels Interview; Claims 'Threat of Jail'


Cuomo and Kaloyeros, both pointing (photo (https://www.flickr.com/photos/governorandrewcuomo/10983369166/in/album-72157637916497115/): Governor's Office via flickr)
In response to a recent profile of him, Alain Kaloyeros, president of SUNY Polytechnic and the man Gov. Andrew Cuomo chose to administer his Buffalo Billion program, invited Gotham Gazette to meet him for a tour of the SUNY Poly campus. In doing so, Kaloyeros explained that he faces "the threat of jail" if he discusses the U.S. Attorney’s investigation into the Buffalo redevelopment program, an investigation that is creating headaches for the governor and thrusting Kaloyeros into the spotlight.

After setting up a date and time for the tour, Kaloyeros’ office abruptly canceled a few days later, without providing a reason.

A number of sources and other news outlets have confirmed that U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara’s office is investigating how contracts were awarded in the Buffalo Billion initiative, where concerns arose that some requests for proposals were tailored only to fit specific Cuomo campaign donors. Cuomo has denied that he or his staff have been subpoenaed and SUNY Polytechnic has denied Kaloyeros is the subject of any inquiry.

Kaloyeros contacted this reporter by Facebook messenger in response to an article published on September 29 that detailed how a number of officials and observers are concerned with a lack of checks and balances over Kaloyeros and the feeling that he operates with complete impunity and little regard to the fact that he is a public employee handling major sums of taxpayer money.

"Ooo...so you're the one who thinks I act like a teenager...cute," Kaloyeros wrote, referring to mention in the article of his predilection for Facebook posts of bathroom selfies and complaints about slow drivers accompanied by photos of traffic that he appears to take while driving.

After a back-and-forth Kaloyeros suggested that a tour and chat about oversight of the Buffalo Billion project might rectify his concerns with the article. When this reporter pointed out having reached out to SUNY Poly before publishing the article, Kaloyeros responded:

"The issue we have is confidentiality. We were instructed in no uncertain terms not to comment on the inquiry from down South with the threat of jail which is being interpreted as we are the target of an investigation. So that part we cannot comment on beyond what we were authorized to say publicly. The rest is not a problem."

Kaloyeros did not reply when asked if he had a particular issue with the article or thought an individual part of the investigation was being misrepresented in the press.
Gotham Gazette reached out to Kalloyeros via an official email address he provided and a spokesperson set up a meeting and tour for October 19.

In the days following, Kalloyeros continued to post to Facebook traffic photos with clear view of his dashboard and radar detector in the windshield along with complaints. This reporter tweeted one of those photos and Kalloyeros' complaint which apparently caught Kalloyeros' attention (even though he does not appear to be a public Twitter user).

"Since you seem so fascinated with my traffic posts and deem them newsworthy, here's one for you to post," Kalloyeros messaged this reporter over Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/alain.kalloyeros?ref=ts) on Wednesday, October 7 at 11:39 a.m., with another photo included.

Later that day, Gov. Andrew Cuomo took a number of questions (http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/albany/2015/10/8579002/cuomo-no-reason-question-buffalo-billion-contracting) from the Albany press on the Buffalo Billion investigation by U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara. Cuomo was asked if he looked into the project after hearing reports of an investigation and he said he hadn't and wouldn't.

Cuomo appeared to waver when asked if he or his staff had been subpoenaed in the case. He denied that he had been, but declined to answer questions about his staff. "Well, you said, 'and staff.' I have not, but I don't want to get into commenting on a U.S. attorney's investigation," Cuomo said before repeatedly telling reporters to ask Bharara's office.

Later, Cuomo spokesperson Rich Azzopardi issued a statement saying, "Just to be clear, neither the Governor, nor his staff has been questioned or subpoenaed on the Buffalo Billion project. Going forward any questions should be referred to the U.S. Attorney."

Around that time this reporter responded to Kalloyeros' message that included a picture of traffic and asked who had warned him he could face jail if he spoke to the press.

Shortly after, Gotham Gazette received an email from Kalloyeros' spokesperson saying the tour and meeting set for the 19th had been canceled. Gotham Gazette reached out to both Kalloyeros and the spokesperson asking why, but neither responded. Kalloyeros appears to have now blocked this reporter on Facebook.

Bharara's office declined to comment on anything regarding the Buffalo Billion investigation when Gotham Gazette asked whether it had threatened Kalloyeros with jail if he spoke out on the investigation.

Jennifer Rodgers, a former prosecutor who served as deputy chief of Bharara's appeals
unit, told Gotham Gazette that it was extremely unlikely that the U.S. Attorney's office would warn Kaloyeros not to speak to the press. Rodgers is now executive director of Columbia University's Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity.

"I don't know what was said in this particular case, but generally prosecutors don't tell witnesses or suspects what they should or shouldn't say to the press," Rodgers told Gotham Gazette. "Usually they have a lawyer who would advise them on those matters."

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by David King, Albany editor, Gotham Gazette
Why I Was Fired - Uncivil Rites, Steven Salaita

This excerpt from Steven Salaita's new book has been paywalled elsewhere. He'll appear in person on Monday, October 12 at 1200 W. Harrison on the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois in a panel discussion starting at 6:00pm. Guests also include Dr. Nadine Naber of the Gender and Women's Study program.

By Steven Salaita OCTOBER 05, 2015

In August 2014, I was fired from a tenured position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The firing made me a free-speech darling — or the world’s most violent person since Stalin, depending on your perspective. It also sparked a debate about academic freedom, faculty governance, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the role of social media in university life. That debate rages with no resolution in sight.

