New Species of Human Ancestor Is Found in a South African Cave

By JOHN NOBLE WILFORD  SEP. 10, 2015

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The remains covered the earthen floor beyond the narrow opening. This was, the scientists concluded, a large, dark chamber for the dead of a previously unidentified species of the early human lineage — Homo naledi.

The new hominin species was announced on Thursday by an international team of more than 60 scientists led by Lee R. Berger, an American paleoanthropologist who is a professor of human evolution studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The species name, H. naledi, refers to the cave where the bones lay undisturbed for so long; “naledi” means “star” in the local Sesotho language.

In two papers published this week in the open-access journal eLife, the researchers said that the more than 1,550 fossil elements documenting the discovery constituted the largest sample for any hominin species in a single African site, and one of the largest anywhere in the world. Further, the scientists said, that sample is probably a small fraction of the fossils yet to be recovered from the chamber. So far the team has recovered parts of at least
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15 individuals.

"With almost every bone in the body represented multiple times, Homo naledi is already practically the best-known fossil member of our lineage," Dr. Berger said.

Besides introducing a new member of the prehuman family, the discovery suggests that some early hominins intentionally deposited bodies of their dead in a remote and largely inaccessible cave chamber, a behavior previously considered limited to modern humans. Some of the scientists referred to the practice as a ritualized treatment of their dead, but by "ritual" they said they meant a deliberate and repeated practice, not necessarily a kind of religious rite.

"It's very, very fascinating," said Ian Tattersall, an authority on human evolution at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, who was not involved in the research. "No question there's at least one new species here," he added, "but there may be debate over the Homo designation, though the species is quite different from anything else we have seen."

A colleague of Dr. Tattersall's at the museum, Eric Delson, who also is a professor at Lehman College of the City University of New York, was also impressed, saying, "Berger does it again!"

Dr. Delson was referring to Dr. Berger's previous headline discovery, published in 2010, also involving cave deposits at the Cradle of Humankind site, 30 miles northwest of Johannesburg. He found many fewer fossils that time, but enough to conclude he was looking at a new species, which he named Australopithecus sediba. Geologists said the individuals lived 1.78 million to 1.95 million years ago, when australopithecines and early species of Homo were contemporaries.

Researchers analyzing the H. naledi fossils have not yet nailed down their age, which is difficult to measure because of the muddled chamber
sediments and the absence of other fauna remains nearby. Some of its primitive anatomy, like a brain no larger than an average orange, Dr. Berger said, indicated that the species evolved near or at the root of the Homo genus, meaning it must be in excess of 2.5 million to 2.8 million years old. Geologists think the cave is no older than three million years.

The field work and two years of analysis for Dr. Berger’s latest discovery were supported by the University of the Witwatersrand, the National Geographic Society and the South African Department of Science and Technology/National Research Foundation. In addition to the journal articles, the findings will be featured in the October issue of National Geographic Magazine and in a two-hour NOVA/National Geographic documentary to air Wednesday on PBS.

Scientists on the discovery team and those not involved in the research noted the mosaic of contrasting anatomical features, including more modern-looking jaws and teeth and feet, that warrant the hominin’s placement as a species in the genus Homo, not Australopithecus, the genus that includes the famous Lucy species that lived 3.2 million years ago. The hands of the newly discovered specimens reminded some scientists of the earliest previously identified specimens of Homo habilis, who were apparently among the first toolmakers.

At a news conference on Wednesday, John Hawks of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, a senior author of the paper describing the new species, said it was “unlike any other species seen before,” noting that a small skull with a brain one-third the size of modern human braincases was perched atop a very slender body. An average H. naledi was about five feet tall and weighed almost 100 pounds, he said.

Tracy Kivell of the University of Kent, in England, an associate of Dr. Berger’s team, was struck by H. naledi’s “extremely curved fingers, more curved than almost any other species of early hominin, which clearly
demonstrates climbing capabilities.”

William Harcourt-Smith of Lehman College of the City University of New York, a researcher at the American Museum of Natural History, led the analysis of the feet of the new species, which he said are “virtually indistinguishable from those of modern humans.” These feet, combined with its long legs, suggest that H. naledi was well suited for upright long-distance walking, Dr. Harcourt-Smith said.

In an accompanying commentary in the journal, Chris Stringer, a paleoanthropologist at the Natural History Museum in London, found overall similarities between the new species and fossils from Dmanisi, in the former Soviet republic of Georgia, dated to about 1.8 million years ago. The Georgian specimens are usually assigned to an early variety of Homo erectus.
Ivory May Have Driven Greenland Colonisation

Posted By: Irina Slav (http://www.newhistorian.com/author/irina-slav/)  Posted date: September 09, 2015
in: Breaking News (http://www.newhistorian.com/breaking-news/)
No Comments (http://www.newhistorian.com/ivory-may-have-driven-greenland-colonisation/4781/#comments)

Scientists have traditionally believed that the reason Greenland was colonised around 1000 CE was farming. Arable land in Scandinavia at the time must have been in short supply, this traditional view goes, so the Vikings went north in search of new lands to grow crops on. A new study, however, is challenging this view with an alternative explanation: walrus ivory.

