From Seattle With Love: A Tale of 4 Friends and One Band

By KIM BARKER  AUG. 31, 2015

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It all started with the dream of Ifrah Ahmed, 25, who barely remembers her early years in Mogadishu, Somalia, when her country was at war. Growing up in Seattle, she wanted to be a chef, or an astronaut, or a detective, or a librarian. But by junior high, Ms. Ahmed knew what she would become: a human-rights lawyer, who would work with women, children and refugees.

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"Oh, Walt Whitman," he said to Ms. Ahmed, and then proceeded to share many facts about the writer.
“I was like, ‘Who knows all these facts about Walt Whitman?’” Ms. Ahmed recalled.

Mr. Verdoes asked Ms. Ahmed if she was Somali, and spoke a few words to her in her native language. He said he was learning Somali because he worked with so many Somali students. She later sent a text to her friends: “Hey guys, I met my soul mate today.”

Not so fast. They became friends on Facebook. Mr. Verdoes, playing the detective, found her email address on Facebook and sent her a note: Maybe they could meet for coffee, and she could teach him Somali? But the email address was an old one — a Hotmail one, which a true detective would have realized was outdated. Ms. Ahmed did not respond.

Mr. Verdoes was disappointed, yet he was also distracted. His first marriage had just broken up, and his ex-wife was in his band, which was foundering for obvious reasons. Mr. Verdoes’s mother fell ill and died that winter. He kept his focus on raising his adopted younger brother, Marshall, whom he had had custody of for four years. And Mr. Verdoes soon started playing music with a new musician, Nate Quiroga, a partnership that Mr. Verdoes initially saw as an escape from all else going on in his life and his music.

Mr. Quiroga, 28, had his own love story, with Mandy Blouin, with its own magic coincidences. They had grown up in small towns on opposite sides of Mount Hood, both ending up at the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. “Very parallel lives,” said Ms. Blouin, predictably also 28.

They met in Seattle in 2007, the summer after their sophomore year. Mr. Quiroga, holding a case of Pabst Blue Ribbon and a skateboard, was on his way to a house party with a friend. Ms. Blouin, who was also with a pal, stared at him because she thought he looked familiar. Mr. Quiroga told his friend that she was extremely beautiful, and wondered why she was giving him such a weird look. He did something he would never normally do: He followed her. She slowed down. He talked to her, and invited her and her friend to the party. But her friend was cold. The party was a nonstarter.
"I was, like, so frightened and out of my element," Mr. Quiroga recalled. "I was always very afraid of being perceived as creepy."

They went their separate ways, but a couple weeks later, back in her hometown, Ms. Blouin found him on MySpace, which was the thing at the time. She messaged him. "I couldn't believe she found me," Mr. Quiroga said. "I got her phone number and called her."

Mr. Quiroga and Ms. Blouin, now a graphic designer and illustrator, became an item. She supported him in his new band, Mad Rad, a hip-hop/electronica group, even when he caught flak for "wheatpasting," using a flour paste to stick up band fliers all over Seattle.

Another coincidence: Mr. Verdoes's group, the Mt. St. Helens Vietnam Band, did the same kind of in-your-face publicity, first doing fake public-service announcements and then wheatpasting. Seattle, so cool that dancing usually consists of a slight motion of the head and a practiced slouch, frowns on such self-promotion.

"We were probably two of the most resented bands in Seattle," Mr. Verdoes said.

He saw a few Mad Rad shows and asked a mutual friend to introduce him to Mr. Quiroga. Mr. Verdoes played guitar on a few Mad Rad songs. Then the two men started playing together as a side project. Their first time playing together: Christmas Eve 2010, in Mr. Verdoes's living room.

Mr. Verdoes knew that he and Mr. Quiroga had something, but he didn't know what. He thought he and Ms. Ahmed might have something, but she didn't email back.

Mr. Verdoes kept playing with Mr. Quiroga. And he sent Ms. Ahmed a message on Facebook. This time, she replied. They met in late January 2011. It was, in theory, a Somali lesson on verbs. It ended up being a three-hour conversation (so says Mr. Verdoes) or a four-hour one (Ms. Ahmed). Not one word of Somali was uttered.

Dating commenced, on Feb. 3, 2011. About the same time, Mr. Verdoes and Mr. Quiroga started to realize that what they were doing as a side project was more interesting than their own bands.
“People always say, ‘Do you get tired of each other?’” Mr. Verdoes said. “No. We don’t get tired of each other at all. We don’t fight. It’s honestly the greatest thing: a best friend you can create with.”

Mr. Verdoes is, of course, talking about Mr. Quiroga, who feels the same. They finish each other’s sentences. They spend hours together every day. They thought about getting another band member, but no one seemed to fit. They talk about their relationship like it is love. “It happened so organically,” Mr. Quiroga said.

In Seattle, the four spent holidays and birthdays together, threw barbecues, went to readings by authors like Junot Díaz, danced at clubs and swam in Lake Washington. Mr. Quiroga describes them as “the team.” At Ms. Ahmed’s suggestion, the two men called their band Iska Dhaaf, which in Somali means, roughly, “let it go.” Ms. Blouin did the art for their albums.

The band’s first full-length album, “Even the Sun Will Burn,” came out to positive reviews in March 2014. (The Stranger, an alternative weekly in Seattle, named it No. 2 on their Top 10 Seattle Albums of 2014 list.)

Meanwhile, Ms. Ahmed had applied to law schools specializing in human rights. She got into several, including her top choice, the City University of New York School of Law, far, far away from the team and Lake Washington.

Yet people move to New York for all sorts of reasons: to disappear, to reinvent, to never sleep, to run away from disappointment, to follow their dreams, jobs and lovers. For the team, following someone else’s dream across the country made perfect sense, especially since their own dreams fit perfectly into the glittering, alien-shaped, garbage-smelling bucket that is New York.

Mr. Verdoes agreed to go, especially since his younger brother was planning to move out. The couple told Mr. Quiroga and Ms. Blouin over dinner at Quinn’s Pub on Capitol Hill in Seattle.

“I was like, we play every day,” Mr. Quiroga recalled. “I’ll go.” Ms. Blouin was also up for the adventure. “My immediate reaction was ‘Of course, let’s go,’” she recalled.
In May 2014, Ms. Ahmed and Mr. Verdoes married in an Islamic ceremony known as a nikah. Two months later, Ms. Ahmed moved, staying with a friend before landing in an apartment in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn that had only an air mattress. “I just couldn’t wait for them to get here,” she said.

At the end of summer, the other three followed, in a tour van pulling a U-haul trailer with all their belongings. Mr. Quiroga and Mr. Verdoes held a farewell concert in Seattle, then played shows on the way to New York, raising gas money as they went. It was Ms. Blouin’s first time on a grinding tour.

“It was awful,” she said. “Just awful.”

Now, Ms. Blouin and Mr. Quiroga live near Ms. Ahmed and Mr. Verdoes, about a 15-minute walk apart. Ms. Ahmed studies law and works on an online magazine she helped start for expat Somali women. Ms. Blouin has a job and does freelance work. Mr. Quiroga and Mr. Verdoes have a rehearsal space in Bushwick, Brooklyn, a windowless room in a basement of windowless rooms that bears some resemblance to a jail cell. On the side, Mr. Verdoes works as a substitute teacher, and Mr. Quiroga works at a SoHo bar that appears to cater to other refugees from Seattle.

The four hang out together and look like Brooklyn hipsters, although Mr. Quiroga hates that description and says they are not. They complain about the heat and all that it brings. (On a recent two-night run, Ms. Ahmed got 29 mosquito bites.) Now New York City, its infuriating real-estate prices and postage-stamp-size apartments, is home.

“I had a certain stipulation about moving,” Mr. Verdoes said. “I was like, I’m not going to move to Iowa. But I had an intuition about New York City. I wasn’t too worried. If eight million people can do it, I was pretty sure I could.”
A Literal and Figurative Meaning of Children's Needs

As the inaugural edition of my blog, "Food and Phonics," I thought I would take a moment to explain the thinking behind its name. Washington, DC, my hometown is lauded for having an array of decadent tourist attractions including museums that punctuate the great contributions made by artists all attempting to use art as a means by which to comment on the social, political and economic actualities of the world.

As a District resident, I spend much of my summer Saturdays touring the museums of my hometown and while all of them are stunning in their own right, I recently stumbled into the National Gallery of Art, and into an intriguing session on how artists use contrast to tell a story or to offer interpretation. In the art world, contrast is the difference between two or more elements (e.g., value, color, texture) in a composition or the difference between the lightest and darkest areas of an image. As I toured the National Gallery of Art looking for examples of contrast in the art pieces, I could not help but think about the two very decisive portraits of DC: the "haves," and the "have nots" ostensibly titled "west of the park," and "east of the river."