The story of my notoriety begins on July 21, 2014, when The Daily Caller ran an article about me titled “University of Illinois Professor Blames Jews for anti-Semitism.” With the brio and
wisdom for which right-wing websites are known, the piece begins, “The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has continued its bizarre quest to employ as many disgusting scumbags as possible by acquiring the services of Steven Salaita, a leading light in the movement among similarly obscure academics to boycott Israel.”

The article, and subsequent coverage, focused on several tweets I wrote in the summer of 2014. One tweet read: “At this point, if Netanyahu appeared on TV with a necklace made from the teeth of Palestinian children, would anybody be surprised?” In another, I wrote, “You may be too refined to say it, but I’m not: I wish all the fucking West Bank settlers would go missing.”

It has since become popular to call me uncivil. Or intemperate. Or inappropriate. Or angry. Or aggressive. It’s unseemly to describe myself, but because “unseemly” is an improvement over what many people now call me — why not? I am a devoted husband and a loving father. I never talk out of turn. I deliberate for long periods before making significant decisions. As is normal for somebody born and raised in Southern Appalachia, I call everybody “sir” or “ma’am.” I do not raise my voice at people. I am deeply shy and chronically deferential. That is to say, I am civil to a fault.

This exegesis on my disposition probably seems unnecessary, but it’s important to distinguish between somebody’s persona and his personhood, though in most cases one informs the other. This is the extent of my feelings on the matter: It is precisely because I am a loving person that I so adamantly deplore Israel’s behavior.

My tweets might appear uncivil, but such a judgment can’t be made in an ideological or rhetorical vacuum. Insofar as “civil” is profoundly racialized and has a long history of demanding conformity, I frequently choose incivility as a form of communication. This choice is both moral and rhetorical.

The piety and sanctimony of my critics is most evident in their hand-wringing about my use of curse words. While I am proud to share something in common with Richard Pryor, J.D. Salinger, George Carlin, S.E. Hinton, Maya Angelou, Judy Blume, and countless others who have offended the priggish, I confess to being confused as to why obscenity is such an issue to those who supposedly devote their lives to analyzing the endless nuances of public expression. Academics are usually eager to contest censorship and deconstruct vague charges of vulgarity. When it comes to defending Israel, though, anything goes. If there’s no serious moral or political argument in response to criticism of Israel, then condemn the speaker for various failures of “tone” and “appropriateness.” Emphasis placed on the speaker and not on Israel. A word becomes more relevant than an array of war crimes.

Even by the tendentious standards of “civility,” my comments on Twitter (and elsewhere) are more defensible than the accusations used to defame me. The most deplorable acts of violence germinate in high society. Many genocides have been glorified (or planned) around dinner tables adorned with forks and knives made from actual silver, without a single inappropriate speech act having occurred.
Academics are usually eager to contest censorship. When it comes to defending Israel, though, anything goes.

In most conversations about my termination, Israel’s war crimes go unmentioned, yet it is impossible to understand my tweets without that necessary context. My strong language — and I should point out that much of my language is also gentle — arises in response to demonstrable acts of brutality that in a better world would raise widespread rancor. You tell me which is worse: cussing in condemnation of the murder of children or using impeccable manners to justify their murder. I no more want to be “respectable” according to the epistemologies of colonial wisdom than I want to kill innocent people with my own hands. Both are articulations of the same moral rot.

In 11 years as a faculty member, I have fielded exactly zero complaints about my pedagogy. Every peer evaluation of my instruction — the gold standard for judging teaching effectiveness — has been stellar. Student evaluations ranked higher than the mean every time I collected them. Yet people affiliated with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have impugned my ability to teach.

Students are capable of serious discussion, of formulating responses, of thinking through discomfort. They like my teaching because I refuse to infantilize them; I treat them as thinking adults. I have never disrespected a student. I have never told a student what to think. Nor have I ever shut down an opinion. I encourage students to argue with me. They take me up on the offer. I sometimes change my viewpoint as a result. My philosophy is simple: Teach them the modes and practices of critical thought and let them figure out things on their own.

The hand-wringing about students is pious, precious claptrap, a pretext to clean the stench from a rotten argument raised to validate an unjustifiable decision.

Troublesome assumptions underlie accusations about my fitness for the classroom. It is impossible to separate questions about my “civility” from broader narratives of inherent Arab violence. This sort of accusation has been used to discredit people of color (and other minorities) in academe for many decades. Administrators and the public monitor and scrutinize our actions in a manner to which our white colleagues are rarely subject. It is crucial to train us in the ways of civility lest our emotions dislodge the ethos our superiors hold so dear.

When it comes to opposing colonization, there is no need for dissimulation, which is the preferred vocabulary of the cocktail party and committee meeting. I could make a case that dissimulation is immoral. It is undoubtedly boring. When I say something, I have no desire to conceal meaning in oblique and wishy-washy diction. This is especially so when I respond to the various horrors of state violence and the depravity of those who justify it. On campus, such forthrightness is unconventional.

But no tenet of academic freedom considers failure to adhere to convention a fireable offense.

Professors are often punished for disrupting convention in informal ways, however. My case
is interesting because administrators ignored the de facto standards that regulate our behavior and exercised their power directly. This should be worrisome to any scholar who isn’t a sycophant.