According to the authors of the study, an international team of archaeologists, new finds of walrus bones and ivory in Iceland suggest extensive hunting of the animals at the time. This is not so much of a surprise, given the value of walrus ivory and the hide of the animals from which rope was made at the time. What is perhaps surprising is that the team also found evidence in Greenland of long-haul hunts for walruses in the area of Disko Bay, where the animals bred prolifically. The hunters brought back to their settlements ivory and hides, which were then traded in Europe.
Ivory in the early Viking Age was a particularly precious commodity, the study's authors note. It was much sought after, whether it came from elephants or walruses. Yet, after the Muslim invasion of North Africa, the supply of elephant ivory sharply declined and it was walrus tusks that became the dominant source of the material. In other words, as Mental Floss website puts it, the Vikings hunting walruses in Greenland had the ivory market in Europe pretty much cornered for a while.

Lead researcher Thomas McGovern from City University of New York, says the farming hypothesis about the population of Greenland in the early Viking Age suffers from a major flaw and this is simply the availability of arable land in Greenland. It was certainly in short supply in Iceland but there wasn't much more of it in Greenland, so it is highly questionable that people would have left Iceland and gone further north in order to just farm. Farming, however, could have served to sustain the life of the hunter settlers, who spent between 15 and 27 days on the hunt. This conclusion of the team is based on written accounts and archaeological evidence, and it reinforces the suggestion that farming was not the main activity of the Greenland settlers, not least because every walrus hunt involved most of the able-bodied men in the community as well as most of its resources. In other words, there was just not enough manpower or resources to engage in large-scale farming.

The difficulties of walrus hunting were worth the effort, the researchers write in their paper, published in World Archaeology. Dates on ivory artefacts from the early Middle Ages discovered in Scandinavia, Britain and elsewhere in Europe correspond to the period of active settlement in Greenland. In terms of value, written accounts from the time reveal that one single load of 520 walrus tusks that was sold in Norway in 1327 was valued at 780 cows or 66 tonnes of fish. In addition to the revenues, the Greenland settlers also used the animals' hides to make rope, and their blubber as lighting fuel. This golden era for the Greenland settlers ended when demand for goods in Europe shifted towards things like cloth and fish, and new competition emerged. Without their primary source of income and with no realistic alternatives, the Greenland settlers were forced to leave the island.

Andrew Cuomo outdoes Bill de Blasio again as state starts plan to fight Legionnaires’ disease in the Bronx

BY ERIN DURKIN, ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE, CORKY SIEMASZKO / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS /
Updated: Tuesday, August 11, 2015, 12:21 PM
New York State firefighters gather Monday to test for Legionnaires' disease on cooling towers in the Bronx.

City Hall got bigfooted by Gov. Cuomo again Monday in the battle against Legionnaires' disease as the death toll rose to a dozen.

While Mayor de Blasio and City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito were preparing to give an accounting of how the city is dealing with the crisis, Cuomo had hundreds of state workers fanning out across the South Bronx — ground zero of the disease that has also sickened more than 100 people this summer.

GOV. CUOMO PITCHES REGS TO FIGHT DISEASE OUTBREAK IN IN CITIES

Operating from a command center at Hostos Community College, Team Cuomo sent out workers to compile an inventory of cooling towers — something that did not exist before this crisis began — and dispatched 20 state firefighters to collect water samples for inspection.

"I don't know what the city is proposing," Cuomo said, after announcing that his inspectors found three more cases of Legionella at cooling towers located outside the main "impact zone" in the South Bronx.

CUOMO USES LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE TO BIGFOOT DE BLASIO

They were among the 50 cooling towers that were inspected over the weekend, he said.

"I think this is the height of irresponsibility for a building owner that has a cooling tower to not have checked the cooling tower by now," Cuomo said.

"This just can't happen again. And if building owners are not going to take care of it themselves, do the right thing, and take directive action, then the state will."

Meanwhile, hundreds of state workers were dispatched to
nearby subway stations to hand out flyers with vital information about the disease.

They hit the No. 4 train stops, including the Yankee Stadium station. They also flooded the No. 5 train stops, including Third Ave. and 149th St. and Gun Hill Road (Co-op City) stations.

DE BLASIO FIRES BACK AT CUOMO DURING LEGIONNAIRES' SEARCH

"The idea is to get as many locations as possible," Cuomo spokesman Frank Sobrino said. "The goal is to get to 1,500 locations today."

"Legionnaires' is a finicky type of bacteria," added Dr. Howard Zucker, commissioner of the State Department of Health, noting that it can take up to a week to determine if water is contaminated.