Juxtaposing the two yield a very clear difference between communities that share the same city name, but nevertheless experience two very different realities. For one community those experiences are decisively burdensome, and for the other, those experiences are fiercely beneficial and the children of both communities experience either the burden or benefit more indelibly than any other community member. Uncovering the lightest and darkest areas of "west of the park," and "east of the river," reveal that for "west of the park" 2 in 3 children will attend and finish college, whereas for "east of the river," 3 in 5 children will serve long stretches of prison time. A closer look at the contrast between the two reveals a light in "west of the park," where less than 5% of its children live in poverty, but a darkness in "east of the river," that reveals nearly 50% of its children live at or below the poverty level. This contrast is at best disheartening, and at worst it is criminal. As I continue to analyze the contrast in the two portraits, I came to realize that a real juxtaposition can be made in the difference between the ability of each community to provide its children the most basic needs. I looked up the definition of "basic," and found that according to Webster's Dictionary, "basic," means "forming an essential foundation or starting point; fundamental "certain basic rules must be obeyed."

It was having a clear understanding of the concept of basic that led me to name my blog. Almost every psychological, sociological, anthropological, and educational piece of research with any integrity notes that when the most basic needs of children are met, their life outcomes, and ability to determine and seize upon opportunities for an improved quality of life drastically expand. In essence, the basic needs of children can be summed up into two synchronizations: food and phonics. For me there was a perfectly designed, yet dark irony that would see two communities, merely a few neighborhood blocks from one another, where one could envelope its children in the finest assurances of a good start, while the other community could do little to execute on ensuring that its children had a salubrious beginning. Food and phonics are assuredly the basics, and whether they are considered figuratively or metaphorically, through their interdependence both components represent the compass for a favorable life trajectory, especially given that 75% of Americans who receive food stamps perform at the lowest 2 levels of literacy, and 90% of high school dropouts are on welfare.

While food most definitely can be taken at face value, what food ultimately offers is nutrients that is needed to ensure healthy physiological and cognitive development. To that end, what food represents can be expanded to include guaranteeing that every child has quality housing, and quality healthcare. Moreover, children need a healthy community to protect them from the perils of an exploitative economy.

Phonics refers to ensuring that all children have the fundamentals in both reading and mathematics so that they are equipped to be victors of achievement, instead of victims of the achievement gap. The need to ensure high quality "food," and highly effective "phonics," is evident.
In a recent study conducted by Donald J. Hernandez, a sociology professor at Hunter College, students at age 13 were divided into four groups based on their reading scores. The study found that students who scored below grade level by 3rd grade were 4 times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who can read proficiently by 3rd grade. Further, students from high poverty backgrounds, who also could not read on grade level by 3rd grade were 13 times less likely to graduate on time than peers from wealthier backgrounds, and who could read on grade level in 3rd grade.

In the same way that food can be expanded past its literal meaning, to describe the physical, psychological, social and emotional needs of all children, phonics too can be expanded past its literal meaning to describe the academic and educational needs of all children. High quality schools, and educational opportunities must ensure that every child, again, irrespective of their socioeconomic background receives strong foundations in 21st century skills and the skills needed to be college ready. A further example of the importance of “food and phonics,” can be seen in a U.S. Department of Justice’s report which reveals a link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime. In the report, Justice Officials confirm that there is an unequivocal connection between abhorrent behavior and poor reading ability. Evidence from the report offers that 85 percent of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate, and over 70 percent of inmates in America’s prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level. Early childhood, when food and phonics, especially at their most literal meanings are most critical spans from in Eudora to 3rd grade.

Demonstrations of the importance of food and phonics yet again manifest themselves in the fact that 2/3 of students who cannot read proficiently by the end of 4th grade will end up in jail or on welfare. Further, teenage girls between the ages of 16 to 19 who live at or below the poverty line and have below average literacy skills are 6 times more likely to have children out of wedlock than girls their age who can read proficiently. Ultimately, this blog will seek to do more than explore the importance of food and phonics, as critical roles in the lives of children, especially vulnerable children, but in fact this blog will serve as a call to action ensuring likeminded stakeholders and defenders of children collaborate to ensure that they receive high quality “food,” and superior “phonics” in both their literal and expanded meanings.

It will attempt to define what good food and phonics is for children from high poverty rural and urban communities, for children with learning, emotional and physical disabilities, for children who are victims of bullying, for children who attend high and low performing public and public charter schools, for children who are struggling learners, for children who are transgender, gay, lesbian, or bisexual, for children who are in foster care, for children that suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression, and hopelessness, for children orphaned by AIDS, drug addiction and alcoholism, for children who have an incarcerated parent or parents, for children who are homeless. Ultimately, this blog is about what food and phonics, looks like for all children. I want to do more than add a voice to the conversation, but rather add action to a growing, long overdue movement to ensure that all children reach and fulfill their potential.

Blair Horner: College Opens, Will New Yorkers Get A Break?

By BLAIR HORNER • 17 HOURS AGO

Twitter [link]

This week marks the beginning of the semester for most colleges in New York State. As students begin their next collegiate experience, families tackle how to pay for it.

American higher education has seen a dramatic shift in who pays for public college. America was once a
society that valued college education and put its collective money where its mouth is by funding the bulk of the cost of that education.

But since the 1980s, there has been a shift in the burden of paying for public college from government to the families of those in college. The clearest evidence of that shift has been the reduction state dollars going to public colleges and the dramatic increase in tuition over the last three decades.

While state funding for the State University of New York (SUNY) has remained largely flat over the last few years, the total cost to maintain SUNY's and the City University of New York's existing services has increased by nearly $200 million. The state made up the difference using hikes in public college tuition. Stagnant state support coupled with rising tuition has had an impact: Prior to the 2008 recession, tuition covered about half of SUNY’s budget. Now, tuition covers more than 60% of SUNY’s budget.

These tuition increases are the result of a so-called “rational tuition” policy. New York’s law, described by proponents as “rational,” hiked public college tuition each year for five years. The only thing rational about it is that it guarantees increases in the cost of attending a public college. As a result, New York families are paying more – and in some cases adding to an increasing college debt load.

Nationwide, student loan debt is currently over $1 trillion and it is estimated to be $2 trillion by 2025. At New York’s four University Centers 56% of graduates carry debt averaging over $22,000. Studies show that students burdened with student loan debt are less likely to start a business or own a home. This can create a ripple effect where current debt hamstrings future wealth growth—the effect is even greater for low-income students and students of color.

A college-educated workforce is in demand. A Georgetown University study found that, by 2018, nearly two-thirds of New York jobs would require a post-secondary education. Yet, 2013 Census data shows that less than half of New York adults hold an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. Tuition increases outpacing income growth, paired with decreased state investment, have eroded college affordability.

But the New York model is not the only way.

Other states are enacting another form of “rational tuition” – they are either freezing tuition rates, or cutting the cost of attending public colleges and universities.

A growing number of states are trying to rein in the price students and their families pay to attend public colleges and universities. Tuition rose sharply during the Great Recession after states cut higher education funding. Now student loan debt is topping $1 trillion nationally, and even upper-income families are worried about rising college costs. As a result, legislatures are under pressure to bring prices down.

In July, the state of Washington enacted a new law that cut in-state tuition. The state of Minnesota passed legislation that freezes tuition at two-year colleges this fall and will cut tuition next year. The state of Ohio froze in-state tuition for two- and four-year institutions. Wisconsin froze in-state tuition across the 26 campuses in its university system. The University of Maine System kept tuition flat for the fourth year in a row.
New York's law, described as "rational," hiked public college tuition. At the end of the Spring, 2016, New York's law will expire. The debate on what to do about that law is heating up. What is the best way for New York to define rational from a student's perspective - rationally jacking up tuition or rationally keeping it at the same rate? This year's college students will soon know.

Blair Horner is the Legislative Director of the New York Public Interest Research Group.
The Racial Justice Failures That Hillary Clinton Can't Ignore

By Guy Saperstein / Gaius Publius / AlterNet
August 31, 2015

While the Black Lives Matter movement has focused attention on Bernie Sanders for his perceived racial justice deficiencies, no one seems to be giving much scrutiny to the civil rights record of Bill and Hillary Clinton and the impact their political work has had on the black community.

History has not been kind to the Clintons' record and it is possible that Bill Clinton, while president, with no public objections and often with enthusiastic support from Hillary, did more damage to the black community than any modern American president.