People with doctorates who make claims unsupported by evidence and who uncritically repeat terms like “incivility” as if it describes anything other than their own dull prejudice are the ones most unfit to teach college.

Being called an anti-Semite is deeply unpleasant. Those who make the accusation should be responsible for providing evidence, yet it is I who has been saddled with the impossible task of disproving a negative.

The rhetorical incoherence of my critics is evident in their ever-evolving justifications for my firing. First I was anti-Semitic. Then I was uncivil. Then I was a bad teacher. Then I was too charismatic. Then I was too angry. Then I was too profane. Then I was too radical. Then I was too unpatriotic. Then I wasn’t really hired. Then I was unqualified in the field of American Indian studies. Then I benefited from nepotism. Then I was a poor scholar. Then my colleagues were incompetent. Then my colleagues were deceitful. Then my colleagues were ignorant. Then the American Indian-studies program required special guidance. Then the decision to hire me was solely based on politics. Then indigenous studies was illegitimate. Then the entire damn field needed to be shut down.

Part of our charge as educators is to encourage students to find the language that will help them translate instinct into concrete knowledge. It’s the kind of preparation we all need to survive the capitalist marketplace. While anti-authoritarianism may start as an attitude, it has infinite capacity to develop into an ethic.

Distrusting the motivation of institutions and their managers often means demotion or recrimination. But there is reason to distrust authority on campus. Universities are lucrative spaces; nothing is lucrative without also being corrupt.

As Thomas Frank put it in an essay in The Baffler:

The coming of “academic capitalism” has been anticipated and praised for years; today it is here. Colleges and universities clamor greedily these days for pharmaceutical patents and ownership chunks of high-tech startups; they boast of being “entrepreneurial”; they have rationalized and outsourced countless aspects of their operations in the search for cash; they fight their workers nearly as ferociously as a 19th-century railroad baron; and the richest among them have turned their endowments into in-house hedge funds.

Frank later pinpoints the reason for campus authoritarianism:

Above all, what the masters of academia spend the loot on is themselves. In saying this, I am not referring merely to the increasing number of university presidents who take home annual “compensation” north of a million dollars. That is a waste, of course, an outrageous bit of money-burning borrowed from Wall Street in an age when we ought to be doing the opposite of borrowing from Wall Street. But what has really fueled the student’s ever-growing
indebtedness, as anyone with a connection to academia can tell you, is the insane proliferation of university administrators.

Universities are lucrative spaces; nothing is lucrative without also being corrupt. The numbers validate Frank's observation. Benjamin Ginsberg points out that in the past 30 years, the administrator-to-student ratio has increased while the instructor-to-student ratio has stagnated. The rise of untenured, or non-tenure-track, faculty exacerbates the problem; a significant demographic in academe lacks job security or the working conditions that allow them to maximize their pedagogical talent. Over a recent 10-year period, spending on administration outpaced spending on instruction. At American universities, there are now more administrators and their staffers than full-time faculty. In the past 10 years, administrative salaries have steadily risen while custodians and groundskeepers suffer the inevitable budget cuts — as do the students whose tuition and fees supplement this largess.

When so much money is at stake, those who raid the budget have a deep interest in maintaining the reputation of the institution. Their privilege and the condition of the brand are causally related. The brand thus predominates. Its predominance often arrives at the expense of student well-being.

Take the matter of sexual assault. Reporting rates have recently risen, but all versions of sexual assault remain woefully underreported. There are numerous reasons why a victim chooses to keep silent. One reason is that she may expect a wholly inadequate, or even hostile, response from her own university. In 2014, Columbia University fielded 26 federal complaints claiming the university had inadequately investigated reports of sexual assault. Florida State University, with the help of the Tallahassee Police Department, orchestrated a clumsy cover-up of a rape allegation to protect the star quarterback Jameis Winston. A different category of sexual assault infamously occurred at Pennsylvania State University, where the onetime defensive coordinator of the football team, Jerry Sandusky, was found to have molested various children, some of them on campus. The university's complicity is but an extreme instance of a common phenomenon.

In this era of neoliberal graft, universities barely pretend to care about the ideals upon which higher education was founded. Sure, administrators and PR flacks still prattle about dialogue and self-improvement and the life of the mind, but not even impressionable 18-year-olds believe that claptrap. They know just as well as their superiors that college is really about acquiring the mythical-but-measurable status conferred to them by a crisp sheet of cotton-bond paper.

As universities more and more resemble corporations in their governance, language, and outlook, students have become acutely brand conscious. Guardianship of the brand thus predominates and overwhelms the primacy of thought and analysis to which the academy is nominally committed. Students no longer enter into places of learning. They pay exorbitant prices to gain access to the socioeconomic capital of affiliation with the most recognizable avatars, adorned magisterially with armor and pastoral creatures and Latin phrases.

Take that most sacred element of pedagogy, critical thinking. Many faculty don't know how to
do it, never mind imparting instruction in the practice to those trying to learn it. (My conception of "critical thinking" includes acting in some way on the knowledge it produces, if only in the formulation of a dynamic ethical worldview.) One of the greatest skills critical thinking provides is the ability to recognize and undermine bunk. In short, if critical thinking is to be useful, it must endow a reflexive desire to identify and understand the disguises of power.

This sort of focus is low on the list of what universities want from students, just as critical thinking is a terribly undesirable quality in the corporate world, much more damning than selfishness or sycophancy. Let us then be honest about critical thinking: On the tongues of cunning bureaucrats, it is little more than an additive to brand equity, the vainglorious pomp of smug, uptight automatons who like to use buzzwords in their PowerPoint presentations.