So fire protection specialist John Dalen did not waste any time as he handed out gloves, protective masks and testing kits to firefighters.

"We've got a lot of buildings to check today," he said.
A state Department of Health volunteer hand out flyers concerning the Legionnaire's breakout.

Cameron Bard, 27, who works in the governor's office, handed out fliers on 138th St. and Grand Concourse. He said the Bronx residents he spoke with were happy to see them.

CUOMO'S GERM WARFARE

"People are receptive to the idea," he said. "People are on edge and understandably so. That's where the state steps in."

Kevin Wisely, director of the state Office of Emergency Management, said Bronx building supers have been cooperating.

"It's been all positive," he said. "We've been trying to make sure everybody is safe."

Ahmed Elshazly, 38, a South Bronx resident who sells coffee and doughnuts out of a cart on Grand Concourse, says he welcomes any kind of testing the state is willing to do.

"This is important," he said. "They need to check everything, and check it often. Everyone is scared. Just do it."
Gov. Cuomo has outplayed Bill de Blasio again.

Over at City Hall, de Blasio insisted "this outbreak is tapering off and continues to taper off." Of the 100 or so people who were hospitalized, 76 have been discharged, he said.

"What is very important to note is we have no evidence over the last few days of any new cases of Legionnaires'," de Blasio said. "The last day someone became sick with Legionnaires' was August 3."

WHY NOT CALL IN CDC FOR HELP WITH DISEASE OUTBREAK

Mary Bassett, the city's health commissioner, said all but one of the fatalities were over 40 and had preexisting medical conditions.

But de Blasio grew peeved when asked about Cuomo's calls for statewide regulations to prevent another outbreak and how he's not "going to leave it to the cities."

"The city of New York obviously takes responsibility for our own people," de Blasio said. "We're going to pass the laws we need to protect our people and we're going to do it right now. I'm not sure when Albany is going to treat the matter."

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LEGIONNAIRES'

De Blasio also was not interested in contrasting the city's effort with those of the state.
Mayor de Blasio was not interested in comparing the city's efforts to fight the disease to those of the state.

"I'm focused here on the work we're doing," he said. "We right now are focused on the impact zone because that's where this outbreak is."

De Blasio also grew impatient when reporters pointed out that the numbers of buildings testing positive Cuomo presented Monday did not match the figures coming out of City Hall.

"With all due respect to what anyone else is doing, we're trying to be very consistent with information," he said. "We have a very clearly delineated impact zone. We've seen it on maps before. We're happy to go over it. That is where the outbreak is. That is where the focus is."

Bronx Legionnaires' Disease Spurs Action
NY Daily News
De Blasio has been on the defensive ever since the crisis started and it was revealed that officials had no idea how many cooling towers there were in the city.

"There was no handbook or playbook previously provided by the federal government, state government, or city government, because we had no such previous outbreak," the mayor said.

ON A MOBILE DEVICE? WATCH THE VIDEO HERE.

With Dale W. Eisenger

csiemaszko@nydailynews.com

TAGS: andrew cuomo, melissa mark viverito, bill de blasio, legionnaires' disease
Teaching Working Students

By EVAN J. MANDEERY SEPT. 10, 2015

Students are generally passive when talking about the law, but Ellie, a sophomore at CUNY's John Jay College of Criminal Justice, leapt into the discussion of the constitutionality of capital punishment in my death-penalty course. When she eviscerated the Supreme Court ruling upholding Texas' death penalty law, I knew I had met a special student. On the midterm, she earned the highest grade anyone had ever gotten on the exam. Later, I learned that she had scored 1,480 on her SAT. Ellie wanted to be an attorney; it seemed inevitable that she would end up at an Ivy League law school. She had a prodigious, nimble intellect and, as I saw it, a limitless future.

Ellie also had an 8-year-old son, whom she was raising on her own; an alcoholic, depressive father; and a mountain of debt. She had the strangest college transcript I had ever seen: straight A's and straight F's, with the exception of a single B-plus in English, which would have been an A but for the professor's strict attendance policy that penalized anyone who missed more than three classes. In fact, all of her failing grades came from violations of draconian absence and lateness rules. When her son had a health crisis, she began to miss class more frequently, and she received five F's.

If Ellie had gone to an elite private college, her absences would have
been accommodated. In my seven years as a student and teaching fellow at Harvard, I never knew of anyone who was denied an extension for any reason. But the students I teach are the ones who need flexibility. About half of CUNY’s students work, and half of those students work more than 20 hours a week, as Ellie did. Fifty-four percent live in a household with an annual income of less than $30,000, as Ellie also did. The underlying problem is that the New York State financial-aid program on which an overwhelming majority of CUNY students depend doesn’t allow students to attend college part time. It also requires colleges to audit attendance or risk losing financial aid. So colleges like mine that rely on government support create a vicious conundrum: an affordable pathway to a first-rate education, but one fraught with ironclad rules ill suited for the kinds of lives that students like Ellie lead.