1996 Welfare Reform Act: Any consideration of Bill Clinton's impact on the black community must include the 1996 Welfare Reform Act that had been put forward by Republicans Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole as a cornerstone of the Republican Contract for America and signed into law by Clinton, fulfilling his 1992 campaign pledge to "end welfare as we know it."

The bill ended the federal guarantee of cash assistance to the poor, limited welfare payments and turned welfare programs over to the states. Civil rights and women's groups strongly opposed this legislation, which has proved to be a disaster for poor people. Three of Clinton's assistant secretaries at the Department of Health and Human Services resigned to protest the law. According to one of them, Peter Edelman, the 1996 welfare reform law destroyed the safety net for poor people, increased poverty, lowered income for single mothers, put people into homeless shelters and left states free to eliminate welfare entirely.

Clinton's welfare reform did "not offer benefits sufficient to lift recipients out of poverty, and despite a strong economy, the majority of families who have moved off the [welfare] rolls have remained in poverty," according to the book Success Stories, by Joe Soss. Jason DeParle of the New York Times, after interviews with single mothers, said that they have been left without means to survive, and have turned to desperate and sometimes illegal ways to survive, including shoplifting, selling blood, scavenging trash bins, moving in with friends, and returning to violent domestic partners.
Feminist critics such as Barbara Ehrenreich said Clinton's welfare reform was motivated by racism and misogyny, using stereotypes of "endlessly fecund" African-American welfare recipients.

On the face of it, devolving welfare programs to the states was racially neutral, but it didn't work out that way. Joe Soss, who co-wrote the book, *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race*, explains how race became the defining characteristic of Clinton's welfare reform:

"People had become so focused on racial issues that race really drove the patterning....All of the states with more African-Americans on the welfare rolls chose tougher rules. And when you add those different rules up, what we found was that even though the Civil Act prevents the government from creating different programs for black and white recipients, when states choose according to this pattern, it ends up that large numbers of African Americans get concentrated in the states with the toughest rules, and large numbers of white recipients get concentrated in the states with the more lenient rules.

So state freedom to make these different choices became the mechanism for recreating a racially biased system across the states, where the toughness of the rules you confronted really on your racial characteristics.

Despite the human costs of welfare reform, Bill Clinton is still bragging about knocking people off welfare and Hillary has neither repudiated nor disavowed the 1996 Clinton welfare legislation, which has been a catastrophe for the black community. Hillary Clinton not only supported the 1996 legislation, but as recently as her 2008 presidential campaign, publicly supported it, expressing no regret about how it turned out and telling the New York Times she thought the act was necessary and enormously successful.

**1994 Violent Crime Control Act:** Another Bill Clinton legacy that has had catastrophic impacts on the black community is the 1994 Violent Crime Control Act, which, among other things, expanded the death penalty, provided funds to hire 100,000 more police, imposed tougher prison sentences, eliminated funds for inmate education and provided money to build extra prisons. Clinton, who had a history of pandering to racist, anti-crime sentiments (witness his 1992 flight back to Arkansas to personally oversee the execution of a mentally retarded African-American murderer which helped his poll numbers in the New Hampshire primary), pandered to tough-on-crime voters and described the Violent Crime Control Act in stark terms: "Gangs and drugs have taken over our streets and undermined our schools," he said. "Every day we read about somebody else who has literally gotten away with murder."

Bill Clinton wasn't the only one using tough language to sell this tough crime bill; Hillary, in selling this punitive bill to the public, added her own red-meat rhetoric, calling kids in gangs "super-predators" without conscience or empathy:

"[W]e also have to have an organized effort against gangs, just as in the previous generation we had an organized effort against the mob. We need to take these people on. They are often connected to drug cartels. They are not just gangs of kids anymore. They are often the kinds of kids that are called 'super-predators.' No conscience, no empathy. We can talk about how they got that way but first we have to bring them to heel...."

As a result of this legislation, 28 states and the District of Columbia followed the federal money and enacted stricter sentencing laws and built more prisons. Jeremy Travis, a former member of the Clinton Justice Department and now president of the John Jay College of
Criminal Justice says there was a basic problem with the Clinton crime legislation: There is only a small relationship between high levels of imprisonment and lower crime rates. "We know with the fullness of time that we made some terrible mistakes," Travis has said. "And those mistakes were to ramp up the use of prison. And that big mistake is the one that we now, 20 years later, come to grips with. We have to look in the mirror and say, 'look what we have done.'"

What we have done is incarcerate a lot of minorities. There are more than 2.3 million people in U.S. state and federal prisons and nearly one million are black men. "If you're a black baby born today, you have a 1 in 3 chance of spending some time in prison or jail," says Nick Turner of the Vera Institute. "If you're Latino, it's a 1 in 6 chance. And if you're white, it's 1 in 17...[C]oming to terms with these disparities and reversing them...is a matter of fairness and justice."

When we speak about justice and fairness, we need to consider not just the prisoners, but the families who are devastated by the imprisonment of a parent and the stigma and loss of job opportunities that endure forever. And when people are in prison, they are not earning pensions or building Social Security accounts, so their futures are permanently diminished.

Recently, the New York Times published an article about the disappearance of 1.5 million black men from daily American life. The reasons were premature death, foreign military deployments and prison.

The 1994 Clinton Crime bill has been a huge failure, at great cost to the black community, as well as many state budgets, and there has been a big public policy debate shift away from excessive incarceration policies. Even the arch-conservative Koch brothers and some Senate Republicans like Ted Cruz, Rand Paul and Marco Rubio are promoting a re-evaluation of incarceration policies.

To Bill and Hillary's credit, they have acknowledged some of the damage their policies caused. In her meeting with three members of the Black Lives Matter movement, Hillary Clinton tried to explain her policy reversals as the result of different times demanding different policies. Yet the over-reliance on incarceration, particularly for non-violent crimes, made no sense in 1994, and it is equally bad policy today.

The 1994 Act spawned the "era of mass incarceration" that Hillary now questions. The Act supported "truth in sentencing" laws that dramatically increased the amount of time criminals served and over the course of the Clinton presidency, the number of Americans in prison rose an astounding 60 percent. This might have been justified if it led to large reductions of crime, but very little crime reduction is caused by mass incarceration. The Brennan Center for Justice, after spending two years studying 14 different causes of the reduction of crime, concluded that "incarceration was responsible for approximately five percent of the drop in crime in the 1990s" and an even lower percentage since then.

Hillary deserves credit for rethinking the damage the Clinton crime bill caused, but how much credit should that be, since she is now moving on this issue with a herd that includes right-wing Republicans and arch-conservatives like the Koch brothers? Her change of position does not help the millions of people, including hundreds of thousands of African Americans, whose lives were devastated by the hysteria for mass incarceration.

Repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act: After the 1920-21 Depression, the United States began the decade known as the Roaring Twenties, characterized by new forms of consumer credit and bank expansion. Banks sold securities side-by-side with traditional bank services like loans and deposits. The stock market boomed and reached bubble territory and along with
the bubble came market manipulation in which banks and other financial entities would hype the value of stocks, then dump them on less-informed buyers right before the stocks collapsed. Banks offered holding company stocks, many of which were little more than heavily leveraged pyramid schemes backed by dubious assets as prudent investments.

In October 1929, the bubble burst, the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began. In 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president and in 1933, a Democratic Congress passed the Glass-Steagall Act in response to bank failures. Because of Glass-Steagall, banks were prohibited from engaging in banking and investing activities simultaneously. Banks could take deposits and make loans. Brokers could underwrite and sell securities, but no firm could do both due to conflicts of interest and risks to insured deposits. From 1933 to 1999, the system worked well. There were very few large bank failures and no large financial collapses.

In 1999, Democrats led by President Bill Clinton and his Wall Street supporters and joined by Republican Senator Phil Gramm, succeeded in repealing Glass-Steagall at the urging of the big Wall Street banks. As they did in the Roaring Twenties, banks began to originate fraudulent loans and sold securities backed by toxic, worthless assets, to their customers, often while simultaneously "shorting" or betting against the same securities themselves. The bubble peaked in 2007 and collapsed in 2008, causing Wall Street to run to Presidents Bush and Obama and Congress for a financial bail-out, which ultimately cost the federal government $1 trillion in cash and $11 trillion in guarantees. Millions of people lost their homes in foreclosure, unemployment spiked, the average American family lost 40 percent of its net worth and 52 percent of black families and 47 percent of Latino families were left with zero net worth.

Joseph Stiglitz, a Noble Prize-winning American economist has written:

> Commercial banks are not supposed to be high-risk ventures; they are supposed to manage other people's money very conservatively...Investment banks, on the other hand, have traditionally managed rich people's money — people who can take bigger risks in order to get bigger returns.