Critical thinking by faculty is even more undesirable. In research institutions, we are paid to generate prestige and to amass grant money; in teaching-centered colleges, we enjoy excess enrollments according to fine-tuned equations that maximize the student-teacher ratio. (In elite liberal-arts colleges, we pamper the kids with simulations of parental affection.) Critical thinking is especially harmful to adjuncts, reliant as they are for income on the munificence of well-paid bosses who cultivate a distended assemblage of expendable employees.

Nowhere in our employment contracts does it say, "Challenge the unarticulated aspirations of the institution, especially when it acts as a conduit and expression of state violence; and please try your best to support justice for those on and off campus who are impoverished by neoliberalism." If we practice critical thinking, though, it is difficult to avoid these obligations.

Because of their high-minded rhetoric, it is tempting to believe that university managers care about ethics or maybe even about justice, but most managers care about neither. The exceptions, of course, deserve our praise — just don't poke around the highly ranked schools if you want to find them. The key to a successful managerial career isn't striving to be a good person, but developing enough instinct to cheat and charm at opportune moments.

Whatever independence can be acquired in academe requires a fundamental distrust of authority, be it abstract or explicit. There never have been pure epochs of uncorrupted democracy, but increasing corporate control disturbs greater sectors of American life, particularly on campus. There has to be a better way to conduct the practices of education.

What to do about injustice? I hear this question a lot since I was fired. I have no solid answer. My instinct, which I fully understand isn't actually instinctive, is simply to tell people to do what they feel comfortable doing. I'm not big on demands or injunctions. Yet I recognize that as somebody who now exists in a public position I am summoned to analyze a set of dynamics in which I and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are embroiled. These dynamics are especially important to folks in academe who wish to pursue material commitments alongside theoretical and philosophical questions.

Graduate students and prospective graduate students are especially anxious these days.
They are right to be. Decent humanities jobs are in decline. Grad-school slots have become more competitive. Any advantage is a great asset. Being deemed a troublemaker or a radical is no advantage.

Making trouble is precisely the function of the intellectual, though. And being radical is a solid antidote to boring work.

There's always been repression and recrimination in academe. Anybody with an eye toward a career as a scholar has to internalize this reality. Aspiring and established scholars should not abdicate intellectual commitments in order to please the comfortable. This would be careerism, not inquiry.

And that's the point. If we don't examine relationships of power and highlight the disjunctions of inequality, then we're not doing our jobs. (We will be according to the preferences of the managerial class, but pleasing its functionaries isn't generally the mark of an interesting thinker.) Upsetting arbiters of so-called common sense is an immanent feature of useful scholarship.

"What can/should we do?" is not a universal question. Consider that the labor of minority scholars is already politicized. We have to publish more. It's risky to be introverted because so many white colleagues cannot tolerate a minority who doesn't pretend to like them. We have to act as diversity representative on all sorts of committees. We cannot be mediocre because our tenure and upward mobility rely on senior colleagues who reward only their own mediocrity. It's hazardous for us to show emotion because we're aware of the possibility of confirming to others our innate unreason. Adding "activist leader" to this list of tasks is a heavy undertaking. In many ways, simply deciding not to appease power is an active form of advocacy. It is the activism of survival.

Getting fired doesn't make me an expert on anything. I'm doing my best to make sure something productive comes of it, though. My having a job changes nothing if the system that orchestrated my ouster remains intact. I am merely a symbol of the stark imperatives of the wealthy and well connected. We all are, really. Unless the system changes at a basic level, everybody is merely buying shares in a corporation with the power to dissolve our interests the moment we become an inconvenience.

Steven Salaita holds the Edward W. Said Chair of American Studies at the American University of Beirut. This essay is adapted from his new book, Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the Limits of Academic Freedom, just out from Haymarket Books.

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INDY RADIO The future of radio comes not from the Tower of Corporate Media but belongs to us. The newest playlists are linked at [http://ch0.us](http://ch0.us).
New York City Opens First Public Graduate Film School

By Zack Sharf | Indiewire
October 6, 2015 at 2:05PM

Located at Steiner Studios at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, The Barry R. Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema is the only school in the nation housed on a working film lot.
READ MORE: New York City is Getting Its First Independent Cinema Theater in 10 Years

Mayor Bill de Blasio joined City University of New York Chancellor James Milliken, Media and Entertainment Commissioner Cynthia López, Barry R. Feirstein and other elected officials earlier today to open the doors to the Brooklyn College Barry R. Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema. The Feirstein School, which welcomes an inaugural class of 69 students this fall, is the only public graduate school in the nation integrated into a working film lot, Steiner Studios, and is the first public graduate school of cinema in New York City.

According to an official statement, the objective of the The Feirstein School is "to provide affordable access to career opportunities in cinema, while simultaneously creating a pipeline of diverse talent that can work in the local film industry in New York City's five boroughs." Announced in 2012, the school reflects the City's commitment to growing the NYC-set film and television industry.

NYC has invested a total of $8 million to support the creation of the Feirstein School and numerous scholarships so that more New Yorkers have the opportunity to pursue jobs in film and television production. The cost of tuition at Feirstein is approximately $59,000 for in-state students over three years. The City's overall contribution includes $4.7 million for construction, $2 million for scholarships, $1 million for curriculum and programming, and $500,000 for creative grants and marketing.