Even when Ellie’s life settled down, rehabilitating her record seemed too daunting, and she never returned to college. She became one of roughly 50 percent of entering CUNY students who fail to graduate within six years — around the national public-college average. Ellie, who still hopes to return to college, is a paralegal today, and no doubt the best one at her law firm. But it’s a shame that the system couldn’t help her become the superstar attorney she was meant to be.

Evan J. Mandery is a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the author of "A Wild Justice: The Death and Resurrection of Capital Punishment in America."

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A version of this article appears in print on September 13, 2015, on page MM34 of the Sunday Magazine with the headline: Teaching Working Students.
Undercover cops bust two drug dealers who sold coke near Manhattan College, Brooklyn College: police

BY THOMAS TRACY / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Wednesday, September 9, 2015, 12:16 PM

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OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL NARCOTICS PROSECUTOR
Cops recovered about four ounces of cocaine from the homes of Victor Vigniero, who sold drugs to undercover officers, and Osvaldo Espaillat, Vigniero's supplier, officials said.

School's out for two drug dealers found selling cocaine near two city college campuses, officials said Wednesday.

A 29-year-old man who lives near the Manhattan College campus in Riverdale, the Bronx, was busted for selling more than $6,600 in cocaine to undercover officers, officials said.

In an unrelated investigation, a 46-year-old employee of Brooklyn College in Flatbush was arrested for selling cocaine outside one of the school's main buildings, officials said.

"There is no place in our communities for narcotics trafficking, especially on our college campuses," Police Commissioner Bill Bratton said in announcing the arrests Wednesday.

Victor Vigniero of Riverdale is facing multiple narcotics charges after the NYPD and members of New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor's office learned he was selling cocaine to students at the 162-year-old Catholic institution.

A member of the Manhattan College community tipped police off to Vigniero, who was never enrolled in the college.

Undercover officers bought cocaine from Vigniero more than a dozen times between February and August, officials said.

Cops also managed to track down Vigniero's supplier — his cousin Osvaldo Espaillat, 31, who lived nearby on Kingsbridge Ave. near W. 234th St. in Kingsbridge, authorities said.

When cops raided their homes, they recovered about four ounces of cocaine from both places, officials said.

Vigniero's drugs were found hidden in his toilet, officials said. Espaillat apparently liked to keep his drugs underfoot — so he stashed them in his ottoman, officials said.

Two young children were in Espaillat's apartment when cops raided it, officials said.

Vigniero and Espaillat were hit with multiple drug offenses and were ordered held in Manhattan criminal court on more than $100,000 bail, according to a
spokeswoman for the Special Narcotics Prosecutor's Office.

As investigators were peeling the onion on the Manhattan College drug case, they arrested Javon High, a maintenance worker at Brooklyn College who was accused of selling cocaine to undercover cops on nine separate occasions.

Most of the sales, which occurred between April and July, took place outside of James Hall, where several classes are held.

High sold drugs while working and, one time, wore his work uniform when he made a transaction, officials said. He had worked with the school for six years, officials said.

The maintenance worker was arrested on multiple drug offenses on July 23 and was released after making $50,000 bail, officials said.

Calls to Brooklyn College for comment were not immediately returned.

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'Black Lives Matter' Movement Getting Blacks Killed

Larry Elder

9/10/2015 12:01:00 AM - Larry Elder

Despite the lack of evidence that there is an increase in cops shooting blacks, let alone shooting blacks unlawfully, a few recent killings of blacks by cops has spawned the so-called Black Lives Matter movement. But over the past 45 years, per the Centers for Disease Control, police killings of blacks are down 75 percent. What are on the increase, year-to-year, are cop killings.

The No. 1 preventable cause of death of young black males is homicide -- usually at the hands of other blacks. The primary cause of preventable death among young white males is auto accidents.

Predictably, the Democratic National Committee recently adopted a "black lives matter" resolution. It promotes the phony narrative that blacks remain victims of racism. If Democrats truly want to help, they would rethink their welfare state policies that have decimated black families. In 1950, only 18 percent of blacks were born outside of wedlock. Today, that number is over 70 percent.

Left-wing-driven welfare state policies have incentivized women into marrying the government, and men into abandoning their financial and moral responsibility. Obama once said a kid growing up without a father is 20 times more likely to end up in jail.

Where is the Black Lives Matter movement on that?

In Chicago alone, an average of 35 to 40 people are killed each month, most of them black, almost all by the hands of other blacks. And most of the cases are unsolved! Nationally, in 2013, 90 percent of black homicide victims were murdered by other blacks.

Where is the Black Lives Matter movement on that?

Peter Moskos, associate professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York, extrapolated figures between May 2013 and April 2015 from the website Killed by Police -- although he noted that 25 percent of the website's data, which is drawn largely from news reports, failed to show the race of the person killed.