When repeal of Glass-Steagall brought investment and commercial banks together, the investment-bank culture came out on top. There was a demand for the kind of high returns that could be obtained only through high leverage and big risk-taking.

Although American taxpayers bailed out the banks, Wall Street, with the support of President Obama, vigorously and successfully fought the re-institution of Glass-Steagall and the United States today remains just as vulnerable today to bank speculation and financial melt-down as it was in 2007.

Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have called for the re-legislation of Glass-Steagall; by contrast, a spokesperson for Hillary Clinton recently said she did not support legislation reinstating Glass-Steagall rules. The banks remain free to run wild, while the U.S. economy continues to limp along, apparently with Clinton's approval.

**NAFTA**: In 1993, President Clinton strongly lobbied for and passed NAFTA, which he and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce promised would create an export boom with Mexico that would create 200,000 high-paying jobs in America within two years and millions of jobs within five years. Instead, trade deficits with Mexico eliminated 682,000 good-paying jobs in the United States, 61 percent of which were manufacturing jobs, many held by African Americans.
When China entered the World Trade Organization in 2001, according to Robert Scott, director of Trade and Manufacturing Policy Research at the Economic Policy Institute, black workers lost 281,000 high-paying manufacturing jobs from 2001-11 and tens of billions in wages. The U.S. trade deficit with China is $318 billion per year and Celeste Drake, globalization policy specialist for the AFL-CIO, has written that, "The displacement of manufacturing jobs by growing U.S. trade deficits with China has been particularly hard on minority workers: 958,800 were displaced, with wage-related losses in 2011 of $10.485 per worker and $10.1 billion overall."

The NAFTA-style trade agreement with Korea (KORUS) has resulted in the net loss of 75,000 jobs for African Americans and other workers, U.S. imports from Korea surged to more than $12 billion, while U.S. imports to Korea increased by less than $1 billion, said Robert Scott.

Once African Americans and other non-white workers lose their jobs, they have a difficult time finding new ones, wrote author Lori Keltzer in the book Job Loss from Imports: Measuring the Costs. "Minority workers face reemployment rates almost 11 percentage points lower than white workers," Keltzer wrote. "For less skilled manufacturing workers, the male minority's employment rate is 20 percent lower than the average. Female minority's reemployment rate is 24 percent lower."

NAFTA and NAFTA-style trade agreements have been described as a "little discussed triple whammy in the black community that has hit black Americans financially hard over the past two decades," wrote Frederick H. Lowe in, "Will the proposed trade agreement be another bad deal for black workers?"

You can thank Bill Clinton for NAFTA. But the story of bad trade deals is not over. In fact, the worst may be yet-to-come — the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which has been described by the AFL-CIO as "NAFTA on steroids."

The TPP, which has been negotiated in secret, involves the U.S., Japan, Canada, Australia, Mexico, Malaysia, Singapore, Chile, Peru, New Zealand, Vietnam and Brunei — almost 40 percent of the world economy. If passed, it would reduce tariffs and allow capital to move more freely among these nations. NAFTA and other NAFTA-style agreements have encouraged capital to flee to the lowest-wage countries, a "race to the bottom," wrote William Greider in his seminal work on globalization, One World, Ready or Not.

If the TPP passes, the race not only will accelerate to the great profit of U.S. corporations, which already are sitting on $2+ trillion of retained earnings they have not repatriated to the U.S. or paid U.S. taxes on, but it will further gut the already-weak U.S. manufacturing base and further damage jobs for the black community. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have publicly opposed the TPP, while Hillary Clinton has refused to take an identifiable position on it.

The Clinton administration, with policies Hillary Clinton supported at the time and in most respects still supports, pushed millions of African Americans off welfare; over-incarcerated hundreds of thousands of African Americans while devastating hundreds of thousands of black families and careers; supported Wall Street-friendly legislation that helped to melt down the economy, leaving millions homeless and 52 percent of black families with zero net worth; and promoted trade policies like NAFTA which cost African Americans hundreds of thousands of jobs and tens of billions in salaries and income. Is this the track record and set of policies African Americans and racial justice advocates really want to endorse for 2016?
From subway stations to Carnegie Hall

By Tammy Scileppi

The MTA platforms were his stage and New York City's subway riders were his audience.

A few years ago, a talented and driven teenage violinist living in College Point, captured the hearts of many who helped him play it forward with donations. The Bayside High School grad was helping his mother put food on the table.

Yut Chia, who is of Chinese descent, came to the city from Colombia with his family, when he was 3.

Two years of underground gigs provided him with some extra dough to pay for college expenses. All he wanted was to have a shot at a musical career. But it was a long shot and the odds were stacked against him.

But one day, many doors started to open for this Middle Village resident.

"This year, I'm proud to say I won CUNY's Got Talent. All the CUNY schools sent their most talented person to compete in the biggest university talent competition in New York City, and Queens College chose me to represent them," Chia, 22, said. "I gave it my all and got the first place prize and the title of most talented person in the whole CUNY system. I got two trophies plus a $2,000 check."

Chia said one of the most enriching experiences in his life was his experience as a music student at Queens College.

"All I did was practice 24/7 and I really appreciate everything they did for me," he said.

But he decided to leave school because so many doors were opening up for him as a violinist.

"I just had to grasp all the enormous opportunities I was getting. It was either continue studying to become a well-rounded classical player, or move on and follow my dream and passion of becoming a modern violinist," he said. "The stuff I do now and they simply don't teach in college. I play modern music, I dance while I play, I have backup dancers and choreograph my whole shows."

His core musicians include a cellist, violinist and his arranger/pianist.

"I get the audience involved and hyped in my shows and most importantly, I make sure every person in the audience goes 'wow' by the time I'm done performing," Chia said.

Playing under the stage name Yut and The Hot Four, Chia has been performing all over the city.

"From Carnegie Hall to Lincoln Center to nightclubs to Mercedes Benz Fashion Week to government offices. Except Madison Square Garden or Barclays, which by next year, I hope to cross from my bucket list," he joked, adding, "People always ask me, 'Hey Yut, where are the other four?' And that's when I say, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to introduce to you my hot four. Then I proceed to pluck the G, D, A and E strings on my violin, and everyone laughs."
City Tech students ready to compete in solar home decathlon

Students from City Tech held a send-off party on Thursday for a solar home they built, which will be entered into the 2015 Solar Decathlon International Competition in October. Eagle photo by Rob Abbuzzese

that it's livable, supplies energy to its appliances and needs to produce at least as much energy as it consumes.

"It's part of a national initiative to promote sustainability and zero emissions," said Kevin Hon, dean of City Tech's School of Technology and Design. "A number of major universities compete for the right just to compete. We are very fortunate that City Tech was one of the qualifying teams and is one of the only undergraduate qualifying teams."

Twenty schools entered the bi-annual solar decathlon, but, for various reasons, five have already dropped out, including Yale. Many schools team up to enter the competition and use graduate students, which makes City Tech unique.

The process began two years ago when City Tech selected 20 students who made up the core of Team DURA (Diverse, Urban, Resilient, Adaptable) and began drawing up plans. The DURA house is a stackable design meant to provide relief after catastrophic storms and can also be used for mobile and low-income housing.

Because the house is meant to be stacked, it created many difficulties for the team including how to best position the solar panels on the side of the house and how to properly install water drainage systems. Team members remarked that building something like this in New York City was particularly difficult.

"It's difficult to build a sustainable house living within the constraints of an urban area because it makes direct access to
solar power a little more difficult," said Nadia Djibring. "You also can't dig into the Earth to get geothermal energy. There are a lot of zoning and location laws that make it hard for a homeowner to build a home like this in New York City."

After the competition is over, the students hope to donate the home to a disabled veteran, but since it is so expensive to move and construct the eventual destination is unknown. Djibring noted that the local firefighters from a nearby station were hoping that they might get the unique house.

The entire project cost approximately $350,000 and although it is nearly completed, the school is still raising money for the project. While it is built, they still have to ship it to California for the competition and send a team of students to reconstruct it while they are there.

The decathlon, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy, takes place Oct. 8-18. To see the results and for more information on the rules of the competition, go to www.solardecathlon.gov/ and to donate money to the students, go to www.citytech.cuny.edu and click "Support City Tech."
Health & Science

What about that second glass of wine? It may catch up with you as you age.

By Jill U. Adams · August 31 at 4:15 PM

I typically have a second glass of wine when I'm out to dinner, either at a friend's house or a restaurant. But as I get older, I may need to reconsider that practice.

That's because as we age, our bodies react to alcohol differently. As a result, guidelines from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism are more restrictive for older people than those for younger adults.

"Because of changes in normal aging, we become more sensitive to the effects of alcohol," says Alison Moore, a UCLA geriatrician who researches drinking behaviors in older adults.