"New York City has long been a global capital for film and television production, but today we are making an unprecedented commitment in the future of this industry and in New York's finest young filmmakers," said de Blasio. "By opening the Feirstein School, we are unlocking the door of opportunity for a talented and diverse group of students who want to get the best, most cutting-edge education in cinema, and then put those skills to use right here in New York City."

Seasoned directors, producers and actors will also contribute to the Feirstein's advisory board and help to guide the school toward fulfilling its mission, including Ethan Hawke, Steven Soderburgh and Celia Costas.
New York City’s First Public Graduate Film School Opens

October 7, 2015 | By Staff

New York mayor Bill de Blasio joined City University of New York chancellor James Milliken, media and entertainment commissioner Cynthia López, Barry Feinstein, and other elected officials to open the doors to the Brooklyn College Barry R. Feinstein Graduate School of Cinema. The Feinstein School, which welcomed an inaugural class of 69 students this fall, is the only public graduate school in the nation seamlessly integrated into a working film lot, Steiner Studios, and is the first public graduate school of cinema in New York City.

“New York City has long been a global capital for film and television production, but today we are making an unprecedented commitment in the future of this industry and in New York’s finest young filmmakers,” said de Blasio. “By opening the Feinstein School, we are unlocking the door of opportunity for a talented and diverse group of students who want to get the best, most cutting-edge education in cinema, and then put those skills to use right here in New York City. I thank former Mayor Michael Bloomberg for his extraordinary vision on this project and to the generous private funders who helped to make this first-of-its-kind school not only top-notch but highly affordable for a group of aspiring filmmakers who reflect the multicultural creativity of our city.”

The Feinstein School is designed to provide affordable access to career opportunities in cinema, while simultaneously creating a pipeline of diverse talent that can work in the local film industry in New York’s five boroughs. Announced in 2012, the project is funded through a public-private partnership model. The city has invested a total of $8 million to support the creation of the school, as well as numerous scholarships, so that more New Yorkers have the opportunity to pursue careers in film and television production.

The cost of tuition at Feinstein is approximately $9,000 for in-state students over three years, while the cost of comparable three-year MFA programs at private institutions can often exceed $150,000. Under the de Blasio administration, the city’s commitment to the school has increased by 20% over initial investments. The city’s overall contribution includes $4.7 million for construction, $2 million for scholarships, $1 million for curriculum and programming, and $500,000 for creative grants and marketing.

Through the Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment, the city has worked closely with Brooklyn College in various aspects of the school’s development, including marketing and financing. The school is the result of an extensive public-private partnership involving the Brooklyn College Foundation, Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment, Steiner Studios, New York City Council, the Brooklyn Borough President and the City University of New York.

The Feinstein School will provide students with access to state-of-the-art production and postproduction facilities in one of the largest sound stages in the country, as well as a full complement of lighting, grip and electrical equipment. Degree programs include M.A. in Cinema Studies and M.FA in Cinema Arts, which is composed of five tracks: cinematography, directing, postproduction, producing and screenwriting.

Seasoned directors, producers, and actors, will contribute to the school’s advisory board. Among them are actor, author and director Ethan Hawke; director Steven Soderbergh; and Emmy award-winning producer Celia Costas.
Dangerous History: What the Story of Black Economic Cooperation Means for Us Today

African Americans have been pioneering co-ops as an economic strategy since the days of slavery. Author Jessica Gordon Nembhard on how centuries-old models can guide our economy today.

A Black cooperative in Memphis, Tennessee, circa 1919.

Keane Bhatt posted Oct 07, 2015

Editor's note: Jessica Gordon Nembhard is a professor of community and social economic development at John Jay College (CUNY), and the author of "Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice." She spoke with Keane Bhatt of The Next
System Project, about the tradition of black cooperative economic development and what the Civil Rights movement can teach us about system change. The Next System Project is a movement exploring genuine alternatives and new models that can move us toward a more equitable and sustainable system. What follows is an edited transcript of their conversation.

Keane Bhatt, The Next System Project: Thank you for speaking with us. I was really excited to talk to you, because it seems that your intellectual and scholarly trajectory maps toward system change. Could you tell us a bit more about that trajectory, and how you began to tackle system-level questions?

Jessica Gordon Nembhard: I came from a family that was dedicated to social justice—a family that was very involved in trying to make social and economic change. And I felt like people didn’t know enough about economics, and that the economists that were out there had a kind of tyranny over the standard models and weren’t allowing other models to come out. So I decided that I was going to study economics and figure out where the inroads were to make economics liberating, as opposed to being constraining and exploitative.

So as I started studying economics, I became interested in international development and finance capital, because I realized that finance was one of the major areas contributing to inequality and supporting the current system. And that was my specialty coming out of my Ph.D. But then I started looking at domestic economic development, and economic development in black communities. I started looking into actual alternatives, particularly for community economic development. That’s when I focused my work on how to do real, community-based economic development that meant community-owned, community-initiated, real grassroots democracy, and prosperity for all—democratic community economies.

That’s also where I came across cooperatives as a model, and discovered that they have actually been used throughout all
centuries, and by all kinds of groups. It wasn’t really just a European thing or what European immigrants did in the U.S., but was something that all groups have practiced and worked on, sometimes just for survival, but sometimes also with a larger vision in mind for how they could really change society and bring prosperity to the whole group.

"Instead of letting the conquerors tell the story, let the people who have been doing these collective survival strategies tell the story."