Based on the site's data, Moskos found that roughly 49 percent of those killed by officers were white, while 30 percent were black. He also found that 19 percent were Hispanic and 2 percent were Asian and other races. "The data doesn't indicate which shootings are justified (the vast majority) and which are cold-blooded murder (not many, but some)," Moskos wrote on his blog. "And maybe that would
vary by race. I don't know, but I doubt it."

Adjusted to take into account the racial breakdown of the U.S. population, he said black men are 3.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white men. But also adjusted to take into account the racial breakdown in violent crime, the data actually show that police are less likely to kill black suspects than white ones.

"If one adjusts for the racial disparity in the homicide rate or the rate at which police are feloniously killed, whites are actually more likely to be killed by police than blacks," wrote Moskos. "Adjusted for the homicide rate, whites are 1.7 times more likely than blacks (to) die at the hands of police. Adjusted for the racial disparity at which police are feloniously killed, whites are 1.3 times more likely than blacks to die at the hands of police."

Moskos speculates as to an explanation: "1) cops in more minority cities face more political fallout when they shoot, and thus receive better training and are less inclined to shoot, and 2) since cops in more dangerous neighborhoods are more used to danger; so other things being equal (though they rarely are), police in high-crime minority areas are less afraid and thus less likely to shoot."

Year to year, murders in many cities are up. As always, many factors affect the crime rate. But the "Ferguson effect," causing officers to be less proactive, appears to be one of them. Crime is up in places like Baltimore, New York City and Camden, New Jersey, as officers -- feeling under siege and falsely accused of racial profiling -- have pulled back and arrests are down. NYPD officers Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos were literally executed -- gunned down while sitting in a police cruiser -- by a black man who wrote on Facebook about his anger over the shooting in Ferguson, Missouri.

A piece about Baltimore officers in The Atlantic captures the mood of the city's cops: "The (Fraternal Order of Police) offers a bleaker, though related, rationale for the decrease in arrests: Officers are afraid, its leader says. On the one hand, they're beset by hostile citizens who carefully monitor every arrest, crowding around officers who are just trying to do their jobs and capturing the detentions on camera, lest they turn into another Freddie Gray situation. On the other hand, police are also afraid a prosecutor will haul them in front of a jury. ... They say that they don't know when they might be charged with a crime, just for doing their jobs."

Nice work, Black Lives Matter, nice work.
Calls To Close Down Rikers Island Are Getting Louder

A New York City Council member wants to talk about "abolishing" the jail "completely."

Christopher Mathias
National Reporter, The Huffington Post

NEW YORK -- Tear down Rikers Island.

That idea -- to close one of the country's largest jail complexes -- has in recent months inspired op-eds, protest signs and a hashtag. On Wednesday, the idea got the endorsement of a New York City lawmaker.

"Ultimately, what we should really be talking about is abolishing Rikers Island completely," City Council member Daniel Dromm (D-Queens) told reporters outside City Hall in lower Manhattan.

Dromm, who was speaking at a rally against a measure to limit visitors to Rikers, explained that the biggest problem facing the jail complex is the sheer density of people on the island.
A daily average of 11,000 inmates -- the majority of whom are pretrial detainees, and the rest of whom are serving sentences of less than one year -- are packed into 10 jail facilities on the 400-acre island, along with 9,000 correction employees and 1,500 civilian administrators.

"I don't have a plan, per se, written to abolish Rikers Island at this point, but what we do know about Rikers Island is that because of the large numbers of people that are there, that's a major factor in terms of the violence that occurs," Dromm said. "So if we could break that down and spread it out, we'd be in a much better position in terms of reducing violent attacks."

This idea -- to disperse New York City's inmate population across different facilities -- was floated in an editorial last month by The Marshall Project's Neil Barsky.

"If our courts were speedier, our bail system not so rigged against the poor and our mental health and drug rehabilitation programs properly funded, Rikers and other jails might be manageable," Barsky wrote in his column, which also appeared in The New York Times. "Instead, Rikers and big city jails around the country have become notorious dumping grounds for the impoverished, the addicted and the mentally ill."

Indeed, about 98 percent of inmates on Rikers have some form of mental illness, and the mentally ill population on the island surpasses that of New York state's 24 psychiatric hospitals combined.

"The reality is that the only way to transform Rikers is to destroy it; it needs to be permanently closed," Barsky's column continued. "The buildings are crumbling. The guard culture of prisoner abuse and the gang culture of violence are ingrained. The complex is New York's Guantánamo Bay: a secluded island, beyond the gaze of watchdogs, where the Constitution is no guide. It is a place that has outlived its usefulness."

Martin Horn, former commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction and now a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has also called for Rikers to be closed.

"The city must move away from its reliance on Rikers Island," Horn wrote in a June editorial for The Marshall Project. "Jails should be close to the communities they serve and the courthouses where prisoners' cases are heard. It requires political courage for the city to address these issues and bring sanity to the jails. It will take money and leadership. There is no
alternative, because our jails are a reflection of our collective conscience, and if they remain as they are, the fault is ours."