For men in general, the NIAAA recommends no more than 14 drinks per week and no more than four drinks on a given day. For women, the numbers are seven and three. For people older than 65 who are healthy and don't take medications, the NIAAA guidelines say no more than seven drinks per week and no more than three drinks on any one day. (One drink equals 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of liquor.)

If seniors drink more than that, Moore says, they put themselves at increased risk for alcohol-related problems. This may mean thinking less clearly, forgetting things and falling. Even subtle impairments can interfere with normal activities such as cooking and remembering to take medications.

[What happened when this college student drank too much, too quickly]

There are a number of reasons why drinking is riskier in the elderly. Older people have less muscle mass and less water content, which means more alcohol ends up circulating in the blood. Also, older people metabolize alcohol more slowly, so that its effects last longer. An enzyme called alcohol dehydrogenase, or ADH, is needed to begin breaking down alcohol. As the enzyme acts, alcohol's effects decline. "When we age, starting at around age 50, we start to lose ADH," says Alexis Kuerbis, a social worker at New York's Hunter College who specializes in alcohol use disorders in older adults.

(ADH also accounts for the gender difference in alcohol effects. Women, on average, have half the amount of the enzyme as men, according to Kuerbis.)

Altogether, this means that a 60- or 70-year-old can develop a drinking problem even if his or her drinking habits haven't changed in decades.
For instance, in a 2014 study, volunteers were given alcohol to achieve blood alcohol concentrations of either 0.04 percent or 0.065 percent — less than the 0.08 level that classifies a driver as intoxicated — and tested in a driving simulator. At the higher level, people age 55 to 70 were more erratic with their steering and were worse at maintaining a consistent speed than younger volunteers, who showed no significant impairment.

So in the not-too-distant future, even my first glass of wine may affect my reactions and coordination more than it did when I was younger.

[When should you talk to your kids about drinking? Before they turn 10]

"Acute bouts of drinking carry some risk, and people need to be aware of that," Nixon says. Even moderate drinkers may need to reconsider their drinking habits, she said.

"About half the people over the age of 65 consume alcohol," Moore says, and of those people, about 10 to 15 percent drink at a level that exceeds the NIAAA guidelines, which puts them at risk for negative consequences.

Most people reduce or quit drinking as they get older, often because of worsening health. Seniors who drink heavily often were heavy drinkers as younger adults: They're maintaining their habit with potentially worse results. Still others develop heavy drinking habits late in life, Moore says, "because of loss. They're retired, they're lonely, they've lost a loved one — they've had a negative change in life."

What if an older person in your life is drinking too much? Encourage him to see his doctor, who should regularly screen for problem drinking. Kuerbis says physician education on this has gotten better in recent years. Moore says adult children often raise concerns about alcohol to their parents' doctors.

"Studies do show that age-specific treatment is best for older adults," Kuerbis says. That means group sessions with people of similar age or therapies that take into account seniors' cognitive abilities.

Psychologists employ what is called a motivational interview to get someone to consider changing their drinking behavior. This means talking through the consequences of drinking — making a health condition worse or getting poor sleep or not keeping up with life's responsibilities. "If they see that the substance causes problems, they may be motivated to cut back on drinking," Moore says.

Still, the problem can be intractable. Kuerbis describes two patients — "some of the heaviest drinkers I ever witnessed," she says. They were retired, they weren't caring for anyone but themselves, and they had no responsibilities. "They had zero motivation to change."
Once a Pariah, Now a Judge: The Early Transgender Journey of Phyllis Frye

By DEBORAH SONTAG  AUG. 29, 2015

HOUSTON — Nearly four decades before Caitlyn Jenner introduced herself to the world, Phyllis Randolph Frye came out as a transgender woman in a far less glamorous way. No Diane Sawyer, no Vanity Fair.

It was the summer of 1976. As Bruce Jenner, 26, was celebrating his decathlon victory at the Montreal Olympics, Phillip Frye, 28, was admitting defeat in suppressing his gender identity. He, becoming she, had already lost a lot: He had been forced to resign from the military for “sexual deviation.” He had been disowned by his parents, divorced by his first wife and separated from his son. He had been dismissed from several engineering jobs.

Now, with the encouragement of his second wife, Trish, he was starting to transition and wanted to be forthright. Going door to door, he distributed letters to advise the community that the neighbor formerly known as Phil — the husband, father and born-again Christian; the former Eagle Scout, Texas A & M University cadet and Army lieutenant — was going to start living full time as Phyllis.

In response, she got her house egged, her tires slashed, and her driveway spray-painted with obscenities. Teenagers openly mocked her, the engineering profession blackballed her and the federal government rejected her for a job because of her “desire to impersonate the opposite sex.”

During that bleak, embittering time, Ms. Frye could not have imagined that someday this tiny transgender population would generate a hugely visible movement,
and that she would be considered not only one of its pioneers but a pillar of her civic community — the country’s first openly transgender judge.

“All my life, I have gotten judged,” she said in a recent interview in her office, surrounded by her many degrees and awards, movie posters for “Tootsie” and “Transamerica,” and photographs of Trish, to whom she has been married for 42 years.

Ms. Frye, 67, did not watch Ms. Jenner, 65, come out as a transgender woman on national television in late April: “It’s old hat to me,” she said. Nearly 17 million viewers did, though, as Ms. Jenner tapped into what some have seen as a bafflingly sudden moment of ubiquity for transgender Americans (roughly estimated at 700,000 adults).

But this moment — when transition stories are increasingly and empathetically featured in the media, campuses buzz with gender politics and the president condemns transgender persecution in the State of the Union address — did not materialize out of thin air. It evolved over the last quarter-century as Ms. Frye and others built a transgender civil rights movement, fighting dexterously to rebrand a highly marginalized group; demand, and increasingly win, equal protection under the law; and put the T in L.G.B.T.

Despite a historic affinity between gay and transgender people, mainstream gay rights groups did not initially embrace the transgender cause as their own. They saw it as a liability. Yet from the time their far younger movement coalesced, most transgender advocates felt kinship and a practical need to ally themselves with the large, relatively well-financed gay movement.

“We realized that we should have a parallel movement, but also needed to be dug into the L.G.B.T. movement,” said Mara Keisling, the executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. “The folks I work most closely with are all very nice, sweet people, but we had to be such hard asses. At a certain point, we said, ‘No more moving gay people ahead without trans people.’ ”

Having felt the sting of gay groups’ rejection long ago, Ms. Frye led some of the earliest sorties in what became a pitched battle for transgender inclusion. She
repeatedly argued that homophobia and transphobia were entwined, and made the case that many transgender people are themselves gay.

At the same time, Ms. Frye was one of the first to act on the need for transgender advocates to develop their own legal theories and agenda. In the 1990s, she convened annual transgender law conferences, where grass-roots activists from around the country first met and developed an aspirational transgender bill of rights. Between events, she helped tether the growing network through group emails she called her “Phyllabusters.”

“Caitlyn Jenner stands on the shoulders of somebody like Phyllis Frye,” said Shannon Price Minter, the legal director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights and one of several transgender appointees by the Obama administration. “Phyllis is the grandmother of our movement.”

Precursors


In the years that followed, while other transgender people quietly sought treatment abroad, too, no real transgender community developed. There were precursors: private cross-dressing clubs on the West and East Coasts, most notably Hose & Heels (for heterosexual men only), and a gritty urban subculture of drag queens in big cities like New York and San Francisco.

But in San Antonio, in the 1950s, Ms. Frye grew up the middle child in a middle-class home where gender roles, true to the era, were rigidly fixed. Her father was an engineer and a Mason, her mother a stay-at-home mom and amateur painter. Tarzan and Jane, she called them in a speech once.

As a young boy, Phillip Frye coveted his female cousin’s junior bake set and his mother’s spike heels. But he got “the cues” — “not for boys, not for you.” Fearful of detection, he overcompensated with machismo, telling the “dirtiest jokes” with the “foulest mouth.”
“I was so good at being a guy that I should have won an Oscar,” she said. “I was an extremely good Boy Scout — but I would have rather been in the Girl Scouts. I was the R.O.T.C. commander of my high school — but I would have rather been the head cheerleader. And I cross-dressed whenever I could, in private.”

In Phillip’s high school years, his mother uncovered a cache of her own clothing, and underclothing, in her son’s closet. Was Phillip just experimenting? she asked hopefully. Yeah, he said.

“My parents would have pitched me out then if I told the truth,” Ms. Frye said. “Because when I did come out, a decade later, my dad said, ’You’re dead to me if you do this.’ And he kept his word.”

In 1966, as Phillip Frye was entering the nearly all-male engineering program at Texas A & M, transgender history was being made, though that has come to be understood only in retrospect.