Nembhard: So the long history is really, unfortunately, a history of exploitation, where the stronger (which in the case of economics means the richer) people who already have endowments or resources (or stole them) have used those resources to reinforce their own position at the expense of everybody else.

Bhatt: How does your deep grasp of history inform, and in some ways upend, the dominate worldview created by standard economic theory? And what does the history tell us about human interaction, economics, and motivations?

Nembhard: So when we look at history, particularly the economic and social history around thinking about that systemic issue, we see that two things happened. While the powerful are gaining more and more power over the centuries, they’re also leaving holes and gaps so that the people who are exploited are figuring out at least small ways to do alternatives. Even if we take enslaved African Americans as an example—people who didn’t own their own bodies, didn’t own their labor, weren’t paid—were totally exploited. Yet, on the one day they had off, on Sunday, they would farm small gardens together. Some actually hired themselves out if they had skills. They found alternative ways to make sure they could feed their families and have some dignity.

And often they did it collectively, by helping each other. If they were farming, they shared the produce. They taught each other how
to read, even though it was illegal. They would save money to help each other buy their freedom. And there are lots of other examples. Serfs in Europe, for instance, were also doing their small stuff locally.

So one of the things we understand in history is, even though the bullies and the powerful kind of win, there’s all this other activity under the radar that’s still happening because human beings are human beings, meaning they work together, and they help each other, and care about each other. And so, the ability for us to raise that, sort of the lions telling history instead of (maybe the lions isn’t the best example, but that’s the term we use) the lions telling history instead of humans or hunters, right? Instead of letting the conquerors tell the story, let the people who have been doing these collective survival strategies tell the story. Then we understand that we actually have all the models, that they have worked, but that they’ve just been suppressed. And when we see that there are other models that can work, we then can see what we can do now and, into the future, how we could make them work, and how we can try to make them the dominant models.


Nembhard: Sure. Du Bois and others, though I guess Du Bois is kind of the main feature. He’s also the way I got into this, but there were also people like A. Philip Randolph and Ella Jo Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer—a lot of people who aren’t even considered big thinkers or intellectuals, but who seized upon this and understood it. But Du Bois said (well, many things, but one of the things he said) about economic inequality and economic progress is that if we look at African Americans, we’ve been forced to be segregated. And because of that forced segregation, it actually gives us an opportunity to look inward more, look to ourselves for the things that we need, use our own resources, create our own power, create our own economic systems. And then if we want to then integrate, we can integrate from a position of power.

So his notion was we need these collective, cooperative structures first within the race, because that feeling of solidarity—like we’re
doing it for our families, for our race, for our people—is one way to get people to contribute to economic development in that way. Especially since it’s an alternative model that, in the mainstream, doesn’t have a lot of clout. So how do you get people to engage? One way, as we keep saying, is due to necessity. But Du Bois was also saying: Let’s not do it just to survive, but let’s do it as a strategy to prosper and to give ourselves a place in the larger economy as equals with other people.

"Let’s not do it just to survive, but let’s do it as a strategy to prosper..."

He actually started calling that idea the group economy notion. I’ve been connecting it to some of the other notions of solidarity economies and the use of solidarity in, say, the Mondragon system in Spain with the Basque people. They also had a notion of needing to help their own communities, since nobody else was helping them. That’s why I also talk about a subaltern and cooperative economic development strategy, because I believe all subaltern or marginalized, oppressed people actually, when they think about it, can not only consolidate their own culture and strengthen it, but can also create an economy that will work for them, especially in the face of economies and systems that don’t work for them.

I don’t think a lot of people followed through on Du Bois’ notions, but I think they were motivated to at least do small things. He was talking like this mostly in the 30s and 40s, sometimes through The Crisis magazine, sometimes through speeches and other writings. He definitely had people who at least would go back home and try to start a co-op. There were groups like the Young Negroes’ Co-operative League in the 30s that actually believed that young black people could help create a national movement that would start locally, but then consolidate black economic power into an interlocking cooperative system that could then actually produce some prosperity for blacks.

The other aspect of this is that we really can’t make political or social progress without economic justice. And that’s where Fannie
Lou Hamer comes in, in the 70s. She talked about how we tried getting voting rights and other basic civil rights, but when we did, they retaliated against us economically. So now we need to figure out how to become economically self-sufficient so that they can’t retaliate against us when we try to do our political and social action. So she also saw this notion that we really need an economic system that supports us with dignity, prosperity, and survival—cooperatives. We need to own our own land, grow our own food, control our own economy; and then from there, we can fight all the other battles and struggles.

Bhatt: I think what you just touched upon with Fannie Lou Hamer is very important. Here you have this widening, opening, more inclusive civil arena that’s over the decades being expanded. You have black CEOs in Fortune 500 and so on, so there’s inclusion at a very superficial level. Yet black wealth has either remained stagnant or declined. Can you talk more about what has led to this divergence, and what that means for today?

Nembhard: So, to continue with the Fannie Lou Hamer theme: by the 70s people thought that the civil rights movement was pretty much over, right? We had voting rights now, some affirmative action, civil rights laws, etc. More and more blacks were able to get jobs that they previously couldn’t get. We even had a growing black middle class and a small black upper class.