Rikers has been plagued by scandal, corruption, violence and sometimes death since jail facilities were first established there some 80 years ago.

But there's been a recent groundswell of support in New York for bringing big changes to the island, especially after a scathing U.S. Justice Department report last year that described the "rampant use of unnecessary and excessive force" by guards against teenage inmates there.

Similarly, the story of Kalief Browder -- the young man from the Bronx who spent three years at Rikers awaiting trial on robbery charges that were ultimately dismissed -- shocked the country, and inspired Mayor Bill de Blasio to implement reforms to the city's bail system, which is what kept Browder locked up in the first place.

Browder, who was starved and beaten by guards and assaulted by fellow inmates, and who spent an accumulated and torturous two years in solitary confinement, took his own life in June. He was 22. His family blamed his time on Rikers for his suicide.

Since taking office last year, de Blasio has worked with Department of Correction Commissioner Joseph Ponte to introduce a series of sweeping reforms for Rikers: curtailing the use of solitary confinement (and abolishing it for inmates under 21), introducing supervised release programs for inmates, restricting the use of force by guards, keeping better records and installing thousands more surveillance cameras around the jail, among other changes.

Additionally, the City Council is setting up a bail fund for low-level defendants.

But horror stories about the conditions at Rikers persist, and for leading prison reform advocates like Glenn Martin, president of JustLeadershipUSA -- an organization that aims to reduce America's prison population by half -- serious change is long overdue.

In a statement to The Huffington Post Wednesday, Martin said that "increasingly, and especially over the last six [to] eight months, the demand to #CloseRikers -- a demand put forth by JLUSA on day one of the de Blasio Administration -- is becoming normalized in some elite spaces."

Martin called these developments "exciting," but added that one need only recall the previous failed efforts to close Rikers -- under former Mayors Ed Koch and Michael Bloomberg -- to understand that without community engagement and support, the goal is "impossible."

"With so much attention on Rikers, with growing discussions about solutions, we have a unique opportunity to #CloseRikers," Martin said. "Without question, closing Rikers would serve to advance justice and human rights in New York City. And the profound symbolism of
closing the nation’s largest jail complex would serve to charge and energize the broader movement to end mass incarceration.”

Martin added that there are many questions that still need to be answered.

“Will more community supervision be used, and can this reduce the population enough to close Rikers?” he said. “Or will new facilities have to be built? And if so, will they build new facilities in Queens, Bronx and Brooklyn (and face the same NIMBYism [not-in-my-backyard] that stopped the last effort), or build a single new facility in Staten Island (and face the same NIMBYism)? Will reducing racial disparities and addressing the legacy of abuse be part of the plan to #CloseRikers? What role will bail reform play in the overall effort? And what will become of Rikers Island once the corrections facility is closed?”

Dromm said Wednesday that he has no immediate plans to introduce legislation that would abolish Rikers, but that he is working on a series of bills to make further reforms there.

“The level of understanding among all the council members [has] grown, and I think that there is a tremendous amount of support for further reforms at Rikers Island,” Dromm said, when asked if his colleagues also supported closing the jail. “And we’re going to see that probably in some of the pieces of legislation that are coming out.”

Last month, another City Council member, Brad Lander (D-Brooklyn), tweeted a link to Barsky’s op-ed at The New York Times.

In a statement to HuffPost, a spokeswoman for the mayor’s office said Wednesday that “there have been a number of big, long-term ideas floated to reform the city’s jail system.”

“Right now, Commissioner Ponte is undertaking dramatic reforms to create a safer and more secure jail each day,” the spokeswoman continued, “including ending punitive segregation for 16 and 17-year-olds, launching a new housing tool to separate the most violent inmates, and tripling the number of security cameras on the Island.”
Irving Harper, Creator of the Marshmallow Sofa, Dies at 99

By SAM ROBERTS  SEPT. 10, 2015

Irving Harper, who pioneered Pop Art furniture design with whimsical mid-20th-century modernist classics like the marshmallow sofa, the ball clock and the sunburst clock, died on Aug. 4 at his home in Rye, N.Y. He was 99.

The cause was kidney failure, his daughter, Elizabeth Harper Williams, said.

Mr. Harper was famously obscure, working as an industrial designer from 1947 to 1963 for George Nelson, who was often credited with the company’s creations for the Herman Miller furniture line. Even Mr. Harper’s death last month received scant attention, except in local newspapers.

Mr. Harper’s creations included exhibits at the 1939 and 1964 World’s Fairs in New York, department store interiors and the Herman Miller company logo (an evolving stylized letter “M”). As a hobby he produced a fanciful menagerie of intricate paperboard and balsa wood sculptures of animals.