In the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, the drag queens who hung out at Gene Compton’s 24-hour cafeteria rose up against police harassment. Susan Stryker, who wrote “Transgender History,” published in 2008, considers it the first collective, militant “queer” uprising against police harassment in this country’s history. It predated by three years the Stonewall Rebellion, which galvanized the gay rights movement.

Nineteen sixty-six was also the year that Harry Benjamin, a German-born endocrinologist based in New York, published a groundbreaking book, “The Transsexual Phenomenon.” Dr. Benjamin advanced the now widely accepted idea that gender identity could be distinct from anatomical gender; he implored the American medical community to help those who so desired align their bodies with their identities through hormones and surgery.

Additionally, the first university-based gender identity clinic in the country opened at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. Dr. Benjamin’s research and the clinic were both bankrolled by one of the doctor’s patients, a wealthy transgender man named Reed Erickson; the movement continued to be self-financed by transgender people through the early 2000s.
Wearing the garrison cap of a “fish,” or freshman member of the Corps of Cadets, in conservative College Station, Tex., Phillip Frye, like most Americans, had no idea such things were occurring. Like many transgender people of that generation, he thought he was alone, or nearly so.

During his junior year at college, Phillip Frye married his girlfriend. They had a son. While he continued to dress in women’s clothing, he did so furtively and shamefully, explaining his secret to his wife only after she caught him.

Upon graduation, he was commissioned by the Army and stationed in West Germany with his family. His marriage began to crumble. Lieutenant Frye revealed the reason behind the marital discord to his superiors, and was sent back to the United States, where he made a good-faith effort to be “cured.”

He underwent drug therapy, hypnosis and aversion therapy, in which he was induced to vomit while handling women’s underwear. The therapies didn’t work. His wife filed for divorce.

And in mid-1972, the Army, citing a diagnosis of “transvestism, chronic, treated, unchanged, manifested by the compulsive need to wear female clothing,” accepted his resignation “in lieu of elimination.” He was granted an honorable discharge because he had been forthright about his personal life.

Not long afterward, he slit his wrists.

At a Low Point

Looking back, Ms. Frye considered her suicide attempt out of character. It was “the ultimate in self-pity,” she wrote in autobiographical notes contained in the Phyllis R. Frye Collection, part of the L.G.B.T.Q. Archive of Cushing Memorial Library at Texas A&M.

Material in the collection helps piece together what happened next, filling in elements of a life story that Ms. Frye does not relish retelling at this juncture. (Instead, she gave The Times a thumb drive with her “war stories” from that period, as delivered in speeches.)
The collection includes personal correspondence and a curious document, a 49-page government investigation report, based on scores of interviews with Ms. Frye’s neighbors, colleagues and associates and written by a Civil Service adjudicator when she applied for a federal job.

After hitting that low point in 1972, Phillip Frye rallied, found work as a civil engineer, became a born-again Christian and fell in love with Trish, who briefly broke off their engagement but came to accept the cross-dressing.

“She said something to the effect of, ‘If you can stop short of surgery, I will try to learn to accommodate the rest,’” Ms. Frye explained in a speech in 1999.

Others were not so accepting. Phillip Frye lost a job at his alma mater after the department chairman heard rumors he was shopping for women’s clothing in College Station, his former supervisor told investigators.

“Source stated that he was able to get subject a job in Pennsylvania and apparently subject assumed a very masculine role while working in Pennsylvania,” the report said. “According to source, he got married to his current wife, Trish, while in Pennsylvania and grew a full-length beard.”

The couple returned to Houston in late 1974. Phillip Frye, who was starting to venture out at night in women’s clothing, continued to get and lose engineering jobs. Finally his wife urged him to stop living a double life.

And in an era when most transgender people, for their own preservation, “lived stealth,” as it was called, Ms. Frye came out with a megaphone.

“I put on my skirts five weeks ago, and I have not taken them off,” she said in the fall of 1976, in one of many lectures about her gender identity that she volunteered to give at local universities. “During the past five weeks, I have felt normal for the first time in 28 years.”

Ms. Frye described herself in the lectures as a “transgenderist.” She was adopting a term popularized by Virginia Prince, founder of Hose & Heels and Transvestitia magazine, who introduced it in the 1960s to describe people who lived full time in the “gender opposite to their anatomy” without having surgery.
In addition to the letters left with her neighbors, Ms. Frye wrote hundreds to relatives and ex-classmates. Robert L. Boone, director of the Singing Cadets at Texas A&M, was one of the few who wrote back.

"I am not able to emotionally or intellectually accept you as Phyllis," he said.

Mr. Boone, who is now deceased, referred to alumni participation in concerts: "As a former singing cadet, Phil (Fish) Frye, the guy we knew, is welcome to join us. However Phyllis Frye is a stranger to us, and is not a former Singing Cadet, and therefore would not be welcomed on stage."

At the end of an agonizing 13-page missive to her mother, Ms. Frye begged for acceptance: "Let me be the Phyllis that cries to emerge." She closed, in her peppery fashion, "I love you all. Don't trade my balls for my heart," signing the letter, "Phil."

After a long period of unemployment, during which she was reduced to accepting Christmas food donations from her church, Ms. Frye applied for the government job. And, despite the gossip and prejudice they shared with investigators, all but one of those interviewed recommended Ms. Frye without reservation, saying she was "a loyal citizen of the United States."

But the government rejected her. In a 1977 letter addressed to Mr. Frye — though by this time she had legally changed her name to Phyllis — the adjudicator excoriated her "pattern of unorthodox practices." He described her as a "disruptive influence" in her community, "parading around in short shorts, dresses and other female attire."

Ms. Frye responded by telling the official that she was dismayed by the "disgust-filled manner" in which he had exercised his "administrative duty."

"I am not worthy of the extreme dislike which glares out at me from your letter," she wrote. She added, "I don't own any short shorts."

'Voice-y People'

Like the mainstream gay movement, the transgender movement was initially dominated by white professionals. Their privilege shielded them from the harsher realities of extreme poverty and deadly violence encountered by many of their
constituents. It also, some say, gave them an edge.

"Take my case — and Phyllis is similar," said Ms. Keisling, the transgender leader. "I grew up white, middle class, educated and male. Suddenly I found myself marginalized. But I had always had the privilege to speak up. A lot of civil rights movements start from voiceless people. Our movement had a lot of voice-y people."

From the moment Ms. Frye transitioned, terrified of being arrested, she waged a battle against a Houston ordinance that made cross-dressing illegal.

Such laws not only criminalized gender identity, they also created a wedge with the gay community. Drag, a transgender magazine, published an editorial in 1972 that denounced gay clubs in New York for barring drag queens, who were seen as creating a justification for police raids. "The only thing we can do is yell a lot," the editorial acknowledged, "and embarrass the clubs as they continue to say, 'Go away, little girl, we can't allow you to stay.'"

In Houston, Ms. Frye lobbied city leaders for four years until the cross-dressing law was repealed in 1980. By that time she was pursuing a law degree, which she hoped would give her "the tools to defend myself against all the crap that was dished my way."

The self-defense, combined with a charm offensive, began in law school itself, at the University of Houston. During her first semester, she felt shunned. Determined to break out of her isolation, she requested the seating charts for her classes, memorized her classmates' names and approached them one by one. She tussled with the administration to gain access to the women's restroom, the kind of fight that continues to this day.

"The public has a deep fear of trans people in bathrooms, and specifically of penises in girls' rooms," said Chase Strangio, a transgender lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union's LGBT & AIDS Project. "We organize our society around very fixed notions of who men and women are, and people whose very existence challenges that provoke visceral, irrational reactions."

The Christian Legal Society, in which Ms. Frye sought solace, was so provoked. Its members began meeting secretly to avoid praying with her — until she got their
group suspended for discrimination.

In law school, she was undergoing significant physical changes as she adjusted to feminizing hormone therapy and underwent electrolysis for her facial hair.

"I was kind of a mess," she said, "but I graduated, and nobody booed or heckled me when I walked across that stage for my diploma."

Unable to find a firm willing to hire her and reluctant to hang out her own shingle, Ms. Frye peddled Amway cleaning products and worked occasionally as an engineering consultant.

After getting a case by chance and winning it, Ms. Frye felt emboldened to solicit work from judges who appointed counsel for indigent defendants. Little by little, she developed a specialization in criminal defense and made herself a fixture in the Harris County Courthouse, wearing big hats in an effort to make her headwear, not her gender identity, her signature.

Politically, she was active with the state Democrats, the League of Women Voters and the local gay and lesbian caucus, where she routinely crossed paths with Annise Parker, who is now in her third term as Houston's mayor.