Certainly where Fannie Lou Hamer was in Mississippi, you didn’t see it as much, but even there you had some changes. She was highlighting the frustrations and reminding us of the systemic issues that—even though things were looking better and there were a few individuals who were able to make it—the recent changes weren’t going to be enough. She really stepped back, especially from the voting rights issue, to say: We’ve got to own our own land, we’ve got to raise our own food, we’ve got to have affordable housing; and cooperatives are the way to do that. She developed the Freedom Farm Cooperative in order to provide those things.
She did need to use money from philanthropy and donations in order to buy the property and that kind of thing, but she said: Look, it’s all kind of ephemeral if we don’t have these other structures in place that will really provide for the majority of people rather than minority of people. And it’s interesting because she really is saying something in the 70s that Du Bois actually said in 1907. And I won’t get the quote right, but he wrote in 1907 that we black people stand at the crossroads. We could either go the individual, capitalist route of letting some of us gain some wealth on our own for ourselves, and a few of us making it and being wealthy, and the rest of people being left behind; or we could take the other road of cooperative economics, where actually the whole society is moving together. We each are amassing some small pieces of wealth as a collective so that there is broad ownership and we’re all prospering.

And of course he said we took the wrong road, right? We’re at a crossroads, but it looks like we’re going towards that individualist, capitalist route, which is basically what we did. But we should have taken the other route. And I think that we’re at the same crossroads again. Actually, we’ve been at the crossroads many times. We keep taking the wrong route. But we have a chance to take the better route, to correct our route. We have the chance to go the cooperative way so that we don’t have a few people doing well off
the backs of the rest. We can all prosper together. Especially as we are trying to recover from the Great Recession, we see the mainstream economy is not working for us. More and more people are starting to look for alternatives and are turning to cooperative ownership.

And we actually know how to do it. One of my pet peeves is that we keep thinking we don't know what to do, but we do know because we have lots of models that have succeeded over the centuries, even over the last 20 years. There are lots of examples of cooperative solidarity economics that work, that deliver to people, that provide people a say, a piece, that operate in a business model that can make money for people. What we don't have is enough will and enough education about how to do it. We also get bogged down in petty racial and gender problems in terms of not giving women their due, in terms of still having racial issues against African Americans and Latinos being able to be participants, that kind of thing. But we do know what to do. We just have to get over the ignorance and the—and I guess what I would call the white privilege people not being willing to give up their white privilege.

Bhatt: One thing that is very striking about some of your work is how you address the very tangible effect of white terrorism on black economic development. When we talk about things like slavery or redlining, it can seem very abstract. But when we really start to look at the great migration, it was not simply to find opportunity, but to flee from terrorism. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Nembhard: The research I conducted on the history of African American cooperatives and the cooperative movement among African Americans points to that fortitude, to that persistence that you had to have to follow alternative strategies. I actually named the book “Collective Courage” partly because of that, because it was actually physically, as well as economically, dangerous to participate in economic alternatives. And as you mentioned, the white terrorism or white supremacist violence actually surrounded almost every effort for African American co-op development. And I imagine it was probably similar for other groups as well.
The examples range. Some of the terrorism was physical, like physically beating and lynching people who were involved, or burning down the exchange or store, co-op building, or a member’s house. But it also was subtle economic terrorism in terms of getting banks to collude. No bank would give a loan or give a line of credit to a black co-op; insurance companies raising the premium on insurance for the co-op; rent skyrocketing in a gentrifying area. And we had that problem up into the 90s and really into the 21st century, so it isn’t even necessarily a historic problem. African Americans were made to feel like they shouldn’t be pursuing this and that it was going to be against their interests.

And sometimes they were harassed and intimidated into leaving a co-op or disbanding a co-op.

And yet, like with the Civil Rights Movement for political rights, African Americans continued to challenge that, to say we’re going to persist no matter what, to basically—I was going to say step over the bodies, but it’s not really stepping over the bodies, but stepping on top of the dead bodies to keep moving, and saying you can’t scare us away. Sometimes a co-op did go under because of all the sabotage, but often people persisted, and others followed. Sometimes they just changed the form or name and cropped up somewhere else. And sometimes the community defended the co-op.

And then often, even if a particular co-op went under, all of the different things that its members learned, the skills they developed, and the different strategies that they used to cooperate surfaced in other ways. They formed other kinds of businesses and enterprises. They were able to do other things economically.
Sometimes, they even were able to integrate a union or enter into an industry that they hadn’t been allowed in before. And they asserted leadership in other endeavors and civic engagements. So there were lots of different ways that they ended up being able to succeed because they kept persisting.

When I first started doing this history, I learned that people weren’t talking about this aspect of co-op history, and didn’t really know about it. But then I also discovered that, at least at the time when they were creating these co-ops, most of them were using education. They were educating themselves. They were educating a larger population to make sure those co-ops worked. But they weren’t necessarily passing it onto their children overtly because it was so dangerous. So that’s the other piece. I think hopefully I’ve been able to break that silence. It’s not so dangerous for us to remember that history and for us to get strength from it.

**Bhatt:** Historically, what was the contribution of black women to the black union and cooperative movements?

**Nembhard:** In the black union movement, the role of black women was to keep things moving. Particularly in the progressive unions—and I really studied the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the relationship of A. Philip Randolph with the head of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, who was Helena Wilson from Chicago. Black women also played this role in the black churches and in the black co-op movement.