But his most enduring legacy is the sofa he conceived one weekend after Mr. Nelson had embraced a Long Island plastics manufacturer’s method of making inexpensive molded 12-inch diameter discs.
The plastic proved impractical, but Mr. Harper playfully assembled 18 upholstered discs as if they were floating on a 52-inch-long metal frame. As the company took pains to explain in its catalog, “Despite its astonishing appearance, this piece is very comfortable.” The sofa originally sold for $452 in 1956 (the equivalent of almost $4,000 today).

About 150 were purchased from 1957 to 1961; one of the original models was auctioned off in 2003 for $30,420. A custom 104-inch-long model sold at auction this year for $112,500.

The sofa now comes in 12 colors and retails for $5,499 in the Herman Miller catalog. (The company still assures potential customers, “And even though you might not think so, just looking at it, it’s very comfortable too.”)

The catalog describes “love seat #5670” as the Nelson Marshmallow Sofa and lists the designer as George Nelson, as was his firm’s practice. But the George Nelson Foundation website attributes it to Mr. Harper.

Mr. Harper lived in a 19th-century farmhouse in Rye, where he and his wife moved from Greenwich Village in 1954. It was filled with hundreds of his surreal sculptures, riffs on objects he had admired in museums or galleries but could hardly afford. After reimagining them, he could not part with the sculptures, at any price.

“I never sold any of my pieces,” he was quoted as saying in “Irving Harper: Works in Paper,” published in 2013. “I had all the money I wanted. Then I would have lost my sculptures and just had more money.” (One was donated to the Rye Arts Center after an exhibition last January, and most will be auctioned off; Mr. Harper left the decision about their disposition to his daughter.)

He was born Irving Hoffzimer on Manhattan’s Lower East Side on July 14, 1916. His father, David, manufactured children’s books. His mother was the former Rebecca Gross. He attended Brooklyn College and Cooper Union.
After he married Belle Seligman, a labor lawyer, he changed the family's surname to Harper. She died in 2009. In addition to his daughter, he is survived by a sister, Phyllis Hoffzimer.

As a draftsman for Gilbert Rohde, Mr. Harper worked on exhibits for the 1939 New York World's Fair, was hired by Raymond Loewy Associates to design department store interiors, and in 1947 joined George Nelson Associates, where he handled the Herman Miller furniture and Howard Miller clock accounts (including the numberless timepieces that featured balls on the end of spokes).

In 1964, he and Phillip George started their own design company, where Mr. Harper worked until he retired in 1983.

Mr. Harper's work helping to design the Chrysler pavilion for the 1964 World's Fair, in Flushing Meadows, Queens, involved creating a lake with islands featuring different elements of automobile manufacturing, including a walk-in engine.

The project was so stressful, Mr. Harper told The Financial Times last year, that he considered taking up knitting to relax. He then turned to paper sculpture, which seemed to come more naturally, and continued that work until about 2000, when he ran out of room.

"I didn't have to direct my hands," he said. "My hands just knew what to do."
A University System Makes a Big Push to Strengthen Diversity on Its Campuses

By Katherine Mangan  SEPTEMBER 10, 2015

The State U. of New York is seeking to make its institutions more welcoming to underrepresented groups, and recruiting more minority faculty members will be part of that effort. "A diverse faculty is a magnet for a diverse student population," said Nancy Zimpher, the system's chancellor.

As growing numbers of Hispanic and first-generation students set their sights on college, the State University of New York is expected to approve a sweeping effort on Thursday to make campuses from Long Island to the foothills of the Adirondacks feel more welcoming to those and other diverse groups.
System trustees will vote on a policy that would place a chief diversity officer on each campus and provide a new tool that would allow students to voluntarily identify their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Over the past decade, enrollment among underrepresented minorities at SUNY campuses has grown from 14.7 percent to 23.8 percent of the total. While bringing a welcome blend to the university, the shift has strained the system because low-income and minority students have the lowest retention and graduation rates.

State funding formulas that base a portion of allocations on graduation and retention rates for minority and other students are putting even more pressure on SUNY to help diverse students succeed.

Meanwhile, universities like SUNY have been struggling recently to make inclusion a priority for an entire campus, not just the diversity officer or administrators confronted with a crisis.

That requires stepping up efforts to recruit more minority faculty members, SUNY administrators interviewed on Wednesday said.

“A diverse faculty is a magnet for a diverse student population,” said Nancy L. Zimpher, the system’s chancellor. And when a vacant presidency needs to be filled, “We will not let a search committee do an airport interview unless the candidate pool is diverse.”

SUNY’s new policy, which also calls for a range of programs to recruit and support a broad mix of students, faculty, and staff members, was developed by a task force appointed by the chancellor.

The panel met with SUNY and national experts, studied best practices at other universities, and mined the system’s data for clues to which groups were growing, which were struggling, and which needed more targeted supports.

Among the comprehensive diversity plans that influenced their work was one adopted by the University of Maryland at College Park.