At one point in the 1980s, Ms. Parker gave Ms. Frye a ride to a conference. During the drive, Ms. Frye confided that she sorely missed playing sports, and that no women's team would let her join.

Ms. Parker, who coached a lesbian softball team, looked over at the strapping, 5-foot-10 woman beside her and thought, "I really need a power hitter."

"I got back to her later and said, excuse the pun, 'I'm willing to go to bat for you,' " Ms. Parker said.

Ms. Frye, who had watched admiringly as the transgender tennis player Renée Richards won the right to compete as a woman in the United States Open in 1977, became the first transgender woman in Houston's lesbian softball league. She and her wife, who were socially isolated, found themselves welcomed into a community.

Ms. Frye did not become the reliable power hitter that Ms. Parker had hoped for,
"She only wanted home runs," Ms. Parker said. "She was always swinging for the fences."

Liberating Feelings

For years, apart from scattered support groups, transgender people had no way to find one another.

And then came the Internet.

In the early 1990s, Gwendolyn Smith, a desktop publisher at a California reprographics company, stumbled on an offer for five free hours on something called America Online. She discovered chat rooms and, in particular, one named TV Chat. (The community referred to itself then as TV/TS — transvestite/transsexual.)

Relative anonymity was liberating.

"It was on American Online that I first identified myself regularly by a feminine name and gender and explored my trans feelings," said Ms. Smith, now a columnist for The Bay Area Reporter in San Francisco. "I found my people."

After some initial resistance from AOL, Ms. Smith opened a dedicated chat room for transgender people, The Gazebo. It became a gathering place, a resource center and a bulletin board.

"When The Gazebo happened, all hell broke loose," Ms. Keisling said. "Suddenly there was a place where we could be out in a safe way and build a community and grow a voice."

By the mid-1990s, Ms. Smith said, The Gazebo had tens of thousands of unique visitors a month. Many veteran leaders of the transgender movement first connected there — and first assembled in 1992 when Ms. Frye summoned them to a Hilton Hotel in Houston for the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy.

Like others, Ms. Frye was frustrated that gay groups had distanced themselves
from the transgender cause. Although transgender activists like Sylvia Rivera had
played a prominent role at Stonewall, a rift developed afterward. In the early 1970s,
mainstream gay groups came to emphasize “a gender normative model of gay
identity,” as Mr. Minter, the White House appointee, put it.

“The Gucci-shoes crowd, the gays and lesbians on Wall Street, they saw us as a
politically embarrassing subgroup,” Ms. Frye said. “In Houston, the gay and lesbian
political caucus thought we were going to slow down their progress. So it became, ‘If
they’re going to shut us out, then we’re going to do our own thing.’”

Ms. Frye put the expenses for the first conference on her personal credit card and
crossed her fingers that people would show up. They did.

“Those conferences were like lifelines,” said Paisley Currah, a political scientist at
Brooklyn College and co-editor of Duke University Press’s Transgender Studies
Quarterly. “It was very exciting to meet other transgender activists face to face, and to
cement the networks that were going to be necessary to put the movement in place.”

In addition to articulating legal theories in areas like transgender employment,
housing and health law, conference participants drafted the International Bill of
Gender Rights, which proclaimed, “All human beings have the right to define their
own gender identity regardless of chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex or
initial gender role.”

At the conferences’ helm, Ms. Frye delivered motivational lectures, typically
ending with a call to action: “Once again I say this to you, my sisters and my brothers,
if I could do that in the late ’70s and early ’80s, what is your excuse? You have no
reason for staying scared. You have no reason for staying closeted. You have no
reason for not being the true person that you are. This is our decade. Make it happen
for you now.”

She had recently cleared some hurdles herself. She had rebuilt a relationship
with her son, by then in his 20s, although the reconciliation lasted only about a
decade. (Her son declined to be interviewed.) She had also undergone a removal of
the testes, which reduces testosterone, and won the right to amend her birth
certificate.
Ms. Frye never opted for full gender-reassignment surgery. Ahead of her time, she firmly believed that surgery did not "complete" a gender change and should not be imposed on transgender people to justify a legal gender change on identification documents. "For many years I have been about the business mostly of freeing our community from the legal need of the scalpel," she said in a speech in the 1990s.

During that period, for personal and political reasons, she and others consciously adopted "transgender" as an umbrella term.

"We framed the relevant community as broadly as possible to make the case that we're all in this together — not just transsexual people but people who cross-dress, butch lesbians, feminine gays and so on," Mr. Minter said.

Mr. Minter himself was going through a transition that would prove useful as a bridge between the gay and transgender communities. When he joined the National Center for Lesbian Rights as a lawyer, he identified as female and lesbian. In the mid-1990s, he found himself a transgender man inside the lesbian rights movement — and kept his job.

This was at a difficult time, when gay groups were allowing transgender people to be excluded from statewide nondiscrimination laws "left and right," said Lisa Mottet, deputy executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. Minnesota, in the vanguard, had included transgender people in 1993, but it was eight years before a second state, Rhode Island, followed suit.

The tone was set on high. The Human Rights Campaign, the largest gay rights organization in the country, agreed to drop transgender people from the federal Employment Nondiscrimination Act when it was introduced in Congress in 1994. (The legislation failed then and has yet to win passage.)

"That started the war with H.R.C., and it was a war," Ms. Frye said.

Afterward, Ms. Frye and a handful of others, notably Riki Anne Wilchins, who had founded a grass-roots activist group called Transsexual Menace, took matters into their own hands. They started a transgender lobbying day in Washington. They also found common cause with another frustrated group.
"In 1995, when I went to my first Creating Change conference," Ms. Frye said, referring to the large gathering on gay issues, "the trans caucus and the bisexual caucus had a combined meeting and decided to carry each other's water."

On the West Coast, another branch of the movement was gelling. San Francisco's Human Rights Commission produced a comprehensive report on discrimination against transgender people that served as a template for grass-roots groups across the country.

Also in San Francisco, Ms. Smith, horrified to learn of the stabbing death of a transgender woman named Rita Hester in Massachusetts, raised the topic in The Gazebo one night in 1998. She compared the case to the murder the previous year of another transgender woman, Chanelle Pickett. Nobody in the chat room had heard of Ms. Pickett.

"It struck me that we were ignorant of the scope of violence against our community," Ms. Smith said.

She started a web project, "Remembering Our Dead," shortly before the 1999 film "Boys Don't Cry" created broad awareness of such violence by dramatizing the real-life story of a transgender man, Brandon Teena, who had been killed.

Ms. Smith's web project grew into the International Transgender Day of Remembrance, which is observed every Nov. 20 across the country and around the world. Ms. Keisling calls it "our sacred holiday."

By the turn of the millennium, many thought it was time to professionalize the all-volunteer transgender movement. Ms. Frye was increasingly representing transgender clients in name-change and discrimination cases, merging her political and professional work. She was also starting to run out of steam, she said.

"And then Mara came along," she said, referring to Ms. Keisling, who financed the creation of the National Center for Transgender Equality in Washington in 2003. "She had the courage to move to D.C. My wife didn't want to, and all my political chits were here. So there was kind of a passing of the baton."

**Barriers Fall**
In 2003, George W. Bush became the first president to welcome an openly transgender person into the White House.

It happened during a reunion for his Yale class of 1968. Making her way through the president’s receiving line, a woman in an evening gown extended her hand. “Hello, George,” she said. “I guess the last time we spoke, I was still living as a man.”

Mr. Bush smiled and graciously responded, “And now you’re you,” according to the woman, Petra Leilani Akwai.

Most of the big transgender advocacy groups started during the Bush years: the equality center, the Transgender Law Center, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Center of Excellence for Transgender Health, among others. But they did not push for federal policy changes during Mr. Bush’s presidency, despite the momentum that was building for their cause. On local and state levels, they were winning new laws protecting transgender people from discrimination, and they had persuaded the major gay and lesbian groups — even the Human Rights Campaign — to take up their struggle. Still, they feared a backlash.

And they were heartbroken in 2008 when the Human Rights Campaign breached their détente, once again making a political compromise to exclude transgender people from the federal Employment Nondiscrimination Act.

This time, though, Ms. Frye said, “the tide had finally changed.”

“The gay community went wild,” she continued. “Every state equality group was up in arms.”

When President Obama took office, advocates presented him with a long wish list of proposed changes in federal policy. And despite an initial reticence about publicly expressing support for transgender people, his administration opened its doors to them.

“Dozens of us have been at the White House dozens of times for meetings,” Ms. Keisling said.
In October 2009, a few months after Chaz Bono — the only child of the singers Sonny and Cher — came out as a transgender man, Mr. Obama signed a hate crimes law, the first federal legislation to recognize and protect transgender people. That required an act of Congress, but most of what followed were rule changes.