From the beginning, the Ladies Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, for example, had reading lists for members to learn about consumer economics and cooperative economics. Most of the union members were men, although the maids in the Pullman porter cars were also in the union. But the workers didn’t have that much time to organize, so the wives, who called themselves the Ladies Auxiliary, had the time to study and to talk about this connection. They organized themselves and their families to keep black dollars circulating in the black community and believed that consumer cooperatives were the way to do that.
It wasn’t enough just to get a good job. It wasn’t enough just to have union wages. What else were they doing with their money? What were they doing for their community? And that’s how they came upon cooperative economics, particularly consumer co-ops, to then recirculate this good money into the black community. So they studied how to do it, and formed credit unions and co-op stores. They talked about other co-op models to really keep the money circulating so that hard-earned labor money didn’t just go back into the corporatist economy. And that notion was really, again, coming back to that sense of a solidarity economy, and a way that we could use our own resources to create prosperity for ourselves and our communities.

"It’s not just because we put money in or how many hours of work we put in. It’s also about this energy and the connections made with other people."

As I mentioned before, we have had these kind of things in every period. And in the 30s, 40s, and 50s, we got them through the Brotherhood. It’s also interesting that the Ladies Auxiliary ended up being connected to the wider labor movement. They were involved in the greater Chicago labor movement and co-op movement. They were invited to meetings. They were considered essential when Chicago was starting the Chicago Eye Cooperative. The white organizers of the eye clinic said that they couldn’t have started it if the Ladies Auxiliary hadn’t provided the energy and initial money for it. So black women cooperators also really were not insular, though that’s how they started. But they then actually branched out and became very instrumental to all the different pieces of the movement.

Similarly, in Washington, DC, Nannie Helen Burroughs, co-founder of Cooperative Industries of DC in the 1930s, was called upon by the mainstream DC branch of the Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA) to give speeches and represent the group. And black women were instrumental in the mutual aid societies that were
precursors to cooperative enterprises. So it's interesting that, in every epoch, we have similar stories like that of black women's leadership in the black co-op movement and in the mainstream white co-op movement.

**Bhatt:** What are some of the principles, values, and features that you would consider a priority for a 'next system'? And what do you think are the existing pathways that are helping us to move in that direction?

**Nembhard:** The next system that I think we need, and that I think hopefully we're moving toward, would be what I call a cooperative commonwealth and a solidarity economy. By a "cooperative commonwealth" I mean a system of interlocking cooperative ownership structures in all industries and all sectors of the economy, where co-ops supply each other and feed into each other and fund each other. And cooperative can be loose in terms of any kind of economic cooperation in a solidarity system. By "solidarity system", I mean a non-hierarchical, non-exploitative economic system geared toward the grassroots that's indigenous, participatory and that's democratized a sense of capital.

Some people talk about David Ellerman's term, where labor actually rents capital rather than capital renting labor. So capital is subordinate to labor in that sense, and returns go to labor. Risks are collectivized, skills are perfected, learning is continuous, and surplus is shared in equitable ways, through real democratic decision making. In a system of shared prosperity, shared decision-making, collective economic activity can spill over into other social and political spaces, and enrich civil society, families and individual wellness.

We do have examples of some of this. We have examples of sort of cooperative commonwealths where you have interlocking systems: a credit union that helps to develop worker co-ops and gives the first loan to the co-op store to buy its own building. And then the co-op store deposits its money in the credit union. And the credit union also helps the neighborhood to start a housing co-op. And
the housing co-op members run their own security company and maintenance company as worker-owned companies that also service the credit unions and the co-op stores. The residents also have a co-op sewing factory, catering company, child care center, etc.

So that's the kind of idea we have: that everybody is part of several different co-ops, which service each other and provide products and alternative financing. Some of the surplus from one co-op venture can then be put into something else, like affordable housing or other kinds of provisions, like collective utilities. So the notion is that we don't really have any one group, or one person running off with all the spoils, right? The spoils are truly recirculating in the community. And the community itself is the one who decides what happens to those resources.

The spoils are truly recirculating in the community.

And then the final piece that I think is really important, and that we don't talk about enough, is that resources don't just have to be financial resources. It's not just market relationships. Again, to quote Du Bois badly, he also said very early in the 1900s that African Americans could be at the forefront of creating intelligent cooperation that would dismantle the price system and set up an economy based on the common good, supporting the common good. And so this system that I'm trying to describe would not be so dependent on market forces and a price system, but would really be more about human need and human relationships – an economic cooperative ecology of caring community. This would include not just whether you bring capital to an economic venture, but what other resources you can bring.

One of my colleagues talks about social energy, which he says he got from Du Bois. And that's where not just sweat equity—where you get equity because of the work you put in, the in-kind work—but also the social energy, which is the enthusiasm, caring, and the persistence that you put in to keep the project going; and the high quality of social interaction and support for your fellow cooperators.
So much of the productivity in co-ops and some of its success actually is due to that kind of energy. It's not just because we put money in or how many hours of work we put in. It's also about this energy and the connections made with other people, and the way we work with people. Understanding that those are just as important as the financial contribution I think is another way to think about the new system, and another way to think about how we democratize capital. It's about enthusiasm, caring, persistence, and concern for community. We need democratic, people-centered community-based, collective, sustainable economies that produce prosperity for all (while protecting mother earth).

Keane Bhatt is Senior Associate for Strategy and Policy for the Next System Project at the Democracy Collaborative. He is an experienced activist and organizer, having worked both in the U.S. and in Latin America on a variety of campaigns and projects related to community development and social justice. His analysis and opinions have appeared in a range of outlets, including The Nation, NPR, St. Petersburg Times, the Providence Journal, CNN En Español, Pacifica Radio, and Truthout. Cecilia Gingerich of The Next System Project helped edit this interview.