“Inclusion goes beyond just making sure we meet our diversity commitments,” Alexander N. Cartwright, SUNY’s provost and executive vice chancellor, said in a written statement. “It also addresses the way that our students, faculty, and staff feel about being on campus every day. Are they respected? Do they feel supported? We want everyone who comes to SUNY to know that they are welcome and that they can succeed here.”
The policy's sweeping definition of diversity covers race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, age, and socioeconomic status. It also includes status as a veteran, first-generation, or transfer student, and whether or not someone has a disability.

"We Can't Wait Until Grade 13"

Getting minority and low-income students better prepared for college is one goal of about 50 early-college high schools the university system helps run. "To achieve the goals we want, we can't wait until Grade 13," Ms. Zimpher said.

The students filling that pipeline are also becoming more racially diverse. From 2008 to 2019, the number of Hispanic public high-school graduates in New York State is expected to increase by 13 percent, and the number of Asian or Pacific Island students by nearly 40 percent.

The system is also making a big push to make its campuses more welcoming to gay students.

Giving students the option of specifying their gender identity and sexual orientation "sends an important message that SUNY is a welcoming place for gay and lesbian students," said Richard Socarides, a trustee who is nationally recognized for his advocacy on gay, lesbian, and transgender rights.

For gender identity, the new tool lets students choose from a list of options — man, woman, trans man, trans woman, genderqueer/gender-fluid, questioning, or unsure — or they can write in an identity. For sexual orientation, the options are straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, and questioning or unsure. They can also write in an option for sexual orientation.

Once the university has a better sense of their numbers, Mr. Socarides said, "we can be smarter about making sure we have the right programs in place to support them."

The challenges of diversity hit hardest at campuses far from major cities like New York and Buffalo, where many minority students grow up. The State University of New York at Potsdam is located in a rural setting near the Canadian border. The location can be a tough sell for a student from a close-knit Hispanic family in New York City.

The Potsdam campus sends buses to major cities in New York, bringing students and their parents up for orientations and offering transportation back and forth on holidays. A campus chef takes requests from students craving ethnic meals.
Such efforts appear to be paying off. The percentage of freshmen at Potsdam identifying as black, Hispanic, American Indian, Asian, or mixed race grew from 18 percent in 2010 to 42 percent this fall, campus officials said.

Thomas Mastro, president of the SUNY Student Assembly, said the new systemwide policy “allows all students to be counted and to have campuses held accountable for meeting their needs.”

*Katherine Mangan writes about community colleges, completion efforts, and job training, as well as other topics in daily news. Follow her on Twitter @KatherineMangan, (https://twitter.com/KatherineMangan) or email her at katherine.mangan@chronicle.com. (mailto:katherine.mangan@chronicle.com)*
ALBANY — Alicia Ouellette will be inaugurated Thursday as the 18th president and dean of Albany Law School.

Ouellette, 49, of Bethlehem, who officially became the school's dean on July 1, served as acting dean since October 2014. She will be inaugurated at 4 p.m. in the school’s 1928 Building, DeMatteo Gymnasium.

Ouellette succeeds Penny Andrews, who remained the school's president until the end of the last school year, in leading the nation's fourth-oldest law school dating back 164 years.

Unlike Andrews, a South African native hired in 2012 following a stint as associate dean for academic affairs at the City University of New York School of Law, Ouellette represents an in-house hire.
The 1994 graduate of Albany Law was associate dean for academic affairs and intellectual life before becoming acting dean.

Oullette, a graduate of Hamilton College, was once editor-in-chief of the law school's Law Review. She also has served as an assistant solicitor general in the state Attorney General's office and confidential law clerk to Associate Judge Howard Levine of the Court of Appeals.

Albany Law has 415 students — a drop from 475 last year. Tuition is $43,248 a year.
Assumption College in Worcester makes U.S. News and World Report's top regional colleges list

Assumption College, at 600 Salisbury St, Worcester, has been ranked among the region's best liberal arts schools.

By Michael D. Kane | mkane@masslive.com

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on September 08, 2015 at 1:18 PM

WORCESTER — Assumption College, a Catholic-rooted liberal arts school on Salisbury Street, has been named to U.S. News and World Report's list of top regional universities for the north region.

Assumption ties for 32nd place with City University of New York — Baruch College. That places Assumption in the top third of approximately 200 regional universities in the north that offer bachelor's and master's degrees, according to a press release from the school.

Assumption College President Francesco C. Cesareo said the listing "is a testament to the strength and value of an Assumption College liberal arts education."

"Our dedicated faculty and unique programs provide Assumption students with hands-on experience both inside and outside of the classroom," Cesareo said. "Our traditional paths of study, academic partnerships, and our campus in Rome, Italy, provide a number of intriguing opportunities for students to embark on a fulfilling and successful scholastic journey."

"These, coupled with our service and internship initiatives, invite students to explore their world, preparing them to contribute to society in a meaningful way upon graduation," he said.