The State Department took a first big step, eliminating an outmoded requirement of sex reassignment surgery for people who sought to change gender on their passports.

Following the lead of the courts, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission then ruled that antitransgender bias was a form of sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

Agency after agency, on federal, state and local levels, ordered explicit protections for transgender people and, in some cases, mandated insurance coverage for transition-related health care. Gay and civil rights groups increasingly fought transgender discrimination in court, sometimes with Justice Department support. Legally at least, barriers started falling away.

In 2013, after over a decade of badgering from transgender advocates, the psychiatric establishment formally reclassified gender identity disorder as a "condition" called gender dysphoria, removing the stigma of mental illness. The next year, Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, issued a formal apology, saying, "H.R.C. has done wrong by the transgender community," and pledging "a new chapter."

In the court of public opinion, with the marriage equality campaign moving toward success, a climate of acceptance was growing and extending from sexuality to gender identity. "Suddenly people liked us," Ms. Keisling said.

It helped that the movement was growing younger and more diverse. In 2013, a website called "We Happy Trans" published its inaugural "Trans 100" list, which included veterans like Ms. Frye but also new stars, like Laverne Cox, 31, a black transgender actress featured in the Netflix television series "Orange Is the New Black."

To be sure, as Ms. Cox often emphasizes, life remains excruciatingly hard for
many transgender people who continue to face discrimination, hostility and violence in many families, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, police precincts and prisons. Rates of attempted suicide, H.I.V. infection, unemployment, poverty and homelessness are exceptionally high, especially for transgender women of color.

Still, seen through Ms. Frye’s long lens, the progress is undeniable.

After more than four decades with her wife — “and even though I had hair on my face when Trish and I married” — Ms. Frye exhaled deeply when the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, she said.

“It’s always been in the back of our minds all these years, that somebody could challenge us,” she said.

In her private law practice, which she maintains alongside the part-time judgeship, she exclusively represents transgender people now, and is taking ever more children through the process of changing their names and gender markers. “Their parents call me,” she said. “Who’d have imagined?”

She does not miss the intensity of the struggle, she said. “I’ve enjoyed my 60s. I haven’t had to fight.”

Though she watches the movement’s building momentum with occasional incredulity — “Even the military!” she exclaimed, referring to the announcement in July that the Pentagon plans to lift its ban on service by openly transgender people — she has been waiting with impatience for society to catch up with her.

“I keep wondering what took her so long,” she said about Caitlyn Jenner’s introduction to the world. “She could have done a lot of good.”

**New Normal**

One night this summer, in a basement courtroom at the Houston Municipal Courthouse, Ms. Frye emerged from chambers, zipping up her robe over her khakis and telling a smattering of defendants, “Don’t get up.”

Under a low ceiling, she settled on the bench, between the American and the Lone Star flags, in front of a framed photograph of Mayor Parker, who fought back
tears at Ms. Frye’s swearing-in in 2010.

Chatting with the clerks, the judge questioned the air-conditioning — “Is it hotter than a firecracker in here, or is it just me?” — and described how she lost 70 pounds over the last few years, changing her diet and working out daily in her fitness room (at the same modest house that was egged decades earlier).

For the next several hours, she dealt amiably and efficiently with a sleepy stream of mostly sheepish traffic violators.

“Hawkins,” she said, summoning a jaunty man wearing earrings. “How are you?”

“I’m doing pretty well, judge. Yourself?” Mr. Hawkins replied.

“I’m terrific,” Ms. Frye replied. “You were supposed to bring $279 plus your license plus proof of insurance.”

Mr. Hawkins said he had run into a “small problem.” He was unable to get a new license because he owed $2,200 in surcharges to the city.

“I hope you’re not driving now,” Judge Frye said, holding up her hand. “Don’t tell me. Don’t tell me.”

She gave him a 60-day extension, and he thanked her, saying he had never gotten one that long before.

“Well, you ain’t getting any more,” she said.

If prosaic authority is the summit of normalcy, then Ms. Frye, who once harangued a federal official for treating her like “a freak,” has reached it.

“Whatever normal means,” she added.

A version of this article appears in print on August 30, 2015, on page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: Once a Pariah, Now a Transgender Judge.
CUNY professor arrested for groping women in Times Square

By Kenneth Gogger

Times Square
Photo: Shutterstock

A CUNY professor was busted for groping women in Times Square over the weekend, cops said.

Chemistry instructor Hasan Zumrut, 28, mingled amid a sea of tourists on Broadway near West 44th Street while grabbing the buttocks of several women, including an 18-year-old, just after midnight Friday, authorities said.

The creepy Lehman College adjunct then strolled off but was arrested a few blocks away at 12:55 a.m. Saturday, police said.

He was charged with forcible touching and sexual
Mom charged with drowning 2-year-old twins in bathtub

abuse.

Former students of Zumrut at the Bronx college offered praise for the "great lab professor" on the Web site ratemyprofessors.com.

"Excellent professor, very soft spoken," read one review from the spring semester of 2015.

Classes resumed Thursday at the liberal arts college, but it's unclear if Zumrut was scheduled to teach this semester.

FILED UNDER CRIME, CUNY, LEHMAN COLLEGE, TIMES SQUARE
CUNY Prof Arrested For Allegedly Groping Women In Times Square

by Jen Chung in News on Aug 31, 2015 5:45 pm

A local college professor was arrested for "allegedly molesting unsuspecting women" in Times Square as they gathered in an area set aside as part of a makeup promotion.

According to the Daily News, Hasan Zumrut, a 28-year-old chemistry professor at CUNY's Lehman College, was arrested over the weekend:

Zumrut was first spotted early Saturday inside a pen that Revlon set up in the square where tourists can see themselves on a huge video screen, sources said.

Then, starting around 12:15 a.m. Saturday, Zumrut was seen by a uniformed officer touching the backsides of three women who were in the crowd watching a magician perform on Broadway near 44th St., the sources said.

When they nabbed him, Zumrut had a warrant on his record for failing to appear in court after he got a summons for riding a bicycle on the sidewalk in 2010.

One of the victims was 18 years old, the Post reports. Zumrut reportedly said, "I made a mistake."

On Rate My Professors, two reviewers say he's great, but add, "He is soft spoken, so move close!"

Contact the author of this article or email tips@gothamist.com with further questions, comments or tips.
EXCLUSIVE: CUNY professor charged with molesting women in Times Square

BY ROCCO PARASCANDOLA, CHELSIA ROSE MARCIUS / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS /

Updated: Monday, August 31, 2015, 11:22 PM

A Lehman College professor was charged with forcible touching and sexual abuse after cops say he was seen touching unsuspecting women in Times Square.
At least he kept his shirt on.

A CUNY college professor with allegedly roaming hands is the latest Times Square pest to run afoul of police.

While attention has been focused of late on the topless painted ladies and the costumed characters who hassle tourists for money, 28-year-old Hasan Zumrut was allegedly molesting unsuspecting women.

"I made a mistake," the soft-spoken Lehman College professor said after cops spotted him grabbing the buttocks of several women, police sources said.

But now the Turkish-born chemistry professor has joined the desnudas, their creepy male handlers and the overly aggressive Elmos and Spider-Men in the rancid ranks of folks the city wants out of the Crossroads of the World.

Zumrut was charged with two misdemeanors, forcible touching and sexual abuse in the case of one woman, and was released without bail.

The Painted Lady's Point of View

NY Daily News

He was first spotted early Saturday inside a pen that Revlon set up in the square where tourists can watch themselves on a huge video screen, sources said.

Then, starting around 12:15 a.m. Saturday, Zumrut was seen by a uniformed officer touching the backsides of three women, who were in the crowd watching a magician perform on Broadway near 44th St., the sources said.
When they nabbed him, Zumrut had a warrant on his record for failing to appear in court after he got a summons for riding a bicycle on the sidewalk in 2010.

The professor declined to comment when reached at a fourth-floor chemistry lab at Lehman Colleges Science hall on Monday.

"I don't want to talk about that," he said before slapping on a pair of surgical gloves and walking to the back of the lab.

Calls to the school regarding the incident were not returned by late Monday.

According to his Facebook page, Zumrut graduated from CUNY with a biochemistry degree in 2013. He is described as an "excellent professor, very soft-spoken" on ratemyprofessors.com.

"He is a great lab professor," wrote another poster. "Professor Zumrut's small lectures and notes that he writes upon the board are so useful. He is soft spoken, so move close!"

ON A MOBILE DEVICE? WATCH THE VIDEO HERE.

rparascandola@nydailynews.com

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